

## Chapter 676 Danger

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Amidst the rising flames, the usually composed Marco seemed to lose his grip on the situation, his face betraying his fear.

Eloise, aware that Loraine was still in the building, also became distressed. She glanced at the ferocious fire, panic in her voice. "There's a child named Sam Lem missing. Lorrie went in to find him. Didn't you run into her?"

Marco's face darkened further, worry etched in his features. He hadn't seen Loraine at all!

Suddenly, a timid voice emerged from the group of children behind him. "Madam, I'm here..." stammered the child.

Eloise's eyes widened, relief and disbelief mingling in her expression. "Sam? You weren't in your room?"

Sam lowered his head, a guilt-ridden expression on his face. "I couldn't sleep at night, so I went outside to play..."

He had inadvertently avoided danger by being outside, but fear had kept him hidden in the shadows until he heard his name.

Eloise let out a relieved sigh. Blaming the child now would serve no purpose. Her focus shifted back to Marco, anxiety in her voice. "The children are all safe outside. Lorrie wouldn't have found Sam in the building. It's too dangerous for her in there!"

Marco's fists clenched, his lips tightly pressed together.

The flames intensified, their scorching heat felt even from a distance. Going in now would be a perilous gamble with life.

But if they waited any longer for Loraine, the situation might become dire...

Marco's heart was in turmoil, his gaze flicking back to the dark road ahead.

The firefighters hadn't arrived yet, and the poor road conditions could be delaying them. This wretched road was hindering their chances of rescue.

Without a word, he grabbed a soaking wet blanket, his face set with grim determination, and prepared to enter the blazing building.

Eloise gasped, fear in her voice. "What are you doing? It's too dangerous. Don't be impulsive!"

Marco's determined figure did not waver. "I can't wait. I can't let Loraine face this danger alone!" he declared, striding into the flames.

Inside the burning building, the smoke seemed to thin as the fire roared, the intense heat making visibility nearly impossible.

Loraine covered her face, dodging open flames, her body reacting to the sweltering environment.

She had searched tirelessly around the dormitory but had found no sign of Sam.

Coughing, her vision blurring, she felt her body's moisture being sapped away by the searing heat.

Her voice hoarse, she called out, "Sam!"

No answer came, only the continued roar of the fire, buildings collapsing around her, sending showers of sparks in all directions.

Realization dawned on her; she couldn't stay any longer. She had to find a way out, and quickly, before it was too late.

But when she looked around, Loraine couldn't discern any directions amidst the raging fire.

The heat wave obscured her vision, and the temperature kept climbing, rendering the wet cloth on her body useless. Smoke and ash clogged her throat, making breathing difficult, and she had to open her mouth wide to inhale, only to allow more smoke and ash to enter her lungs.

She had never felt so thirsty before, her throat scratching painfully. Her strength waned, and her body felt weak.

Was she going to die here?

Trapped in the inferno, with death tightening its grip, Loraine felt surprisingly little fear — only regret.

There were so many things she hadn't had a chance to do yet ...

Not far away, a wooden beam snapped with a deafening sound. Loraine closed her eyes resignedly, a bitter smile on her face, hoping that everyone else would be safe. If she could, she would tell Marco to live well and not grieve for her.

But then, something reached her ears through the roaring flames, something that couldn't be a hallucination. Marco's voice!

"Loraine!"

Her mind buzzed for a moment, and suddenly she was fully awake.

It wasn't a hallucination; Marco had truly come to find her!

Summoning a burst of strength, Loraine covered her mouth and nose, coughing violently as she struggled to get up and move towards Marco, trying to respond to him.

Just then, a disturbance sounded in her ears.

With a crack, a flaming crossbeam came crashing down, aimed precisely at her.

In the midst of the inferno, all her senses dulled by the scorching heat, Loraine felt the searing heat coming towards her. There was no time to avoid it.

Instinctively, she closed her eyes, her heart filling with despair ...

But at that very moment, someone lunged towards her, pushing her to the side with a loud thud!



