

Chapter 861 Jennie's Return

The creature in Loraine's arms suddenly looked up, smiling brightly beneath its curly hair. When it leaped towards her, Loraine instantly knew who it was.

It was Jennie, her close friend. Loraine affectionately stroked Jennie's curls, her face lighting up with surprise. "You're back? Why didn't you tell me? I would've come to pick you up!"

Jennie tossed her hair, grinning with a hint of pride.

"Oh, Loraine, I've been studying so hard overseas. I just wanted to get back home as soon as I could! You're always so busy, so I didn't want to bother you. I just wanted to see you!"

Loraine chuckled softly and nodded, inviting Jennie to sit down. As they walked, Jennie chattered excitedly about her six months abroad.

"You wouldn't believe how bad the food was over there. After tasting your cooking, nothing else came close..."

Seeing Jennie's thinner frame, Loraine felt a wave of sympathy. "Don't worry, now that you're here, I'll cook plenty of good meals for you."

Tears welled up in Jennie's eyes. She grasped Loraine's hand tenderly. "You're always so good to me, Loraine. I was so focused on getting back sooner that I was completely absorbed in my studies and didn't get a chance to reach out. I miss you so much!"

Loraine raised her eyebrows, teasing, "Really? I bet you rushed

back for some other reason, right?"

Jennie's cheeks turned pink, and she quickly changed the subject. "Are you going to the Cruz family's banquet?"

Loraine gave a nod. "Did the Cruz family invite you too? How about we go together?"

Jennie shook her head and openly remarked, "Our family's business doesn't really overlap with the Cruz family. We're more into overseas stuff lately. My parents are abroad, so we don't really keep in touch with the Cruz family."

When the conversation turned to the Cruz family, Jennie's face suddenly reddened and she whispered, "But... the Cruz family invited Jimmie. I'm going to the banquet as his date."

Loraine looked at her, smiling knowingly. "You and Jimmie seem pretty close. So, why'd you come to see me first?"

Jennie was taken aback by the question, her cheeks flushing with a shy redness. She looked up, trying to appear nonchalant. "I agreed to accompany him to the banquet because he helped me overseas. It was just a friendly gesture to return the favor!"

Loraine raised an eyebrow. "Even I couldn't reach you. How did Jimmie manage to help?"

Jennie gave a reserved smile. "Well, he's a top-notch lawyer. When I started handling the family business, I needed a lot of legal advice. Plus, he's really smart and has taught me a lot of other stuff too..."

She blushed again at the thought of Jimmie's assistance.

Seeing Jennie's reaction, Loraine shook her head, amused, and decided not to tease her further.

Jennie quickly reassured Loraine, looking earnest, "But he's not as great as you. That's why I came to see you first after I got back!"

Feigning jealousy, Loraine sighed and dropped the subject. "Alright, I'll take your word for it."

Jennie laughed and playfully linked arms with Loraine.

She had been in touch with Jimmie quite often, who had even visited her a few times overseas, so she wasn't in a rush to see him. She planned to catch up with Jimmie later at the Cruz family's banquet.

Jennie, recalling the gossip she'd heard since returning, couldn't help but bring it up.

Jimmie kept quiet about Marco's business. When they were together, he only whispered sweet nothings. That was why Jennie was stunned to hear about Marco from Loraine.

She remembered Loraine mentioning that Marco was staying with the Torres family.

Jennie glanced back, but there was no sign of Marco. Had he moved?

She still couldn't wrap her head around the idea of Aldo letting Marco stay with the Torres family.

Surprisingly, the Torres family welcomed Marco as Loraine's future partner. It seemed he wasn't just knowledgeable in business but also great at winning people over!

Jennie was taken aback, clicking her tongue in amazement. Just as she was about to ask where Marco was, he appeared from Loraine's room, holding a lady's bag.

His soft voice carried over from a distance. "Lorraine, here's your bag. Did you forget anything else?"

Jennie's eyes widened in shock, her hand covering her mouth. She looked from Lorraine to Marco and blurted out, "Have you two already shared a room?"



Chapter 862 The Forbidden Fruit

Marco had just walked downstairs when he heard Jennie's words. He paused and turned to look at Loraine.

Seeing Marco's tender gaze, Loraine suddenly stopped talking and her cheeks turned pink.

Their love was true and pure. They were careful, even when Aldo wasn't around, not to cross certain lines. It looked like they didn't need to explain anything to Jennie.

They were like any other couple in love, except they hadn't yet consummated their relationship.

Especially in recent times, with Aldo being away, Loraine had been sharing her room with Marco. They were no different from a couple living together.

Jennie had a knack for uncovering the truth. When she saw their affectionate glances, she realized their relationship had grown deeper.

She raised her eyebrows in surprise, giving Loraine a playful wink and taking the chance to tease her. "Have you ever tried the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden?"

Catching on, Loraine's face turned even redder, and she bit her lip, staying quiet. Jennie grinned victoriously, leaned towards Loraine, and whispered jokingly, "Is Marco, you know, good at... that sort of thing?"

Hearing Jennie's words, Marco's lips twitched. He gave Jennie a pointed look and then gazed softly at Loraine, curious about her response to such an awkward question.

Loraine, recalling the moment Marco had held her hand against his abs, felt her ears heat up in embarrassment. Flustered and slightly irritated, she quickly covered Jennie's mouth. "Okay, enough of that!"

