

## Chapter 648 Sharing A Bed

Lorraine was stunned.

Why would she tell Eloise about her divorce from Marco?

She hadn't even breathed a word about their rashly arranged marriage. To Lorraine, wedding Marco was akin to a high-stakes gamble, a topic she found too daunting to broach.

Following her departure, she interacted less frequently with Eloise, and during their infrequent conversations, she only shared positive news and recounted joyous events.

She was puzzled as to why Marco would unexpectedly introduce this subject. But as she looked into his earnest eyes, she responded honestly, "No, I didn't, but that's because I didn't want Mrs. Harvey to worry..."

Suddenly, everything clicked into place, and she comprehended why Marco had initiated this discussion.

The reason Eloise hadn't disclosed her struggles mirrored Lorraine's decision to remain silent about her tumultuous marriage with Marco.

Their mutual silence stemmed from their affection for each other; neither wanted to impose their burdens on the other.

Seeing Lorraine's comprehension, Marco was relieved. He smiled and said, "You don't want Mrs. Harvey to worry about you, and the same applies to her. She doesn't confide in you, not because she resents you. Do you understand?"

Lorraine nodded, feeling emotionally steadier, though a trace of melancholy lingered. She pouted, appearing as though she was sulking.

Eloise didn't hold anything against her.

But Lorraine was still self-reproachful for failing to spot the issues earlier and offer assistance.

"Had I returned sooner, things wouldn't have deteriorated to this extent..."

Understanding her thoughts, Marco could only respond with a resigned smile before wrapping her in a gentle embrace.

"It's okay. Even though Mrs. Harvey didn't confide in you, we found out on our own, didn't we? Now that we're aware of her challenges, we'll address them. I'm sure Mrs. Harvey will appreciate that."

His tone was soothing, like that used to comfort a child. Despite herself, Lorraine managed an awkward smile, conceding that her mood had improved.

He was right. The priority now wasn't to berate herself, but to muster her strength and help Eloise resolve her issues!

Lorraine's eyes flashed with determination as she lifted her chin confidently. "You're right. If I can't sort this out, I won't have the audacity to return and lead Universe Group as CEO!"

Initially, she had intended merely to visit Eloise. But having learned of Judie's actions today, coupled with past grievances, she felt compelled to excise this malignant presence. Otherwise, she wouldn't be worthy of the name Lorraine!

A radiant smile blossomed in Marco's eyes; he adored this



formidable stance of his beloved, who reminded him of a dazzling sun.

The Loraine he knew was not one to easily admit defeat. It was only because Eloise's predicament had briefly thrown her off balance.

Now that she had regained her footing, everything was in order.

Marco consoled Loraine, tenderly caressing her soft hair. "It's late, let's get some sleep."

Loraine nodded and accompanied Marco to freshen up. However, as they prepared for bed, she suddenly blushed, realizing there was only one bed in the room.

Uh oh... It appeared as if Eloise had prepared only one bed for them?

However, Marco seemed unconcerned, heading straight for the bed.

Loraine felt a flurry of butterflies in her stomach. Were they genuinely going to share a bed?

She wasn't ready yet!

Her gaze involuntarily followed Marco, and to her surprise, he bypassed the bed to open the bedside cabinet. From there, he pulled out a fresh set of bedding, calmly spreading it on the floor.

Ah, she had jumped to conclusions. Marco was planning to sleep on the floor.

Loraine felt a wave of relief mingled with guilt. Marco had recently been ousted from his CEO position, facing a significant setback. He had still accompanied her to the



countryside, and now he was preparing to sleep on the floor?

That felt rather heartbreaking.

Marco turned to her, noting her shifting expression, and quipped, "What's going through your mind?"

Loraine cleared her throat, feeling a blend of shyness and hesitancy, and proposed softly, "Um... the floor is too hard, and it's getting colder. You might catch a cold. Why don't you sleep on the bed?"

