

## Chapter 628 Distant Memories

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Judie Cooper?

Upon hearing that name after such a significant passage of time, Loraine felt as though she had been catapulted into another world.

Judie was a girl from a relatively affluent family in the same rural area.

In contrast, Loraine had spent her days at the orphanage, interacting minimally with Judie.

However, the orphanage director harbored a deep affection for the children and was willing to make personal sacrifices to provide them an education. Consequently, Loraine, because of her superior academic performance, ended up in the same experimental class as Judie at the town's junior high school.

The experimental class was composed of high-achieving students and those with influential family connections. Judie belonged to the latter, with the means and influence to secure her place.

Loraine was the lone orphan in the class, and, unfortunately, Judie took on the role of the chief tormentor, berating Loraine for being an orphan.

It was Loraine's first exposure to the harsh reality of human cruelty.

Later, when she was found by the Torres family, Judie and the small village faded into distant memories.

Now, hearing Judie's name from someone else stirred a surreal feeling in Loraine.

Lost in her recollections for a moment, Loraine abruptly sensed a chill in the air and snapped back to the present, only to see Marco's eyes narrow, emanating a palpably hostile aura.

Those were events from her past, and she would never cross paths with those individuals again. There was no justification for Marco to be riled up over such antiquated issues.

Loraine quickly redirected the conversation, saying, "Mrs. Thatcher, let's not dwell on them. Since leaving, have you kept in touch with the village? How is the director of the orphanage?"

Loraine felt a pang of guilt at the thought of the orphanage director.

When she left the orphanage, she had proposed bringing the director to live in the city. However, the elderly woman had declined, so Loraine's uncles decided to send regular donations to the orphanage.

Knowing the selfless nature of the director, Loraine was convinced she wouldn't spend the money on herself, but instead, distribute it amongst the children at the orphanage.

After leaving the orphanage, Loraine experienced a period of unease and anxiety in her new environment. But she rapidly adapted, immersing herself in a rigorous academic regimen, eventually studying abroad.

She later married into the Bryant family. Three years into her marriage, her former life seemed like a distant memory.

Although she had sporadically maintained contact with the director of the orphanage, her life was persistently consumed by one matter after another, affording her scant time for the rural village. Today, having encountered Henna, she felt compelled to inquire further about the director.

Henna paused for a moment before letting out a soft sigh.

"Six months ago, I returned to the village. She seemed less vibrant than I remember. I know she's perpetually concerned about those children... However, she frequently asks about you whenever I see her. You know, Vagow is so vast, and you hail from an affluent family. It's not easy to come across you. Still, I didn't expect that luck would favor us with this unexpected meeting today!"

Listening to this, Loraine's emotions became tangled, prompting her to cast her gaze downward. "I should pay her a visit."

Henna offered her a comforting smile. "Don't worry. The director understands your busy schedule, and the village remains stubbornly narrow-minded, gossiping ceaselessly about you. There's no immediate need to go back."

Loraine, overcome with guilt, sighed.

Suddenly, Marco chimed in, "Is the village located in the western outskirts of Vagow?"

Taken aback, Loraine turned to look at him. How could he possibly know about that place?

Henna, oblivious to Loraine's surprise, confirmed Marco's guess with a nod.

After a moment's thought, Marco gently took Loraine's hand

and earnestly said to Henna, "Since Loraine and I are together, it's only fitting that we visit the place where she grew up and show our gratitude to the orphanage director. We will go there together in a few days to visit her."

At first blushing at Marco's words, Loraine was soon rendered somewhat speechless, her heart touched by his sincerity.

In the time they'd spent together, she had noticed Marco's struggle to adapt to ordinary life, a stark contrast to his previous existence.

He was an heir from a prosperous family, yet he was willing to accompany her to a small and backward village to visit the woman who had raised her.

The walls around Loraine's heart crumbled, allowing feelings for Marco to take root and flourish, filling her heart with a warm and affectionate glow.



