

Chapter 453 The Hotel Of The Bryant Group

The hotel manager wouldn't stop offering his apologies to Loraine and Jennie after Paige was escorted out.

Jennie made a dismissive gesture and said to the manager with scorn in her tone, "Paige's insignificant! Lorrie would not lose her cool over her!" She then turned to Loraine and persuaded, "Lorrie, now go freshen up. We've got a ball to attend!"

Loraine, complying, went into the dressing cubicle with her new outfit.

Jennie had quite the eye for fashion. The choice was a floor-length dress in a rich, wine red, a perfect complement to the scarlet fox mask.

But... It was an intricate piece.

Loraine donned the dress, which clung to her frame tightly. Despite showcasing her appealing figure, it restricted her movements. Zipping up the dress was a task in itself, leading her to let out a sigh of exasperation and call out.

"Jennie, could you come in and lend a hand with the zipper?"

A response was conspicuously absent. Loraine furrowed her brow in worry, unable to investigate due to her half-exposed state.

Suddenly, she could hear the sound of footsteps approaching.

Unaware of the true identity of the person behind her, Loraine, facing away from the door, didn't ponder too deeply. Assuming it was Jennie returning, she placed her trust in the person behind her, lifted her hair to expose most of her pristine, smooth

back, and gestured for the person to zip up her attire.

"Where have you been? I've been calling out for you..."

Her words were interrupted as a hand made contact with her back. The coarseness of the hand was a stark contrast to what she'd expected, sending a shiver down her spine.

With a sudden sense of fear, she spun around.

It wasn't Jennie!

How could she have been so naive? Jennie was never this quiet.

Lorraine's heart pounded in her chest as she stared at the man before her. Regaining her senses, she addressed him with a mix of surprise and indignation, "What brings you here?"

Marco's gaze was intense, his throat parched as he tried to find his voice. Swallowing, he finally managed to respond, "This hotel is part of the Bryant Group. The manager informed me of the incident. I came to check on the situation and heard you calling for someone."

Lorraine retorted sharply, "Even if this is your property, you have no right to barge in. Would Mr. Bryant be so eager to help if any other woman needed assistance?"

Taken aback, Marco shook his head, responding, "No. I knew it was you. Your tone sounded urgent... I feared something might have happened to you."

Lorraine was left speechless. She suddenly recalled a familiar vehicle parked outside her workplace. Her eyes narrowed with suspicion.

"Marco, have you been trailing me? I noticed your car outside my office."

Marco was surprised, but he didn't deny it and nodded silently.

"I... I wasn't trailing you. I was just concerned, so I decided to stop by."

This explanation came from the man who had followed her all the way to the dressing room of the VIP suite. Amused and irritated, Loraine rolled her eyes at him, ordering, "Would you please exit now?"

With silent compliance, Marco vacated the cubicle, carefully shutting the door behind him.

Loraine, free of tension, collapsed onto a chair, her dress hitched up a bit. Her gaze wandered, detached from her surroundings.

The sensation of his touch on her back lingered in her memory.

Suddenly, the door swung open. Jennie swept in and said, "Lorrie, are you hungry? The ball tonight is severely lacking in the food department. I went and gathered some food and beverages. Come, fuel up. Dancing is a workout after all!"

It was then that Loraine connected the dots regarding Jennie's earlier disappearance. Apparently, Marco hadn't crossed paths with her.

With a helpless shrug, Loraine joined Jennie, accepting the offered drink. As she took a tentative sip, her mind drifted into contemplation.

Waving her hand to catch Loraine's attention, Jennie voiced her concern, "Something's off, Lorrie. You seem different! What's up?"

Easing Jennie's hand away, Loraine sighed, "We're in a Bryant Group property."

Taken aback, Jennie responded, "The Bryant Group owns such vast assets? They're wealthier than I assumed."

This high-end hotel was a preferred choice for the affluent to host their celebrations. Despite frequent visits, Jennie was unaware of its ownership. Her introduction to this venue came

from Cayson.

On the thought of Cayson, a sudden curiosity bloomed in Jennie. Did he know this was a Bryant Group establishment?

She assumed he didn't. If he did, he wouldn't have brought Loraine here.

Her musings were interrupted by a knock at the door. Cayson called out, "Lorrie, are you ready?"

Loraine replied and guided Jennie out.

There stood Cayson, poised at the door, a soft white suit framing him. A few locks of hair fell in front of his eyes, softening his gaze.

As he spotted Loraine, his eyes sparkled with astonishment. He stood straight, revealed a lush bouquet of red roses he'd been concealing, and presented it to Loraine with reverence.

Loraine was torn. She hadn't anticipated this from Cayson. Hadn't he forsaken his quest for her?

Yet, the sight of those roses sparked memories of similar ones Marco had once given her...


With a soothing tone, Cayson assured her, "Lorrie, consider these flowers as a token of friendship. Don't read too much into it."