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## Chapter 677 Escape

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For a fleeting four or five seconds, a deafening silence enveloped Loraine, her eyes wide and fixed on the sparks of fiery orange surrounding her.

As her awareness clawed its way back, Loraine felt a heavy weight pressing down on her, and memories of the preceding events flooded into her mind.

Her heart stuttered in her chest, and she reached out hastily to grip the arm of the man beside her. "Marco? Are you okay?"

Marco's response was a muffled groan, followed by the sound of him pushing himself up and leaning over her. In the eerie glow of the flames, he met her gaze, his lips curved in a gentle smile, his eyes soft and tender.

"I'm okay. How about you?"

Loraine's breath caught, and she shook her head, her eyes drawn to a charred beam not far away, still consumed by fire.

Once again, Marco had risked his life, fearlessly plunging into the inferno to save her.

Tears welled in Loraine's eyes, whether from the smoke or the emotion, her nose tingling with the scent of the blaze.

She had feared she might never see Marco again.

As if sensing her distress, Marco raised his hand to brush the tears from her eyes, his smile fading into an expression of pain.

His arm around her tightened for an instant, though he controlled it so deftly she didn't notice.

He was all too aware that, amidst the roaring flames, the rising



A brief pause, and Marco's eyes locked onto hers. He leaned down and kissed her forehead tenderly before rising to his feet and cradling her in his arms.

Lorraine's mind was a whirl. She wanted to tell him she could walk, to ease his burden, but Marco anticipated her thoughts. "I'm okay. This way is safer."

He knew she was both physically and mentally drained after staying alone in the inferno for so long. Carrying her would hamper his movements, but he didn't care.

Even at great risk, he couldn't bear to be apart from Lorraine for even a second.

"I'm okay." The phrase seemed to have become a mantra to him. Lorraine's throat tightened, and she glanced back, as if expecting something.

As Marco carefully navigated the collapsed doorway, he caught her eye and exhaled softly. "The children are safe; they're all outside."

A surge of relief washed over Lorraine. The children's safety was all that mattered.

Once outside the dormitory building, the path ahead seemed clear, the way less fraught with obstacles.

But a nagging sense of unease gnawed at Lorraine.

Marco's pace was slow as he carried her, his focus absolute.

Lorraine had assumed he was being cautious, but as she leaned against his chest, she felt his heartbeat hammering, rapid and erratic.

The sound of his breathing in her ear was tinged with an underlying note of pain.



Suddenly, a memory surfaced – the muffled groan she had heard when Marco saved her from the collapsing beam.

Was he injured?

Loraine's thoughts froze as she instinctively looked up at Marco. His jaw was set, his lips pressed together in a thin line, and minor abrasions were visible on his face, mingling with sweat and ash to give him a rugged, disheveled appearance.

It was only then that she realized his footsteps were heavier than usual.

How had she missed it? Marco was known for his ability to endure pain, always dismissing his injuries unless they were severe. He had hidden his suffering from her, shielding her from his distress.

Loraine's eyes drifted downward, and she discovered a grim scar marking Marco's thigh. It must have happened when he pushed her away from the collapsing beam, injuring himself in the process.

The sight of the wound, with its darkened edges and exposed, raw flesh, brought tears to her eyes. She fought to suppress a cry, knowing that their situation was dire, and they needed to focus on survival. Her voice trembled with restrained emotion as she managed to say, "Put me down. I can walk on my own."

Marco seemed momentarily taken aback by her demand, understanding that she had noticed his wound. But he didn't stop; he continued to press on, his determination unwavering.

Loraine felt a surge of panic, wanting to insist, but was afraid of touching his wound in the process. She forced herself to quiet her protests, her eyes filling with tears.

As they got closer to the open area, with only a winding path to freedom, Marco's grip tightened, and he shifted Loraine in his arms. Catching sight of her distraught face, he smiled gently, his heart swelling with affection. Seizing the moment, he



leaned down to press a soft kiss to her lips.