Marco was momentarily taken aback before shaking his head definitively. "No, I can't have you sleep on the floor. Don't worry; I'm used to roughing it out. The floor won't be an issue."

Seeing that Marco didn't grasp her meaning, Loraine flushed and moved to sit on the edge of the bed. She retreated under the covers, wanting to curl up in a ball. After a moment of visible embarrassment, she said in a small voice, "Get on the bed."

Marco was utterly perplexed. "What?"

Loraine overcame her hesitation and declared firmly, "Get on the bed! You said you're my boyfriend... so what's the harm in sharing a bed? Besides, it's only for one night..."

The more she spoke, the quieter her voice grew, leaving her with the urge to bury herself in the earth.

Marco's eyes lit up, quickly comprehending Loraine's intention. A sense of delight washed over him. Nevertheless, he couldn't resist teasing her, "Are you sure?"

Loraine lifted her head, feeling a mixture of indignation and embarrassment. She glared at him. "If you don't want to, never mind!"

With that, she wrapped herself in the covers and occupied a small corner of the bed.

Marco's smile broadened as he shrugged off his jacket and climbed into the bed.

The bed was somewhat small, and it felt a tad cramped with two people, especially given Marco's tall, broad frame.

As the soft mattress dipped, Loraine was immediately immersed in a familiar, masculine scent.

Her eyes glossed over slightly as she clutched the bedding nervously, distinctly feeling the comforting warmth approaching from behind her.

She wasn't sure if it was her imagination, but the air seemed to have grown thinner. Her heart was pounding faster, her breath hitching, as she felt a captivating tension fill the room.



## Chapter 649 Harvest Festival Banquet

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Feeling the temperature rise behind her, Loraine's eyes widened with unease. Her body seemed ready to burst with anticipation, and she stared intently at a spot on the weathered wall, her mind a whirl of confusion.

They were sharing a bed; what if Marco intended to cross a line?

Despite the progress in their relationship, which could now be labeled as romantic, it was quite early for any physical intimacy.

The orphanage was not known for its soundproofing, and Loraine didn't wish to wake up to curious children questioning their nighttime activities.

Lost in her thoughts, she was jolted back to reality by a muffled chuckle from behind her, a mix of fondness and playful teasing.

Quickly, a hand gently lifted the blanket from her head. His somewhat cold hand grazed her heated face, a teasing voice murmuring, "Relax, I won't make a move. Go to sleep."

As he saw through her transparent thoughts, Loraine blushed with embarrassment, a sudden urge to bite his hand out of frustration.

In the darkness, Marco seemed to have an uncanny ability to sense her emotions, his laughter echoing with added mirth.

If it weren't for...



into a warm hold.

When she felt Marco's hand patting her head in a soothing way, she writhed under his touch.

"Alright, I was just joking. Don't be reckless. The bed is tiny, so any more tossing and turning might land you on the floor," he whispered, "Given the tight space, it's not conducive to any further activity."

As Marco's words resonated in her ears, her cheeks flushed crimson. However, she was hit with the reality of their cramped situation. She ceased her restlessness and snuggled closer to Marco, finally deciding to sleep in his comforting arms.

Yet, with the rhythm of his heartbeat echoing in her ears, she couldn't help but groan inwardly. How was she supposed to fall asleep under such circumstances?

Sensing her unease, Marco gently patted her back. "We have a challenging day ahead of us tomorrow. Try to sleep," he urged tenderly.

His words floated softly, aiming to alleviate her uneasiness. "Once you're asleep, there's nothing left to fret over."

The gentle rhythmic patting seemed to have a soothing effect on Loraine, and against all odds, she found herself growing sleepy.

She had assumed that sharing a bed with Marco would keep her anxious and awake all night. But surprisingly, once she let her guard down, she fell into a deep slumber within his comforting hold, sleeping more soundly than she ever had.

The night was devoid of dreams.

The next morning, Loraine woke up rejuvenated from a good







night's rest. Lazily stretching her arms, she inadvertently brushed against something firm and solid.

