

Chapter 663 She's Back

Was that a reward?

Marco's eyes widened in surprise, his gaze lowering, not quite believing what had just happened.

Loraine, still clutching his shoulder, wore a mischievous and radiant smile. In that moment, he found himself entranced by her clear, bright eyes and charming smile.

He caught himself wondering if more compliments would win him more of such unexpected rewards.

His eyes flickered to her lips, his throat dry, his hand inching toward her waist almost of its own accord.

Loraine, sensing his intentions, felt a thrill of apprehension.

She had blushed after the kiss, feeling both bold and bashful. How had she found the courage for such an intimate gesture?

But she just couldn't fight the urge to kiss him.

Still blushing, she tried to push Marco away gently, whispering softly, "Alright, you can let go now."

However, it seemed she had ignited something in him that wouldn't be so easily extinguished.

With a sudden but gentle force, Marco wrapped his arm around Loraine's waist, drawing her close into his embrace. Before Loraine could even react, she felt his warm breath surrounding her, engulfing her senses entirely.



His lips met hers in a kiss that was both passionate and tender, exploring and relishing each sensation. Gradually, his caress grew more intense, delving deeper and seeking her response, leading them both into an intimate connection they had never experienced before.

Caught off guard, Loraine clung to him, tilting her head to meet his kiss.

With each moment, the kiss deepened, growing more intense, neither willing to give an inch. What had begun as a playful gesture had turned into something more powerful, more consuming.

Eventually, Loraine surrendered, her resistance melting away in his arms.

When Marco finally released her, his face was flushed, his usually cold eyes softened by tenderness. He seemed as affected by the kiss as she was.

"I'm... I'm out of breath," Loraine managed to stammer, her voice trembling.

Marco's response was a quiet chuckle, one hand supporting her while the other caressed her back, eliciting a shiver.

In the midst of this charged moment, an innocent child's voice rang out, startling them both. "Angel Sister, what are you doing? Your face is so red! Are you feverish?"

Loraine felt as though she had been doused with cold water, stiffening as she spotted several little faces peeking from a nearby classroom, their eyes wide with curiosity.

With a sudden sense of urgency, she pulled away from Marco's embrace, her face flaming.



Marco coughed lightly, trying to regain his composure. He spoke with feigned sternness. "We were playing a game that only adults can play."

Lorraine's scalp tingled with anxiety. The last thing she wanted was for Eloise to think she was a bad influence on the children!

The children's faces were alight with curiosity, eager to probe further, but Lorraine shot Marco a warning glance that silenced them. Without another word, she turned and made her way back to her room.

Marco smiled, raising a finger to his lips in a gesture for the children to keep their secret, then followed Lorraine at a more leisurely pace.

He resisted the urge to tease her, recognizing that her embarrassment was genuine.

As he walked, his mind turned to more serious matters. Lorraine clearly had her own intentions regarding the Cooper family, and he had always respected her autonomy. He would offer his assistance but would never act without her express consent.

He dialed a number on his phone, which was answered promptly. His voice, infused with a casual satisfaction, conveyed his instructions clearly. "Hold off on taking action against the Cooper family for now. Recall the people you sent earlier."

Meanwhile, at the Cooper family's residence, after being forcibly brought home by Zaria, Judie's frustration boiled over into a full-blown tantrum. She yelled, "Mom, how could you? Weren't you going to help me stand up for myself? Weren't you going to shield me from the villagers' ridicule? But as soon as you saw Lorraine, you turned tail like a frightened mouse!"

Zaria, seated on the sofa, looked gravely serious and made no move to calm her daughter's outburst. Her hands wrung together in agitation.

Suddenly, the sound of a car engine outside interrupted the scene, followed by a middle-aged man entering the house. Catching Judie's sobs, he demanded, "Judie, what's the matter? Who has dared to upset you?"

Judie's eyes brightened as she rushed towards the man, fully expecting his sympathy. But before she could even speak, Zaria's voice cut through the room, sharp and commanding. "Judie, to your room, now!"

Judie's face fell, her lips quivering. "Dad, just look at how Mom ..."

"Enough! You've shamed our family today, and you still dare to argue with me?"

Zaria's voice turned icy, her hand striking the table with force. Judie, taken aback by her mother's uncharacteristic sternness, froze, tears welling in her eyes.

Becker Cooper, sensing the gravity of the situation, gestured to the servants to escort Judie away before taking a seat beside his wife.

"What's happened? You're clearly upset, even scolding our precious daughter," he asked, his voice tinged with worry.

Zaria's face was ashen as she clutched his arm, her grip so tight that Becker winced.

"Something's wrong. That girl from before, she's back... Why would she return? What has she discovered?"