"These are just minor injuries. Let's escape first, then we can settle the score however you like. I promise, I won't fight back," he whispered, his voice reassuring.

Loraine stared at him, disbelief in her eyes. How could he consider these injuries minor? Tears threatened to spill over.

Just then, some nearby flammable material ignited, sending flames roaring into the air. Both of them flinched, but Marco's grip on Loraine only tightened as he charged forward, ignoring his pain.

From afar, voices grew louder and more frantic. "We found them! Over there!"

"Someone's injured and unconscious! Where's the rescue staff? Get a doctor!"

In the midst of the chaos, a figure reached them and took Loraine from Marco's grasp. Medical personnel were close behind, ready to assist.

With a weary sigh of relief, Marco's defenses crumbled. His eyes slid shut, and he collapsed, surrendering to unconsciousness at last, knowing that they were safe.



## Chapter 678 Badly Injured

A crowd had gathered in the courtyard of the orphanage. Apart from the firefighters that Marco had called to the scene, the locals who lived near the orphanage were also present.

Before long, the flames were quickly extinguished, leaving behind a dense cloud of black smoke hanging over the village.

Tired from their efforts in helping to combat the fire, the villagers now lay sprawled on the ground, engaging in spirited discussions about the blaze they had just put out.

"What exactly caused the fire? This place has been safe and secure for so many years," one of them wondered aloud.

"This whole thing reminds me of when a mountain fire burnt the Coopers' old residence back then. But this place is very far from the mountains, so there can't be any relationship between both incidents," another man reasoned in a low voice as he cast a wary glance at the others around them.

His companion didn't know what to say. He just swallowed hard in silence. After all, who would dare to speculate on such matters? One had to be very careful in order to avoid implicating one's self.

"Then there's that guy... Loraine's boyfriend. He has suffered severe wounds, hasn't he? I hope she won't accuse the village of being responsible for this incident."

Soon, all these whispered conversations came to an end when Eloise arrived.

Her presence brought calm and silence to the area. One by one, Eloise nodded respectfully to all the villagers involved in the rescue effort.

Being a good neighbor made you almost part of the same family. Even though the villagers were somewhat selfish, they weren't really a malicious set of people.

Besides, helping to put out the fire was simply the only humane and smart thing to do, because there was the real possibility that it could spread to their own homes. Moreover, Eloise was well respected in the village due to her age and position. And her grateful bows to each and every one of them made them respect her even more.

Immediately, they got to their feet and willingly offered shelter to the children of the orphanage that the blaze had now rendered homeless.

Apart from the poor traumatized children, there were only two other victims – Marco and Loraine. They had both been heroic in their efforts to fight the fire.

Thankfully, Loraine hadn't sustained any significant injuries. She only passed out momentarily due to the thick smoke. But she regained consciousness not long after.

The real concern actually lay with Marco. His injuries were much more severe.

But since the village was quite a small one, they had only one part-time doctor.

Worse still, it was a remote place, so expecting the arrival of medical professionals was impractical. Hence, several well-meaning villagers came together to construct a rudimentary stretcher with which they carefully carried Marco to the village clinic.

Loraine stood inside the small clinic, her eyes dim and unfocused. The poor glare of the flickering incandescent light overhead, reminding her of the raging inferno they had just escaped from, illuminated the gruesome sight of Marco's bloody wound.

Lorraine was practically on the brink of total exhaustion. She was relying solely on sheer determination and nothing else.

She was engulfed by weariness and tears had welled up in her drowsy eyes.

Marco, on the other hand, was still unconscious, so the weight of responsibility rested heavily on Lorraine's shoulders. She couldn't go to bed and neither could she shed tears. Marco had saved her from the fire, and now, the least she could do was to take charge of the situation since he was down and out. She just had to be accountable for him.

The sound of a metal object slightly hitting another suddenly jerked her out of her reverie. She looked up and saw the doctor cutting away the fabric that had been wrapped around Marco's wound. Eventually, her gaze riveted on the part-time physician. "How is he?" she asked in a raspy voice.