Her heart leaped as she looked up to find Marco's eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Awake? Let's get started, then."

Remembering the previous night, Loraine quickly scrambled out of the bed.

They both hastily prepared for the day, mindful of the tasks at hand and not wanting to squander any time. Leaving the room, they set out to find Eloise.

By a stroke of coincidence, they met Eloise emerging from her room, clad in formal attire, suggesting she too had plans.

Loraine asked anxiously, "Mrs. Harvey, where are you headed? Is there an event?"

Eloise responded with a smile, "The village chief informed me that the Cooper family will host this year's harvest festival banquet. The entire village is invited, and my absence might cause issues for the orphanage."

Loraine did not expect to find that Eloise had already gotten invited.

A shadow crossed Loraine's face, yet she chose not to burden Eloise with her concerns. She opted not to reveal what she had heard the previous day, aware that even if she raised objections, Eloise would likely still attend the banquet for the orphanage's sake.

Mulling over her thoughts, Loraine reached out and gently grasped Eloise's hand, pleading, "Could we accompany you to the banquet?"





Eloise hesitated. Given the repeated issues caused by the Cooper family, she was naturally skeptical about their banquet invitation.

Concerned for Loraine, she disagreed, "It's better if you both stay."

Loraine countered, "Marco hasn't attended a countryside banquet before. I'd like him to experience it. What do you think?"

On hearing this, Eloise looked at Marco, recalling his display of strength the previous day, and felt reassured.

She had overlooked the fact that Loraine was at an age where romantic relationships were part of life. With Marco's presence, she felt Loraine would be protected from any potential harm.


"Very well, we shall all attend."

Loraine's face lit up in joy, and she assisted Eloise in walking. She glanced back at Marco, making a playful hand gesture for him to follow them.

Marco, observing Loraine's playful interaction with Eloise, couldn't help but feel a pang of envy.

He found himself yearning for the day when Loraine would exhibit the same playful and affectionate behavior towards him, as she did with Eloise. Her playful side was genuinely endearing.



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## Chapter 650 Humiliation

At the villa of the Cooper family, the banquet was truly grand, befitting their status as the wealthiest family in the village.

Over a dozen tables were set up in the open space, and the entire village joyfully attended, savoring dishes they rarely had the opportunity to taste.

In contrast to the simple attire of the villagers, Judie's clothing exuded extravagance, making her stand out among the crowd. She was surrounded by a group of young individuals, all eager to flatter her and gain her favor.

"Judie, our village is truly blessed to have you. In my opinion, these country bumpkins should willingly offer all their resources to support your efforts in leading them to a better life!" one of her followers praised, trying to impress her.

Judie smiled contentedly, yet her eyes remained fixed on the entrance as she anxiously clutched her cup.

"Why hasn't the old lady from the orphanage arrived yet?"

Just as she finished speaking, Eloise's figure emerged at the entrance, leaning on a cane for support. Judie's eyes lit up, and she promptly placed her wine glass down, hurrying over to her.

With a fake smile, she warmly held Eloise's hand and said, "Hello, Mrs. Harvey. Since you've graced my family's banquet, you must be aware that it's customary for guests to bring a gift for the host, right?"

Eloise gracefully withdrew her hand from the handshake,



setting down what she was carrying on the guest registration table. With a calm demeanor, she replied, "These fruits and vegetables are grown in the backyard of the orphanage. They're a token of appreciation for all the hard work you've put into hosting this year's autumn festival banquet."

Such exchanges of etiquette were quite common among the villagers, who often brought their own homegrown produce or poultry to the feasts. Eloise didn't see anything amiss in her gesture.

However, when Judie caught sight of the items Eloise had brought, she couldn't hide her contempt and let out a disdainful snort, rolling her eyes dismissively.

"Such meager offerings hold no value to me. We have an abundance of such things. Since you've graced us with your presence, why not offer the orphanage itself as a generous gift for the banquet?"