Chapter 664 Teaching Her A Lesson

Becker withdrew his arm, irritation etched into his furrowed brow. "What girl are you going on about? Must you always overreact? Sometimes, you still act like that impoverished woman you once were. Try to maintain the demeanor of a woman of wealth and prestige..."

Zaria vigorously shook her head and, in a voice filled with urgency, cried out, "The couple's daughter! The child who was sent to the orphanage! She's returned!"

Becker's rambling halted abruptly, and he stared at Zaria, stunned for a moment.

His expression shifted slightly. "Are you certain about this?"

Her face pale, Zaria nodded. "I saw her myself. You wouldn't believe it – she looks exactly like that woman!"

Becker's brows drew together, and agitation crept into his voice. "That child has been gone for ages, and the old caretaker at the orphanage wouldn't disclose her whereabouts. I assumed she'd met her end somewhere, not that she'd be fortunate enough to return!"

Though Zaria was in a state of panic, Becker seemed more composed.

"No one else knows about the past but us. How old was she then? Don't frighten yourself. As long as she doesn't suspect anything, we needn't reveal anything."

Zaria tried to conceal the chill Becker's words sent down her spine, forcing a chuckle. "We can't be too complacent, though. Why would she leave the city and return to target our family?"

Becker, likely aware of the disruption at Judie's banquet, remained silent, his face grave.

"You don't understand. Loraine isn't that fragile, skinny girl anymore. She now dresses more elegantly than any of us and carries herself with an air of authority. What if she intends to confront us? What then?" Zaria's voice trembled with anxiety.

Becker cast a disdainful glance at his fretting wife and snorted, "This is mere womanly paranoia. She may appear strong, but she's just a woman! Remember how Judie used to torment her? Did she ever retaliate?"

Zaria hesitated. Though it was true that Judie bullied Loraine, Becker didn't know that each time Judie provoked Loraine, some mysterious misfortune befell her, leaving her in tears. Zaria wasn't sure if it was connected to Loraine, but the nagging sense of unease lingered.

Becker, lost in thought, lit a cigarette, the smoke curling around him.

"A girl like that won't amount to anything. If she's dared to come back, she must have support. Are there any influential figures with her?" he mused.

Zaria quickly recounted her observations of Marco, and Becker's expression indicated agreement.

He gestured to one of his bodyguards, instructing, "Investigate this Bryant fellow."

Despite the village's lack of internet connectivity, the wealthiest



family around had their means of gathering intelligence, particularly concerning someone as notable as Marco.

It wasn't long before they had the information.

The bodyguard reported, "Boss, the man named Marco Bryant was once the CEO of the Bryant Group in Vagow." His voice trailed off, leaving the implications hanging heavily in the room.

Upon hearing the word "CEO," Becker's body jolted involuntarily, and his face drained of color. He seemed not to notice the cigarette scorching his finger as it burned down.

As a rural entrepreneur, Becker was no stranger to the Bryant Group and Marco Bryant's reputation. This was a name he couldn't afford to cross, and the realization sent a tremor through his hands, shattering his previously composed demeanor.

"How has Loraine become entangled with such a prominent figure?"

His mind raced to the recent offenses his wife and daughter had committed against Marco. Thoughts of reconciliation began to form, his body betraying his fear.

Just as Becker's shaking subsided, the bodyguard spoke up, taking a sharp breath. "But sir, he's no longer part of the Bryant family. He was expelled."

The news was like a sharp slap, and in a fit of rage, Becker's hand struck his subordinate's face, mirroring the shock he felt. He angrily dismissed the man and took a moment to collect himself. A smug smile curled his lips as he declared, "No wonder! I knew that Loraine couldn't possibly associate with such a magnate. He's nothing but a downfallen baron now, skulking back to the countryside."

Though Becker might not have been able to challenge the CEO of the Bryant Group, a disgraced figure like Marco, cast out by his own family, was a different matter entirely. He could bend such a man to his will!


Zaria, too, was momentarily stunned by Marco's revealed identity, and a realization suddenly struck her.

"Becker, Marco boasted that he's now Loraine's kept man. Consider this – a former CEO of the Bryant Group must possess immense pride. If he's truly subservient to Loraine, there might be other forces at play. Dare we risk provoking them?"

Becker's smirk widened into a menacing grin. "A dog ousted from its own pack will gnaw even the toughest bone to survive! If Loraine has some powerful benefactor, all the better. A discarded plaything like Marco, now kept by another master, will they bother to protect her?"

Understanding dawned on Zaria's face, and Becker's laughter filled the room, triumphant and chilling. "Once the village learns that Loraine isn't wealthy, and she can't finance their road repairs, who will lend her an ear? That girl may be young, but she's grown up under our watchful eyes. It's high time we, as her elders, teach her a lesson!" he finished, his voice dripping with a toxic blend of arrogance and malice.