The doctor was taken aback by both the suddenness of the question and the way she looked. Her bloodshot eyes and disheveled appearance clearly showed that she had been in the inferno.

Frankly, the term "doctor" was quite a stretch for the manager of this small place. The so-called village clinic barely had basic prescription drugs. There was nothing more than just drugs for the flu along with some disinfectant, both of which would come in handy if any of the villagers had any minor ailment, but certainly not for complex injuries like this one.

With a conflicted expression on his face, the doctor cleared his throat nervously and said, "Lorraine, I think you need to prepare yourself mentally."

"What do you mean?" Lorraine asked anxiously.

During her recent stay in the village, she had always appeared calm and amiable. But now, seeing the doctor's sad demeanor, Lorraine's heart skipped a beat. The doctor had a mournful expression on his face as he stammered in a helpless tone, "I...

I can't help him much. All I can do here is to clean the wound and apply some disinfectant. But with such a large wound, who knows if it might still get infected? To be honest, I'm not sufficiently trained or equipped to handle this. You need to find proper medical assistance as soon as possible."

Lorraine's lips turned pale and she almost slumped to the ground. Her eyes seemed devoid of life as she muttered softly, "It will be a long time before they arrive. What do we do?"

She wasn't even sure if she was talking to the doctor or to herself.

Feeling the overwhelming tension in the room, the doctor dared not linger any longer. "W-well," he stammered, "I've given him some basic first aid. If he doesn't develop a fever tonight, he might be able to pull through."

When Lorraine heard this, her eyes brightened and her heart became filled with hope.

Throughout the night, she sat by Marco's bedside, tirelessly caring for him. Every so often, she would use a warm wet towel to wipe his body to prevent him from catching a chill or worse still, running a fever. She also checked his forehead from time to time for any signs of increased body temperature.

As time passed, the sun's rays began to creep through the window. Lorraine leaned forward one more time to check Marco's temperature, and to her joy, she felt no sign of a raised temperature or fever.

She sighed in relief, and almost immediately, an unexpected wave of exhaustion washed over her. Before she knew it, she had drifted off to sleep.

But a few minutes later, she was jolted awake, her entire body drenched in a cold sweat. Immediately, she checked on Marco.

But thankfully, she found him lying peacefully, and everything appeared quite normal.

As she caressed his brow gently, she said in a whisper, "You'll be fine, Marco. Please wake up soon."

In her heart, Loraine had always considered Marco as the embodiment of invincibility – someone who would always be there for her in times of danger.

How could he allow himself to just lie there, causing her to worry so much?

All of a sudden, she felt a slight twitch under her finger.

Loraine was shocked. When she looked at his face, her heart melted instantly. It wasn't an illusion. It was real!

Marco was awake! His brow was furrowed, as if he was struggling to open his eyes.

## Chapter 679 Unique Connection

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Lorraine's nerves were on edge to the point that she thought even a heavy sigh might destroy the fragile hope before her. She held her breath, filled with anxiety and hope.

Marco never allowed her to be disappointed. After a struggle, his eyes opened slowly, glancing at the unfamiliar ceiling before recognition filled his face. Turning his head, he saw Lorraine by his bedside.

Her eyes showed the stress of the previous night, swollen and shadowed.

Compassion filled him as he took in her appearance. He reached out to wipe a lingering tear, his smile soft and reassuring.

Her tears gave way to a smile, and she hugged him, her voice choked with emotion. "Marco."

His response was tender as he smoothed her disheveled hair, his fingers finding joy in the silky texture.

He cherished the moment, content in this fresh chance at life.

Observing the traces of soot on her face, he spoke with playful concern. "You're starting to look like a crying kitten. If others see you like this, they might question the authority of the Universe's CEO."

His playful tone signaled that the danger was over.

She put on a mock-serious face, her voice tinged with genuine concern, as she chided, "What can compare to Mr. Bryant? You were willing to risk everything. Do you understand your leg was

nearly destroyed?"