Eloise's expression immediately turned sour, her heart sinking with disappointment. While she had been aware of Judie's malicious intentions, she hadn't anticipated her to be so shamelessly cruel and publicly humiliate her in this manner.

"Girl, you're taking this too far. Why should guests bring land as gifts to a banquet, huh? That's ridiculous!" Eloise retorted, trying to maintain her composure.

Judie sneered, her tone dripping with contempt, "You think your useless vegetables are enough? Such cheap offerings, and yet you expect a free meal at my place?"

Despite her usually good temper, Eloise's voice quivered with anger as she spoke. "Judie, I know what your family desires. I've said it before, if you want the land, you can have it. But I have one simple request - ensure that all the children in the orphanage are properly taken care of."



Even if Judie seemed uninterested in listening, Eloise felt compelled to speak her mind. "But instead of fulfilling that simple request, your family has been sending people to harass the orphanage and even resorting to violence against the children! Based on that alone, I will never agree to your demands!"

Judie's impatience was evident in her expression as she inquired, "Well, what is it that you want then? How do you want them taken care of?"

Hoping to find common ground, Eloise hurriedly suggested, "For the older children, we can arrange vocational training so they can learn valuable skills to support themselves. As for the younger ones, let's work together to find caring families in the nearby area who are willing to adopt and provide them with a loving home."

Before Eloise could finish her sentence, Judie's cold laughter erupted.

"You expect me to help them find jobs? Why not just propose that I raise them myself?" Judie sneered, her tone dripping with sarcasm. "A bunch of parentless bastards, do we need to complicate things? And searching for families to adopt them? Who would be willing to raise someone else's child? Listen to me, Mrs. Harvey, there's no need for all this trouble. Just selling them off would solve the problem!"

Eloise was in utter shock. "What did you just say?"

Ignoring Eloise's horrified expression, Judie continued with a malicious smile, "As for the boys, sell them off to work as laborers. They'll have jobs, right? And as for the girls, those remote mountain areas are full of yokels who can't find wives. Sell the girls as child brides, someone will surely take them, and it'll create a few new families. It's a perfect arrangement!"

Eloise's face turned ashen, unable to find words to respond. She felt a mix of anger and disgust, almost fainting from the cruelty and heartlessness of Judie's words.

Just then, a clear and assertive female voice rang out, "Is that what you call a perfect arrangement? Then how about we forcefully marry you, Miss Cooper, to a yokel who needs a wife? Would that also be considered a perfect match for the Cooper family?"

Judie's expression changed drastically, her arrogance giving way to surprise and irritation. "Who dares to speak to me in such a disrespectful manner?"



## Chapter 651 The Old Sugar Daddy

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The serene and harmonious voice of the refined woman stood in stark contrast to Judie's avaricious and shrill tone, reminiscent of an elegant crane gracefully emerging amidst a gaggle of sordid, mindless hens.

The surrounding crowd was instantly drawn to the spectacle, with intrigued gazes pivoting towards them.

Upon hearing the voice, Eloise spun around. "Why are you here alone? Where's Marco?"

Loraine stepped forward and gently grasped Eloise's hand, her smile brimming with reassurance. "My boyfriend isn't known here, and the villagers are unfamiliar with him, causing some delay during registration. I apologize for making you face such an individual alone."

Eloise patted her hand fondly. "It's alright, Lorrie..."

"Lorrie? Are you Loraine?" Judie was taken aback, incredulous.

At first, she didn't recognize Loraine.

During her younger years, Loraine, while delicate and adorable as a porcelain doll, was marked by the austere conditions of the orphanage. Her patchwork clothes and her pallid complexion hinted at malnutrition.

Judie, ever haughty, habitually tormented Loraine, barely affording the girl she despised a second glance.

But upon hearing Eloise utter her name, Judie recognized Loraine immediately.

Staring at the woman in front of her, attired simply yet exuding an ethereal beauty, Judie found it hard to comprehend. "No! It's impossible, you can't be Loraine!"