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Chapter 665 A Fortuitous Event Long Past

Zaria found herself swayed by Becker's argument and asked, "What are you planning?"

Becker cast his eyes toward the upstairs, his expression grave. "Over the years, I've groomed our daughter to curry favor with the villagers. It's time to reap what we've sown."

He elaborated, "You must tell Judie about that kept man's true identity. She will incite the villagers herself and reveal that Loraine can't supply the money she pledged. This way, the villagers will rise against Loraine on our behalf."

Zaria's hands twisted anxiously as she hesitated. "Send Judie? Isn't that a precarious task? You know how she was humiliated at the banquet today. Judie's reputation among the villagers is already tarnished. Loraine is no simple adversary. If Judie fails again and is further disgraced, what then?"

Becker's nostrils flared with impatience. "You naive woman! So, you have a better plan?"

"Why not send the bodyguards? We pay them, yet they've done nothing but bring shame to our family. Why must our daughter endure this humiliation?"

Becker's irritation escalated, his sneer turning contemptuous. "The bodyguards? What use are they? Will they truly exert themselves for mere wages? Judie must face this challenge!"

Memories of the banquet's embarrassment still fresh, Becker's

brow knitted with anger. "Dare you mention today's banquet again? It's your pampering that's spoiled our daughter, causing her to fumble at the banquet and tarnish the Cooper family name! I'm offering her a chance for redemption. Can't you see that?"

Zaria's face fell, her expression one of profound grievance.

Though they held sway over the village, Becker's continual belittlement left her and her daughter feeling insignificant and worthless.

Noticing her meekness, Becker's face softened somewhat. "If Judie succeeds in this, she'll restore both our family's honor and her own standing among the villagers."

"But..."

"There are no buts! You must heed my words. Wasn't it my decision that brought us here? If I had relied on your timorous nature, we'd still be languishing on that cliff, destitute!"

Mentioning the past, Becker's words caused Zaria's face to pale, the memory transporting her back to that cliff where she and Becker had found a baby's faint cries...

The Coopers, a line of woodcutters for generations, were no business prodigies. Their ascension to wealth had its roots in a fortuitous event long past.

Suddenly, a bloodstained face from her memories merged with Loraine's recent smiling visage.

Her own thoughts alarmed Zaria, and she shrieked, a wave of anxiety washing over her.

Becker's frown deepened, his eyes narrowing as he hissed, "You and I are the sole keepers of that secret. If you value our

comfortable life, you'll follow my lead. Understand?"

Zaria's nod was distant, her mind still reeling. After Becker departed, she struggled to compose herself, wrestling with her nagging guilt. Clinging to her husband's assurances, she finally managed to quash her unease.

With a newfound resolve, Zaria ascended the stairs to carry out her husband's directive, preparing to persuade her daughter.

Though Judie was raised in the countryside, she had been doted on by her parents, particularly by her mother, Zaria.

As Zaria stood at the doorway, she found Judie in her room, furiously scattering her stuffed dolls across the floor in a fit of rage.

"Judie..." Zaria began, but before she could complete her sentence, Judie's red eyes filled with anger, and she hurled a pillow at her mother, grumbling, "Why are you here? I'll never be as good as that witch Loraine!"

Tears welled in Judie's eyes as she recalled how her mother used to secretly visit Loraine at the orphanage when they were children.

She didn't know the complete story, but her imagination had crafted numerous versions, each one feeding her resentment toward Loraine.

"You always take her side! Loraine bested me, and you still won't do anything to her. Why don't you just adopt that miserable woman as your daughter?" Judie's voice broke with frustration.

Zaria's patience wore thin, and she hurried to comfort her daughter.

"Darling, don't talk like that. I'm not siding with her. Back then, Loraine had that intimidating man with her. If we had confronted her, things might have escalated dangerously. I pulled you away to keep you safe!"

Judie's eyes narrowed with suspicion, her voice trembling. "Is that really what happened?"

"Of course! Why would I ever harm you? As soon as we returned home, I asked your father to look into that man. And you won't believe what we found! He used to be a big shot, a CEO of some major corporation, but he's been tossed aside! Apparently, he had no blood ties to that wealthy family, so they got rid of him without a second thought!"

Judie's eyes bulged, and her tears momentarily ceased. Her mother went on, "Loraine's just putting on an act. She likely doesn't have any money at all! Those clothes she's wearing might be all she has left to keep up appearances. Her promise to help the village repair the roads is nothing but empty talk."

"That man is nothing but a scoundrel!" Judie spat, her words mirroring Becker's sentiments. She seethed, "How dare he try to intimidate me? Just wait until tomorrow! I'll reveal those two for who they really are to the entire village!"



Chapter 666 Judie's Speech

Early the next morning, Judie approached the village chief, requesting that he assemble the villagers.