At the sight of Loraine and Cayson's interaction, even the typically oblivious Jennie sensed something was amiss. She exclaimed, "Oh my, Cayson, how romantic! But why does Lorrie get the flowers? What about me? Am I not a friend too?"

Seeing her friend come to her aid, Loraine shot Jennie a grateful look. Playfully, she suggested, "It seems the flowers are a gift for us both. Jennie, let's share them."

Stunned, Cayson's eyes momentarily revealed disappointment,

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which he promptly masked with a grin.

"That's on me. I apologize. Next time, I'll have something for both of you."

As Loraine exhaled in relief, her eyes caught Marco engrossed in conversation with a woman in the hallway.

That woman... Was it Paige?

Catching sight of this, Jennie queried in disbelief, "Why are they together? Did Marco invite that woman?"

A feeling of unease washed over Loraine.





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Chapter 454 She Can Do Whatever She Wants

Feeling Paige's persistent nudging, Marco's patience was wearing thin. "Stop..."

Before his words evaporated into the air, Marco spotted Loraine at the far end of the hallway.

The sight of Loraine's expression sent a jolt through Marco's heart.

Did she suspect that he was involved with this woman?

A shadow crossed Marco's face. Shrugging Paige off, he quickly approached Loraine, blurting out hastily, "Loraine, I was just waiting for you outside. I have no idea how this woman got here. The moment she laid eyes on me, she wouldn't leave me alone."

"Since when did any woman come close to you without your green signal?" Cayson mocked.

Loraine's face darkened. In a detached tone, she said to Marco, "This is your hotel. You don't owe me any explanation for your actions. They're not my concern."

Upon learning that the hotel was Marco's, Cayson's expression morphed into one of displeasure.

Paige's eyes sparkled with excitement. Clinging onto Marco's arm, she started pestering him once again. "Mr. Bryant, so you're the proprietor of this place? What a coincidence! I'm a long-time VIP guest here, yet I've been mistreated by Loraine! You can't let down an old customer like me. You must stand up against this injustice!"

Reacting to her words with a furrowed brow, Marco extricated his arm and threw her a frosty glance.

Paige suddenly felt a pang of guilt, causing her to shudder before she resumed her complaints. "Mr. Bryant, not only did Loraine mistreat me, but she also bribed your hotel manager to usurp my VIP room, leaving me stranded!"

Marco had already learned about the situation from the manager. Seeing Paige distort the facts, he retorted in a gruff voice, "So what? As long as it's my business, Loraine has free rein!"

Taken aback, Paige stammered, "Mr. Bryant, your staff acted on Loraine's command to evict guests. Doesn't that concern you? You are the CEO of the Bryant Group, and Loraine is simply a partner group of yours!"

Looking her up and down with a furrowed brow, Marco retorted, "Who are you, anyway? Do we know each other?"

Paige's face blanched as she yelled out in disbelief, "You don't remember me?"

"Why should I remember you?"

Paige was left speechless, tears of resentment welling up in her eyes.

She had been standing in front of Marco for a considerable time, yet he didn't have the faintest memory of her!

Her pride stung. At least Loraine could recognize her at a glance. And Marco? What an annoying man he was!

The sight sent Loraine into fits of giggles.

Paige was as clueless as ever, despite their long separation.

A warmth seeped into Marco's icy expression as he watched Loraine's smile.

Paige, misinterpreting the warmth as being meant for her, felt a rapid flutter in her chest.

Did he recognize her?

Given her stunning looks and influential background, forgetting her was out of the question for Marco. Perhaps he was just taking his time to recall.

Due to her recent financial constraints and being kicked out of her family's home in Bluhm, Paige's life had become miserable. If she could charm Marco, her father would surely pardon her and she could return home, back to her life of opulence.

Fueled by the desire to reclaim her past life, Paige plucked up the courage and fixed her hopeful gaze on Marco.

"Mr. Bryant, I'm Paige. I'm the daughter of the Johnathan family in Bluhm. You were a guest at our tech expo, remember?"

Her reference to the technology exposition turned Marco's warm facade into a frosty mask.

In that instant, he recalled the identity of the woman standing before him.

He was astonished that Paige had the audacity to show up in Vagow and even bring up the technology exposition.

With a sardonic smile, Marco responded in a deliberate, slow tone, "You mean the expo where you ripped off the tech of Bryant Group and Universe Group? Loraine and I were about to drag you to court, remember? What happened to the court notice? Now that you've come to Vagow, is it that you want Loraine and I to personally escort you to court?"

Paige seemed to have been jolted by a bolt of lightning as she stammered, "No, no..."

Her plan was to lay low for a few days until the whole ordeal blew over and was forgotten by the public.

However, she hadn't anticipated running into Loraine and Marco upon her arrival in Vagow.

Hoping they had put the past behind, Paige was stunned when Marco revealed his intentions. He reached for his phone and started dialing security.

In sheer desperation, Paige began pleading, "Mr. Marco! Please, I apologize. Don't reduce yourself to my level!"

But to Marco, her pleas were nothing but a cacophony.