How could Loraine outshine her so drastically, glowing with an irresistible radiance? And that sophisticated aura, how could it belong to the unassuming girl from their shared past?

The truth was unbearable; the person she used to bully now eclipsed her, not just by a factor of ten, but perhaps even a hundred.

Protectively, Eloise shot Judie a cautious look and swiftly moved to shield Loraine, reminiscent of a mother hen safeguarding her chick.

While Eloise might shield Loraine from Judie's prying eyes, she couldn't protect Loraine from the collective scrutiny of the banquet attendees.

The moment Loraine's name was revealed, more eyes darted her way, the villagers' expressions shifting from surprise to skepticism.

After all, thanks to Judie's influence, gossip about Loraine was a perennial topic of their idle chats, and the rumors about her were ceaselessly circulated.

But hadn't Loraine left the village pregnant? If she had returned, wouldn't she be a crestfallen woman who had birthed a child and was heartlessly abandoned by her affluent partner? How could she now be this poised, dignified, and stunningly beautiful woman?



As the crowd gaped at Loraine, Judie felt her village limelight swiftly being stolen away. Overwhelmed by resentment, she couldn't contain her venomous words and was first to jeer.

"Loraine, weren't you the one impregnated by some random man before running away? So why did you return?"

Before Loraine could respond, Judie persisted in her mockery. "Ah, it's clear now. You must have been discarded and had to crawl back to the orphanage, right? You parade around as if you're lofty and superior, claiming to have a boyfriend... I suppose he's your benefactor, right? By the way, how old is this man who's supporting you? Is he some frail, elderly man in his seventies or eighties? Just don't bring him here and stage some trick to swindle me, I won't donate my money to you guys!"

Judie had always been quick to voice her thoughts, and as she wrapped up her speech, it seemed to dawn on the villagers as well.

Indeed, her account aligned with the rumors they frequently overheard.

Either Loraine was abandoned by an elderly benefactor and had to retreat to the countryside and the orphanage, or she returned with her unappealing benefactor to embarrass herself here!

Suddenly, the villagers' glances towards Loraine turned scornful, and some women even shielded their children's eyes, admonishing them sharply, "Don't take after women like her, they're shameless and bring disgrace upon our village!"

Loraine was no stranger to such remarks. The enduring poverty of this place had its reasons. People here were ignorant and small-minded, only capable of spitefully conjecturing about others and begrudging their success.

No wonder Henna had struggled vehemently to relocate to the city for a better life.

But an aged man in his seventies or eighties?

So, that's how they had pictured her so-called "benefactor" as her partner. Loraine couldn't help but smirk, feigning disappointment as she responded, "Judie, I'm afraid I will let you down. My partner isn't that old."

Judie was caught off guard. "What?"

The next moment, Loraine pivoted and called out, "Marco."

Was this the name of her alleged sugar daddy? What was his full name?

While Judie was still contemplating, she noticed a tall, elegant figure approaching from a distance. Her eyes instantly sparked with interest.

The man had a stern, icy demeanor, and an extraordinary aura that clearly didn't belong in this rural setting. The only thing seeming out of place was the bag of presents he was carrying.

He scanned the crowd for a moment, his gaze settling on a spot before his frosty facade softened, unveiling a subtle smile as he walked briskly towards it.

As Judie spotted him advancing, her heart fluttered, an inexplicable mix of shyness and excitement washing over her.

Was he drawn to her?

Just as Judie was about to reciprocate, the man's focus shifted to Loraine across from her.

"Everything is settled with the registration. Have you been

waiting long?" he inquired.

Loraine smiled, extending her hand to affectionately loop her arm around his, teasingly replying, "No, you arrived right on time. Someone just suggested that you're older than my grandfather, a frail old man. I was interested to hear what you thought about that."

It was only then that Judie grasped that this man was the one Loraine had brought back. She stood there, frozen on the spot.