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## Chapter 629 The Life Of His Longing

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Henna continued to sing praises of Marco as an ideal partner, causing Loraine to blush in response to the flattery.

After a pleasant chat, they said their goodbyes to Henna.

Then, loaded with bags of groceries, they made their way back to Marco's apartment.

The once barren refrigerator, now full, hummed with the warmth of home.

Marco took in the scene contentedly, yearning for this simple, domestic life to become his forever.

Just the two of them, sharing meals, witnessing the changing seasons together.

He no longer concerned himself with the affairs of the Bryant family or the judgment of society.

Oblivious to his reflections, Loraine proficiently sorted the groceries and commenced meal preparations.

Her movements were deliberate and elegant, resembling the creation of an art piece more than a mere act of cooking. It was as if she wasn't just preparing a meal but was crafting a culinary masterpiece. This enraptured Marco, who found himself staring at her in wonder.

Detecting his stare, Loraine turned around to find him smiling

softly, his gaze tenderly fixed on her.

He remained silent.

"What are you looking at?" Loraine teased, lifting an eyebrow playfully.

Marco glanced down slightly, and then walked towards her, encircling her waist from behind in a loving embrace.

"I was just reflecting on how fortunate I am and how remiss I was in not valuing you when we first married. I nearly missed the opportunity to share my life with such an extraordinary wife. Thankfully, destiny granted me a second chance."

Memories of their three-year marriage washed over Marco as he watched Loraine bustling about in the kitchen. He felt a twinge of regret for not cherishing their time together previously and gratitude for still having the chance to be with her now.

At least, Loraine was still willing to cook for him.

In their modest apartment, a mere few dozen square meters, Loraine had transformed it into a warm, inviting haven. This was the home he had yearned for all along.

The place where Loraine resided was his home.

Holding Loraine in his arms, Marco noticed that she stiffened and her hand, which had been chopping vegetables, stopped for a moment. She squirmed a little and chided him gently, "Let go, I need to finish cooking."

Her cheeks turned a delightful shade of pink, and Marco couldn't help but be enticed by her flushed ear, so near his lips that a simple bow of his head would bring him in contact with it.

His gaze deepened at the thought.

However, Loraine remained oblivious to his inner turmoil and prodded, "Marco, if you want to help, you'll have to let me go first, or we'll have nothing to eat tonight."

Finally shaken from his daydream, Marco reluctantly released the soft, warm figure from his arms. He then took the knife from Loraine's hand.

Loraine observed him curiously as he cleared his throat and somewhat awkwardly offered, "Loraine, let me cook for you tonight. You can relax."

He wanted to cook?

Loraine's face contorted into an amused expression, prompting a chuckle from her. "Can you even cook? Well, never mind. Just wait for me outside, and dinner will be ready shortly."

She was hesitant to leave him alone in the kitchen. Knowing him, he might accidentally cut himself while chopping vegetables, and she would be the one dealing with the aftermath.

However, Marco was unwilling to back down. Having excelled in everything he pursued since a young age, he was confident that maneuvering in the kitchen couldn't be that challenging.

Moreover, he sincerely wanted to do something for Loraine.

"If I don't try, how will I know if I'm capable?" he countered, exerting pressure on the potato on the chopping board with an earnest expression, as though performing some crucial surgery.

For Loraine, cutting vegetables appeared effortless, as if the ingredients naturally aligned themselves into elegant and neat portions.

But when he began to chop, he found the potato to be somewhat uncooperative, refusing to yield to his knife.

With renewed determination, he brought down the knife, succeeding in slicing it.

However, the result was far from satisfactory. The potato slices were jagged and uneven, a stark contrast to Loraine's perfectly uniform ones.

Upon noticing the difference between their chopping skills, Marco felt a blush of embarrassment creeping up his cheeks, and he lapsed into silence.

Suppressing a smile, Loraine held up a potato slice as thick as her thumb and playfully ribbed, "Marco, your cutting skills are truly unique. Even basic French fries would deem themselves too unsightly to be served."