His eyes wandered momentarily before her insistent noise brought him back. He answered with a calming smile. "But I'm fine now."

"Oh, so you wanted something to happen?"

Her eyes turned red; her lower lip trembled.

He looked into her eyes, and with a smile full of warmth, he reassured her. "Loraine, I promised to keep you safe. It's just a leg injury. Even if something goes wrong, I still have my hands. With them, I can continue to protect you, hold you, dry your tears; do so much more."

As he spoke, he reached out to brush the warm tears from her eyes.

Soon, he understood, with a hint of frustration, that his jokes weren't working that day. Her tears flowed like gems from a severed necklace.

Gently holding her face, he tried to lift her spirits with a humorous remark. "It's rare for me to say something so romantic. Did I move you to tears?"

Her tears turned to a smile as she playfully pushed him back. Her voice carried a gentle reproach. "You sweet talker! I hardly have time to be disgusted."

In the next instant, she found herself wrapped in his embrace again, her voice tender. "Marco, you've done enough for me. Not just now, but at the orphanage gate, and even before... You may not recall, but when I was younger, you saved me too."

Her heart pounded, and she tightened her grip on his hand without thinking. This was the first time she had mentioned their initial meeting, and she felt a blend of anticipation and nervousness, afraid that he might not recall.

He looked up, his eyes focused intensely on her. "So, it really

was you."

A faint sense of recognition had always lingered, especially when he intervened with Vinnie at the orphanage gate.

Her words now unleashed a flood of memories, and everything came back to him.

Years ago, he had rescued a young girl from embarrassment and given her his business card. Over the years, the memory faded. He never suspected that the girl he saved would become the woman he loved.

"I left my business card with that girl, but I never heard from her again. I assumed she was safe and moved on, so I eventually forgot. If only I had known the challenges you faced after that."

She shook her head, her voice gentle. "No, not long after, the Torres family took me in."

While she hadn't endured much hardship, her gratitude towards him ran deep.

He paused for a moment, emotion clogging his throat. "So, you assumed a false identity and married into the Bryant family because..."

Her cheeks turned a sudden shade of pink, and she looked away, finally mustering the courage to confess. "Yes, I was drawn to you. I couldn't bear to see you marry someone else."

His eyes sparkled with amusement as he held her closer, as though wishing to make her a part of him.

Their connection, it seemed, was even more profound than he realized. Their relationship was not a string of accidents but fate weaving them together.

"I won't marry anyone but you, Loraine. If you hadn't been there, I wouldn't have married at all."



When he first saw the photographs Liza brought him, he had glanced through them dismissively. But when he saw her picture and that inexplicably familiar look, he impulsively gave his approval.

He was thankful he had chosen her that day. Their destinies had intertwined long before they knew it.

He laughed softly, his voice filled with both relief and self-reproach. "Loraine, fortunately, it's you. Regrettably, I was a fool back then, not valuing you as I should have, wasting three precious years."


Her feelings surged. She understood now that Jimmie hadn't misled her that day at the cemetery.

Her bond with him was indeed special.

With this realization, she embraced him more tightly, her voice soft. "All of that is behind us now, and we're starting fresh. You've made it through your trial period. I agree to be with..."

Before she could finish, a sudden, intense warmth silenced her as he kissed her with a fervor.



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## Chapter 680 Not Settled Yet

The kiss caught Loraine completely off guard. Her eyes widened, surprise showing on her face.

Marco's kiss was sincere, filled with devotion. She found herself lost in his tenderness, her defenses gradually lowering.

She relaxed, instinctively embracing him as she wrapped her arms around his neck. Closing her eyes, she lost herself in the kiss.

A faint smile appeared on Loraine's lips; joy filled her heart from this profound connection.

She loved Marco. Her feelings had evolved from youthful admiration to the deep and intense affection she felt now.

Even after their divorce, she had tried to resist him. Yet, she knew she could never truly convince herself she didn't care about Marco.