Soon, security personnel arrived on Marco's orders. They grabbed Paige and began escorting her out, ignoring her protests, "Don't manhandle me! You're hurting me!"

Regardless of Paige's screams, she was dragged away.

And then, all was tranquil once more.

Chapter 455 Marred Timber

The echo of Paige's words slowly receded into silence. Marco swiveled, his gaze meeting Loraine's. His features relaxed as he murmured gently, "Lorraine, have you recovered yet?"

Lorraine found herself bewildered, at a loss for words.

Her initial encounter with Marco and Paige side by side had left her mildly disconcerted.

It was a faint discomfort, nothing more.

All of a sudden, a silhouette appeared in front of her. Cayson loomed protectively, obstructing Marco's line of sight to Loraine.

The air was always fraught with potential conflict whenever these two men shared a space.

Once again, they found themselves at odds.

Cayson, eyes narrowed, forced a grin as he sneered, "Mr. Bryant, your lack of consideration persists, I see. No wonder Lorrie endured such hardships with the Bryant family previously."

The mood turned chilly instantaneously.

Everyone present was dragged back to the bleak memories of Loraine's past, causing Marco's face to harden and turn confrontational.

Lorraine cast her gaze down, a touch of bitterness creeping into her thoughts.

"If there's nothing further, Mr. Bryant, I'll take my leave with

Lorrie," Cayson's words were laced with triumph. But as he was about to depart with Loraine, a determined Marco obstructed their path.

"Hold on!" Marco exuded an untamed determination; his burning desire to win was palpable. He retorted sharply, "Take back your words. I extend my consideration only to my wife."

Referring to Loraine as his wife, Marco's provocative glance seemed to challenge Cayson.

After a pause, Marco's gaze bore into Loraine's.

"Once, I may have faltered. But that's water under the bridge. From now on, I am devoted to my wife."

He made a point to stress the words "my wife".

Loraine found the courage to meet Marco's gaze, a wild flutter in her heart at the realization that he was indeed referring to her.

"Marco, it's over. We've..." She wanted to remind him of their divorce. She was no longer his wife.

Marco, reading her thoughts, retorted in a hushed tone, "Yet, in my heart, you remain my wife."

With a scoff, Cayson positioned himself between them, shooting a sarcastic retort, "Ever heard of a tale, Mr. Bryant? Quite enlightening, I must say."

Marco, expecting nothing worthwhile, replied coldly, "Frankly, I have no interest."

Undeterred by Marco's dismissal, Cayson drew a deep breath, preparing to continue.

"Once upon a time, a heedless boy, the son of a carpenter, misused a beautiful piece of timber, leaving it riddled with nails. The carpenter removed the nails, but the surface bore unsightly scars from their punctures. Mr. Bryant, some actions have

irreversible consequences. Can you undo the pain you've inflicted upon Loraine?"

Loraine's heart palpitated, as she dropped her gaze to hide the sadness in her eyes.

Past memories could be pushed aside, but never entirely erased.

Though she didn't harbor the same resentment towards Marco as she once did, Loraine couldn't deny the pain that washed over her whenever she thought about the torment she endured at the hands of the Bryant family.

Much like the marred timber, the visible reminders of past hurts were stubbornly enduring.

Feeling a profound sadness that seemed to choke her, Loraine's mood plummeted.

Marco, visibly anxious, clenched his fists and spoke in a desperate attempt to make amends. "The fault lies with the carpenter in your tale, not the wood. A skilled carpenter could restore even the most heavily damaged plank to perfection!"

Marco's voice carried a resolute tone. "Your narrative may be compelling, but it exists solely as a work of fiction, detached from reality. You don't need to use it to impart lessons to me! This is my life, my journey. You're not as familiar with it as you seem to think, and you really don't need to concern yourself so much. Unless of course, you're eyeing something that's mine?"

Cayson shot back, his frustration apparent. "Things of value should be treasured, not discarded like trash. Now you yearn for what you once rejected. Isn't your newfound appreciation a little late?"

The tension between the two was palpable. Marco retorted with a smirk, "What's mine is mine, and no amount of effort from anyone else can change that. You'd be wise to abandon your pursuits sooner rather than later!"

In the midst of their escalating argument, they failed to notice the deteriorating state of Loraine's complexion.

Jennie, who'd been quietly observing the exchange, finally broke her silence in confusion. "What are you two arguing about? Where's this piece of wood you're discussing? What makes it so valuable? Where did you find it?"

Before she could finish, Loraine took her by the hand.

"Lorrie, where are we going?" Jennie looked up at her friend's stern expression and, sensing the gravity of the situation, obediently followed Loraine without uttering a word.

The two men were left behind, staring at each other, belatedly realizing their argument had upset Loraine.

Inside the VIP room, Jennie tenderly handed Loraine a glass of water. "Lorrie, what's the matter? Why are you so upset all of a sudden?"

Taking a large gulp of water and a deep breath, Loraine bit back her anger and managed to say, "Did you listen to their conversation just now? How am I being portrayed? Am I meant to be the object of contention between these two men?"