Flustered, Marco's face reddened further, and he cleared his throat. "It's my first time cooking, and I admit I'm not adept at it, but if you're willing to tutor me, I'll pick it up quickly."

Loraine couldn't resist pushing his buttons a bit more. "Tutor you? There would be a fee involved for that."

At her words, Marco swiftly leaned in and encircled her in a hug, intertwining her hand with his calloused one. His voice carried a husky undertone as he proposed, "Then instruct me wholeheartedly, hand in hand. However, I'm currently broke, so my only means of payment would be through... personal services. What would you like? I'll cater to your every whim."

Pinned against the kitchen counter as Marco held her, Loraine's face turned a vivid shade of red. Caught between annoyance and embarrassment, she retorted, "Personal services? Absolutely not!"



Marco's response was a soft chuckle.

Eventually, Loraine did guide him step by step, showing him how to chop vegetables and navigate through the cooking process.

However, with Marco's arm around her, Loraine found it difficult to concentrate, and even though the vegetables he cut were an improvement from his initial attempts, they didn't meet her standards.

At this rate, they might indeed end up skipping dinner!

Finally, Loraine resolved to evict him from the kitchen. As a slightly regretful Marco exited, he secretly vowed to learn cooking in private. Once he honed his skills, he would prepare a meal for Loraine.

In the past, it was always Loraine who made sacrifices and compromises for him. Now, it was his turn to take care of her!

## Chapter 630 Ordinary Happiness

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With Marco's playful interference finally at bay, Loraine swiftly finished preparing the meal.

The centerpiece was a light yet tantalizingly creamy pasta, accompanied by mashed potatoes that transformed into a dish brimming with cheesy goodness. This was complemented by a vegetable salad made from the lettuce gifted by Henna.

Their modest apartment contained only a computer table, which was transformed into a delightful dining area. The simple dishes laid out on the table created an aura of a lavish banquet.

Settling down at the table, Loraine and Marco shared a glance and found the whole situation rather amusing, prompting a fit of laughter from both.

In that moment, they felt like any other couple, returning home after work, cooking a simple meal together, and enjoying it around a small dining table, wrapped in a cocoon of warmth and contentment.

Though the dishes were humble, Loraine, trained under the Geranium's head chef, brought a distinct finesse to them. Even Marco, accustomed to high-end gourmet food, was enticed by the flavors Loraine crafted.

Before long, they had relished the entire meal.

Marco struggled to recall the last time he had derived such



pleasure from a meal and heaped sincere praise, "Your cooking is exceptional."

Loraine responded with a smile, "I was tutored by the Geranium's head chef, so it's bound to be good."

But Marco felt there was a difference. Even the top chef at the Geranium couldn't replicate the unique taste that Loraine brought to the dishes.

Post-dinner, Marco took up the chore of washing dishes, although his clumsiness resulted in two shattered bowls.

Loraine couldn't suppress her laughter, eventually clearing up the mess herself. They both then settled by the window, watching as the city lights gradually lit up the streets below.

Almost instinctively, Marco's hand found hers.

He turned to her, his face wearing a serious expression as he confessed, "Today, I heard from Mrs. Thatcher about your past ... Loraine, before we got married, I was oblivious to your life. Now, I yearn to understand you—your past, your present, and your future—I want to be involved in every aspect of your life."

Loraine was taken aback. In truth, he had been a part of her past far longer than he realized. He simply wasn't conscious of it.

Marco was under the impression that their first encounter was when they got married.

However, even before their marriage, Loraine had already fallen for him.

As she studied Marco's profile, her heart pounded in her chest, their shared past superimposing itself on the present.



She was transported back to a time when she was harassed by village men, one of whom even attempted to assault her. It was then that Marco made his timely appearance.

A stern-looking young boy, clad in elegant attire, bearing a semblance to the handsome man he would evolve into. He stepped in, reminiscent of a prince from the fairy tales she used to read, thwarting those who intended her harm.