Their recent moments together formed a gentle stream, soothing her heart.

Her family's wish for her happiness strengthened her determination. Why should she deny her heart and reject Marco's advances?

They had lost each other once due to confusion. This time, she determined not to let him slip away again because of miscommunication.

Feeling her response, Marco's eyes lit up; he kissed her with even more passion.

He supported her waist with one hand, while the other tangled in her smooth hair, deepening the kiss.

Only when he felt her become breathless did he release her, her eyes moist and breathing ragged.

Loraine felt electrified, left tingling and weak.

Before she recovered, Marco kissed her again. But this time, he teased her skillfully, leaving Loraine feeling trapped.

He let her go before she became overwhelmed or her heart raced too quickly.

Between them lingered a sense of uncertainty, her face flushed. Suddenly, she felt vulnerable.

How could Marco, who had teetered on the brink of death just the night before, seem so lively after one night's rest?

Yet his pale face revealed that he hadn't fully recovered; he was simply skilled at enduring and concealing.

Noticing the annoyance on her face, Marco understood her thoughts. He laughed, embraced her, and diverted the conversation. "Loraine, do you realize that it's typically the men who take the initiative to declare love?" he asked, his voice casual.

The sudden change of topic surprised Loraine, and she blinked, momentarily disconcerted.

Then Marco took her hand, as if preparing for a solemn ritual, and kissed it gently. With a voice both firm and tender, he said, "Loraine, I love you. I was once foolish, missed opportunities, and made many mistakes. I hope to make amends in the time we have ahead. I want a new beginning with you. Can you please accept my request to be your boyfriend?" His voice was sincere, his eyes fixed on Loraine.

Loraine's lips curved into a smile, though her heart was a battleground of conflicting emotions. One voice urged caution; another beckoned her to be bold. Her gaze fell on Marco's bandaged leg, and tears welled in her eyes.

Their journey had been challenging.

Marco, observing her eyes, was surprised by her tears.

He considered whether he had been too intense earlier. Knowing Loraine's sensitivity, he worried she might think he wasn't serious.

Having just gained her approval, he didn't dare upset her. With a worried look, he quickly apologized. "I lost control just now. I went too far; I'm sorry. I won't do that again!"

Loraine laughed through her tears at his concern, and Marco sighed in relief, smiling as he wiped her tears away.

She let him, and once he was done, she adopted a stern demeanor. "Even though you've been accepted, if you ever neglect your health again, get injured, and make me worry, I won't pay attention to you!" she warned, her words laden with genuine concern and anxiety. Marco's heart warmed, and he nodded obediently, raising his hand in a pledge. "I promise; I'll take care of myself."

He silently added that he would ensure her safety as well.

Satisfied, Loraine looked at him again. He was still recovering from a grave injury, and his fatigue was evident after their long conversation. "Rest now; concentrate on regaining your strength," she advised.

Marco's brows knitted together, his voice grave. "The issue isn't settled yet."

"I'll deal with it," Loraine declared, determination in her eyes. "I'm not someone who can be pushed around easily. Since they've acted, they'll face the consequences. As for you, just stay here. Remember, you promised to take care of yourself."

With a final loving gesture, she adjusted his blanket and left the clinic.

Marco watched her leave, a trace of helplessness in his eyes, but he held back any objection.

He had faith in Loraine's abilities, but he also wished he could manage things himself, letting her experience peace and happiness.

With a sigh, Marco reached for the phone beside him, sending a message.

"Follow Miss Torres; make sure she's safe, and help her with whatever she needs."



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## Chapter 681 The Culprit

Loraine made her way toward the orphanage, a place that had once been home.

With Marco's awakening, she felt a renewed vigor, akin to a collapsed balloon being refilled. Her fatigue was gone, leaving only determination.

Her only desire now was to bring this matter to a swift conclusion. She would not let Marco's suffering be in vain, nor would she allow the orphanage to be wronged.

When she arrived at the orphanage, she was met with the sight of charred remains.