The village chief found himself caught between a rock and a hard place. His reputation had plummeted since the road construction scandal came to light. Many villagers had been won over by Loraine's promises and were eagerly setting up their stalls for the anticipated event.

Taking a stand to assist the Cooper family would put him at odds with the villagers, but ignoring them was not an option either. Though Loraine would eventually leave the village behind, he needed to be mindful of the Coopers if he wanted to continue residing there.

So, with reluctance, the village chief gathered the villagers at Judie's behest.

Predictably, upon learning it was Judie summoning them, all refused to comply. It took the village chief's earnest persuasion, along with invoking the name of the Cooper family, to finally coax them into coming.

As the villagers congregated in the courtyard of the Cooper residence, Judie was nowhere to be seen. They seized the opportunity to grumble and voice their grievances about Judie's consistent meddling. They asked one another, "What's Judie scheming now? When will she cease her disruptions?"

"You've hit the nail on the head! The Coopers, blessed with wealth and time, can pursue any whim, but we don't have such privileges. I've bought a cart and am swamped with

preparations for my stall. I can't waste time on her."

As they spoke, Judie appeared, catching wind of their complaints.

Her face clouded over, and she sneered at the gathering, "Those of you ready to sell, I'd advise unloading your merchandise promptly to cut your losses."

The villagers' heads snapped toward her, and those who had invested in carts raised objections, "What's that supposed to mean, Judie? Are you placing a curse on us?"

Judie responded haughtily, "I'm only trying to be neighborly. But aren't you aware? Loraine is penniless! She's pulling the wool over our eyes!"

Doubt and disagreement rippled through the crowd. "Judie, by what authority do you make such claims?"

"Are you merely envious, attempting to tarnish her name?"

Judie's lips twisted into a smirk. "If you're set against believing me, so be it. Just don't say you weren't warned. Loraine, once a village girl, now a city dweller — how else could she amass such wealth if not by clinging to a rich man? That so-called wealthy man at her side? He's a pauper! A scoundrel, disowned and broke, fired from his job! Both Loraine and he are desperate and have returned to dupe us!"

Uncertainty crept across the villagers' faces, and Judie pressed on, "Consider it, my friends. Loraine's promises are mere smoke and mirrors. She abandoned our village long ago; can you honestly believe she cares for us now? If she truly wished to aid with roads or housing, she could've sent aid. Her inaction is proof enough of her insincerity!"

A buzz of whispers swept through the crowd, unmistakably

swayed by Judie's speech.

A triumphant gleam sparkled in Judie's eyes.

True, Loraine had indeed dispatched a construction team to the village, but her mistake lay in attempting to adhere to proper procedures. Her team was obstructed by the Cooper family's operatives in the town.

The Cooper family had successfully bought the loyalty of the village chief, granting them the ability to thwart Loraine's efforts. What did the truth matter, so long as the villagers believed their version of events?

Though some began to question Loraine's sincerity, there were others who held onto a sliver of doubt, torn between belief and skepticism.

One villager spoke up. "The Cooper family, are you being honest or fabricating this tale? Loraine doesn't strike me as a deceiver ..."

Judie's lips twisted into a contemptuous smirk. "True or false, didn't Loraine pledge to repair our roads? Let's wait and see if any construction team shows up. But mark my words, if Loraine has indeed duped you, all the money you've sunk into this will vanish."

Her statement caused a visible shift in the villagers' demeanor.

Some time had passed since Loraine's promise, and they'd already acquired the necessary supplies. Yet, there was no sign of any construction crew.

While they might still be en route, no one was willing to wager their savings on the integrity of an outsider.

Judie's eyes twinkled mischievously as she singled out a young



man from the crowd.

"Vinnie, you were quite close to Loraine back in the day, weren't you? Can you honestly say you believe she'll return the favor and help develop the village?"

Vinnie Branco's face blanched. In his youth, he had tormented Loraine on several occasions, even nearly compromising her honor.

Considering his own potential success, he admitted to himself that revenge against the village might be tempting. Contributing to its development seemed unlikely.

Having already invested in Loraine's proposed project, he blurted out, his voice edged with panic, "No, I need to verify this. If Loraine dares betray us, she'll rue the day!"

Judie's wicked smile widened, her voice dripping with insinuation. "Loraine may not possess the funds to make amends, but her expensive attire and jewelry might suffice. Surely, there's a way for her to compensate everyone!"

A dark light flickered in Vinnie's eyes as he caught Judie's implication. With renewed vigor, he thrust his arm in the air, exclaiming, "Fellow villagers, let's march to the orphanage and demand an explanation!"

With a collective roar, the angry villagers surged forward. Judie remained behind, her face etched with a triumphant grin.

This time, with the villagers' might behind her, she felt certain they would teach Loraine and Marco a lesson they would never forget!