Since then, Loraine had etched Marco's name into her heart, and fate led her to meet and marry him, drawn to him like a moth to a flame.

Marco caught her thoughtful gaze.

"I gather the director of the orphanage holds a special place in your heart. I want to accompany you on a visit to reassure her that you now have me by your side, and no one will dare mistreat you again," he said.

Marco's words to Henna earlier weren't merely hollow comfort. He was genuinely interested in connecting with the people and experiences that had shaped Loraine's life.

Despite extensive investigation into Loraine's past, the information he had was second-hand. He wished to personally witness and understand Loraine's experiences.

His earnest expression revealed his sincerity and resolve. Hearing him, Loraine felt a mix of complex emotions, but predominantly, she was touched.

She smiled at him and replied, "Sure, you've got plenty of free time now, no longer being a CEO and all. If you want to meet her, accompany me to the countryside."

Marco's eyebrows arched in delight, and he enthusiastically

grasped Loraine's hand, inquiring, "When should we go?"

Observing his eagerness, Loraine was amused by his almost childlike anticipation. "Why the hurry? I need to organize a few things first. I'll let you know when we're ready to leave."

Despite his excitement, Marco reluctantly agreed, unable to refute her logical request.

As evening rolled in, Loraine rose to leave. Marco, reluctant to part with her but conscious of the inadequacy of his small apartment for overnight stays, offered, "Let me drive you back."

Her office was merely a short drive away, and her apartment not much further, making his offer superfluous. Loraine casually declined, "I can manage the trip back by myself."

Nevertheless, Marco's gaze was unwavering, as though fearful she might vanish if he blinked.

Loraine was amused by his transformation from the once stern and commanding CEO to a besotted, puppy-eyed lover.

She reassured him, "Relax, we're practically neighbors, so we'll see each other again soon."

Her tender words dissolved any resistance Marco might have felt, leaving him elated. He acquiesced with a hint of reluctance, watching intently as Loraine descended the stairs and drove away from the apartment.

The moment Loraine was out of sight, Marco's expression reverted to that of a determined predator. His face impassive, he sent a message to his subordinate.

"Thoroughly investigate Loraine's time in the countryside. Determine who spread rumors about her. Pay particular attention to a woman named Judie Cooper."

## Chapter 631 Loraine's Plans To Visit The Countryside

Loraine couldn't stop thinking about Marco's words after she returned to her apartment.

The director of the orphanage, Eloise Harvey, was greatly respected by Loraine. Visiting Eloise with Marco held significant meaning for her.

Eloise was like family to Loraine. Now that her family's outlook on Marco had changed, Loraine also hoped to get Eloise's approval and blessings as well.

Loraine had told Marco they didn't have to hurry. However, she spent the entire night pondering the specifics – what to get Eloise and how to introduce Marco to her.

Loraine tossed and turned on the bed. She couldn't sleep that night. The following day, excitement bubbled within her as she was all set to return to her family home to discuss going to the countryside to visit Eloise.

Rowan had brought Loraine back from the countryside and had always made sure the people of the Torres family took good care of the orphanage. He knew how much Eloise meant to Loraine, so he readily agreed.

Aldo was proud of Loraine for always holding gratitude in her heart. "Our Torres family is always indebted to Mrs. Harvey. It's important that you visit her."

Loraine's eyes welled up with tears. Wesley dotingly patted her

shoulder. "Since you are returning, why not make the most of it and have a good time there?"

"Ask Cayson to look after the company's affairs," Aldos suggested. "It looks like his recent project is about to end, so I'm sure he can take over your work."

Cayson had been running the company before Loraine returned to the Torres family. Since Loraine had to take a temporary leave of absence, they all agreed to entrust the responsibility back to Cayson.

Loraine got all the instructions from her family and headed out to find Cayson.