Loraine stood in stunned silence, emotions welling inside her, hands clenched into tight fists.

This was the place where she had grown up, a sanctuary for countless children, and now it was gone.

The sound of soft, elderly coughing pulled her from her thoughts.

"Madam..."

Loraine wanted to offer solace but struggled to find the right words.

Eloise stared at what was once their home, her face etched with sorrow. Overnight, she seemed to have aged even more.

"Lorrie... Our orphanage is gone."

A deep sadness gripped Loraine, but she steadied herself. "It will get better. Don't worry; I will find out what happened!"

Eloise looked at her, even more forlorn, and simply nodded. Words were unnecessary.

The disaster was probably the result of malicious intent. Eloise likely knew this but accepting it was another matter altogether.

In a village where everyone knew each other, it was unthinkable that someone would harbor such bitterness to commit such a heinous act.

Firefighters were still on the scene, probably finishing their inspection, ensuring that all was safe before leaving.

A thought struck Loraine – could these experts spot details she might overlook?

As if fate intervened, a firefighter walked by, and Loraine quickly approached him to ask about the situation.

The firefighter's face grew serious. "We believe that the fire was set intentionally."

She had suspected as much, but hearing it confirmed made her heart lurch. "Why do you think that?"

"We discovered traces of accelerant at the scene..."

Loraine's eyes narrowed, and she asked with stern determination, "Could you show me? I'd like to see it."

He nodded and guided Loraine further in.

Whoever had set the fire clearly knew the orphanage well, targeting the room where various items were stored as the starting point.

Though the area had been cleared, it left behind a dark and eerily empty space.

The firefighter's face reflected his frustration. "There's no surveillance here, and we found only remnants. While we think it's arson, the villagers aren't helping with our investigation, so

it's hard to get much information."

Loraine understood the villagers' close-knit nature all too well, but this time was different. She had their trust.

Might she be able to gather more pertinent information by speaking directly with the villagers?

With determination fueling her, Loraine expressed her gratitude to the firefighter and turned her attention to the nearby residents.

The orphanage was situated in a distinctive location, so if the fire was intentionally set, there was a chance that the neighboring villagers might have observed something.

In the village's present state, animated by the tragedy of the previous night, the residents were clustered together, engaged in heated discussions about the fire. As Loraine neared, a group of them gathered around her, their faces etched with worry, eager to voice their concern.

She knew them, and they knew her. Her concerns were now theirs, aligning her quest with their well-being. With shared interests, she believed her inquiries might unearth more than what the professionals had managed.

After some friendly conversation, Loraine got to the point. "My friends, you know how important the orphanage is to all of us. Our futures are linked to its prosperity. Did any of you notice anything unusual last night?"

A sea of shaking heads and dismissive gestures met her question. The reluctance in their faces was palpable.

Loraine's face hardened, and her voice carried an edge. "The one behind this fire might not be finished. I could move the orphans to the city, but that would affect your income."

Her words hung in the air, met by a weighted silence. Finally, a middle-aged woman spoke, hesitantly. "I mentioned this in passing, but I think I saw Vinnie Branco near the orphanage



last night..."

Vinnie? Wasn't he held by the police?

A chill settled over Loraine's face as she gathered members of the Universe Group's engineering team and made her way to where Vinnie was staying.

There, before a ramshackle house, Vinnie stood, nonchalantly brushing his teeth. The sight of Loraine approaching caused his toothbrush to tumble from his mouth. "Loraine? Why weren't you in the fire?"

It was indeed him, admitting his guilt without a proper question being asked.

Loraine's lips twisted into a sneer. "Seems like jail didn't teach you anything. Well, I'm out of mercy... Niko, show him we're not to be trifled with."

Beside her, the ever-calm Nicholas nodded, smiling faintly, and approached Vinnie, who immediately panicked.

Stumbling backward, thoughts tumbling out of his mouth, he cried, "You can't hit me! The Cooper family set the fire; they paid me to do it. Go after them, not me!"