Cayson had his own team and project to supervise and was usually occupied with frequent business trips. Besides, Loraine had deliberately distanced herself from him. This would be their first meeting in person after the banquet.

Cayson was pleasantly surprised that Loraine had taken the initiative to meet him. He stood up from his desk, smiling, and walked to her, examining her face.

"Lorrie, it's great to see you. You've finally come to visit me. I was beginning to worry that you had forgotten me." Cayson's eyes glinted with affection.

Cayson was a wise man. He knew his previous actions had caused Loraine to distance herself from him. Therefore, he decided to be patient, wait for the right moment and give her space instead of constantly throwing himself at her.

As such, Cayson was genuinely happy that Loraine had come to visit him.

Loraine couldn't help but chuckle. "Cayson, I know you've been occupied with your projects, so I didn't want to bother you.

Besides, I had some family affairs to attend to. So..."

"I know," Cayson interjected softly. "Lorrie, I'm sorry I couldn't be there for you when your grandfather fell ill. I was away on a business trip and couldn't come back on time to support you. I have been planning to visit him, and I didn't expect you to be here."

Loraine paused and looked at him when she sensed the intimacy in his tone. "Grandpa is much better now," she said politely. "He would love for you to visit. My uncles will be thrilled to see you as well."

Cayson's smile dropped as he realized Loraine deliberately mentioned everyone's name except hers.

Nonetheless, he smiled at her and asked, "So, you wouldn't be happy if I visited?"

"I won't be at home," Loraine explained calmly. "I'm going to the countryside for a while. I came to see you because I need your help in managing the company until I return."

Cayson stopped for a moment when he heard that. While he was happy that Loraine considered him first for the task, he felt equally worried.

"Lorrie, I can help you manage the company. However, is it safe for you to go to such a place alone? It seems risky. How about I arrange for someone to accompany you?"

Loraine's face softened. She shook her head, smiling as she recalled Marco offering to accompany her.

"Don't worry. Someone has already agreed to escort me. Besides, I grew up there, so I know the place well. It won't be dangerous."



Cayson's body tensed when she mentioned someone was accompanying her. "Who is accompanying you?" he asked, knitting his brows. "Is it Jennie?"

"No, it's Marco." Loraine didn't intend to hide anything from him.

Cayson's demeanor instantly changed at the mention of that name. His smile disappeared in an instant as he clenched his jaw. "Lorrie, you've been with him all this time, haven't you?" he asked with undisguised anger and hatred. "Have you two... Have you reached the point of making plans to hang out together?"

He didn't bother concealing his emotions.

Loraine pursed her lips and looked away to hide her emotions. "Marco isn't doing well at the moment. He needs company. You know it too."


Cayson was aware of what had happened to Marco.

Although he was pleased to hear about it, he never thought Marco would use his misfortune to get close to Loraine.



Cayson couldn't contain his emotions anymore. "Well, it serves him right! Lorrie, have you forgotten how he treated you? He was the reason for all the suffering you had to endure in the Bryant family. Now that he has lost everything, he certainly doesn't deserve to be with you. Don't let him deceive you."

"Enough, Cayson!" Loraine frowned.

Cayson immediately fell silent. The atmosphere in the room grew tense. Loraine let out a weary sigh. She didn't want to speak with him anymore. "I'm leaving now. I hope you can handle the rest."

Chapter 631 Lorraine's Plans To Visit The Country  +120 Points at most



With that, she turned and stormed out, oblivious to Cayson's emotions. He stood, staring at the door with clenched fists as a murderous look crossed his face.

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## Chapter 632 Ulterior Motives

After what seemed an interminable stretch of paralysis, Cayson was jolted back to reality by his ringing phone.

Answering the call, a gentle female voice resonated from the other end, "Cayson, are you at Universe Group right now?"

Despite the warmth in her voice, her words fell on him like an icy shower, shocking him back to sobriety.

Quietly balling his fist, Cayson sighed and replied, "Mom, I'm at Universe Group. But there's no need to revisit what you brought up earlier. I don't share those intentions."

On the other end of the line, the woman's voice softened further, as though attempting to cajole him, "Cayson, I understand you need some time. Your father and I won't rush you. Just remember, we want nothing but the best for you."

Cayson held his silence, his face impassive. His eyes, once full of affection, now mirrored his internal battle and torment.

"Never mind, I guess you're not in a place to listen to me right now. What about Lorrie? Is she with you?"

Lorraine's name seemed to thaw Cayson's icy demeanor slightly. Lowering his head in a poignant gesture, he mustered a wry smile.

"Lorrie... She had some business to attend to and had to leave the company. We haven't had much time to communicate lately. Once she's back, I'll continue to cultivate our relationship."

Satisfied with his response, the woman dispensed a few more gentle reminders before ending the call.

Cayson, his gaze vacant, stared into the distance, his brow furrowing unconsciously once more.

His mother, a woman who had once commanded the utmost respect from both him and Loraine, now felt vaguely alien to him.

Could hearts truly alter? His mother had changed, and so had Loraine...

After centering himself, Cayson turned his focus back to Loraine's request and decided to retrieve some documents from her office. As he opened the door, he was confronted with the grinning, creased face of Reynolds.

Clearly, he had been eavesdropping behind the door for a while.

"What brings you here, Mr. Watts?"

Reynolds greeted him with excessive cheerfulness, "Mr. Benton, what a coincidence! I was just searching for you."

Cayson spared him a frosty glance, not in the mood for his antics. When he tried to move past, Reynolds blocked his path again, this time with a sycophantic smile.

"I just happened to overhear that Loraine won't be with the company for a while, is that correct?"

Cayson's heartbeat stuttered, apprehensive that Reynolds might have stumbled upon some undisclosed information. But, recalling his recent phone conversation, he realized he hadn't divulged anything crucial, and Reynolds just knew Loraine wouldn't be around for a while.

While Cayson couldn't entirely discern Reynolds's intentions, he was certain that this wily man had no good intentions. He retorted, his face impassive, "What concern is it of yours, Mr. Watts? I have pressing matters to deal with, so kindly refrain from wasting my time."

Unfazed, Reynolds carried on with a crafty grin, "Cayson, we're both men, why the pretense? Everyone has noted your feelings for Loraine!"

Cayson's countenance darkened immediately upon the mention of Loraine, and he experienced a twinge of embarrassment as if he had been stripped bare.

Reynolds, however, appeared oblivious to his discomfort and leaned in, his voice dropping to an insinuating whisper, "Cayson, Loraine is just a woman, and winning her over is rather simple. Previously, we all had to tread lightly due to Loraine's grandfather, a potent figure within the Torres family. But now that he's not in good health as he gets older, and who knows how long he'll last, even if he recovers, it's unlikely he'll ever return to the company..."

Cayson's ordinarily mild countenance hardened, his fists clenched as he questioned in an icy tone, "What are you implying?"

Believing he had piqued Cayson's interest, Reynolds's smile broadened, "Cayson, your parents were instrumental in helping Loraine's grandfather consolidate his power. And you have been stewarding the company for years, a fact recognized by all. But when Loraine returned, she assumed the CEO role and usurped your position. Consider how she treats you. Are you content with being sidelined by her?"

Loraine is just a woman. Her only talent is capitalizing on a favorable situation. If you desire her, why not align with me?

Together, we can seize control of Universe Group. Once you're in the driver's seat, you can dictate terms with her however you wish..."

Blissfully ignorant of how terrible Cayson's expression had become, Reynolds was lost in his own reverie, his eyes alight with anticipation. In his grand scheme, it was he, not Cayson, who would ascend to power and puppeteer Loraine.

As a man, he assumed Cayson wouldn't be able to resist such a beguiling proposal.

In his elation, Reynolds laid a hand on Cayson's shoulder, but was abruptly shrugged off in the next instant!



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