Jennie, eager for an answer, raised her eyebrows and let out a teasing giggle. "So, is it a yes? Your reaction pretty much says it all, doesn't it?"

Observing Loraine's mix of embarrassment and annoyance, Marco smiled subtly and gave her a knowing look. "I'll wait for you in the car. Take your time and have a good talk."

Jennie's teasing had turned Loraine's cheeks a deep red, making her look even more charming. Although usually as gentle as a kitten, Loraine could get fiercely upset when pushed too far. If Marco didn't intervene to ease the situation, she could not even let him into her room later.

Once Marco was out of earshot, Jennie relaxed her hold on Loraine's hand and chuckled. "He's gone now. Tell me everything, will you? Don't keep secrets!"

Loraine bit her lip, watched Marco walk away, and whispered, "We're very intimate, yes, but he's never crossed that line with me. He's always been a perfect gentleman."

Jennie's eyes widened in shock. "Wow, that's some serious self-control! But, do you think he's... you know, physically okay? Is he doing alright in that aspect?"

Loraine gave her a sharp look. "Is that the only thing you picked up while studying abroad? He promised my grandpa to wait



until marriage. He's always been so caring, yet he neglects his own health, often taking cold showers."

Jennie's eyebrows lifted suddenly, a playful smirk on her lips. "Ah, I see. It's not him, but you, who's struggling to hold back."

Loraine felt a surge of shyness but was at a loss for words. Jennie teased, "I never thought you'd be the one with such a strong sexual desire... Well, it seems Marco is quite skilled in matters of making love!"

Being a designer, Jennie frequently let her imagination run wild, and it was no surprise that she envisioned countless intimate moments. Her words brought back memories for Loraine, reliving the joyful moments when Marco had looked after her so well.

Upset and irritated, Loraine retorted, "What's wrong with being intimate with someone you love? It's natural, isn't it? You will find it irresistible."

In the past, the mere idea of being close to a man made her uneasy. But ever since she met the one, her views had shifted completely.

Jennie caught a flicker of something different in Loraine's face. Teasing, she asked with a dramatic touch, "I just teased you. Are you really starting to think about... you know, being intimate?"

Annoyed, Loraine shot back, "Stop making fun of me. Just wait until things get serious with you and Jimmie. You might also find yourself as the subjects of jokes!"

Jennie playfully stuck her tongue out in response to Loraine's sharp retort and quickly changed the subject. "It's getting late. Let's get going. It's time to leave!"

But Loraine wasn't done. She kept arguing, even though Jennie would never concede defeat. Jennie pouted and muttered stubbornly, "I won't be like that!"

Her thoughts drifted to a memory of Jimmie. He removed his glasses, drawing close to her in a garden sparkling with morning dew during her time abroad...

Jennie's cheeks turned red at the memory of those scenes. She stopped teasing Loraine, hit by the realization that her own words weren't entirely honest.

If her relationship with Jimmie grew stronger, how could she deny her own desires?



Chapter 863 The Banquet

Jennie and Loraine, harboring their own secret thoughts, decided to quit discussing private matters for the time being. They then got into the car and proceeded to the Cruz family banquet.

The venue for the event wasn't far away, so it didn't take long for them to arrive at the location.

A man, tall and striking, stood at the entrance.

He was well dressed in a finely tailored smoky gray suit. With an air of confidence and gold-rimmed glasses on his eyes, he was clearly a man who could easily catch the eye of others.

Initially, his watch had his attention. Then he looked up and stared coldly at their car as it approached.

But the moment he noticed that the new arrivals were Jennie, Loraine, and Marco, a warm smile spread across his face as he waved at them.

Jennie shook her head slightly and quietly grumbled, "The thing about someone as handsome as he is that almost every girl he meets, if not all, will try to hit on him."

Loraine chuckled and said, "One of those girls has been you, right? You should get going. I believe he is waiting for his one true queen, which so happens to be you."

Jennie was red with embarrassment. She turned to look at Jimmie, only to see him already approaching her. She took a sharp breath and her heartbeat increased with every step he

took towards her.

Jimmie stopped right in front of her, his eyes filled with wonder.

In preparing for the party, Jennie had left no stone unturned. She made sure to look her ultimate best today.

Her long hair, permed and dyed, flowed in waves. She had gone for a light makeup on her small and delicate face. Her cherry-like lips, with just a thin layer of lipstick on it, enhanced her youthful charm and looked irresistibly inviting.

Jennie had been brought up in a family involved in the jewelry industry and knew firsthand how to follow fashion trends. Fitted perfectly on both of her ears were two huge earrings, which would have proven difficult for someone else to control. Her elegance wasn't one of an upcoming model, but that of a fairytale princess. Jimmie was thunderstruck by her beauty.

He couldn't help but let out a soft sigh. He held her hand and said, "Thanks a lot Jennie. Not every man gets to be an angel's companion at a party."

Jennie had wanted to swipe his hand away, but held that intent back as she heard his words. Feeling content with Jimmie's sweet nothings, she glanced at Loraine and blinked, displaying her prideful mood.

Loraine, though she tried not to, laughed out loud. At that moment, from behind her, a hand held hers. She turned around and found herself facing a smiling Marco, who had returned from parking the car.

Marco's smile faded off as he observed everyone. "Wait a minute. Don't tell me Slater hasn't arrived yet."

Some days ago, Slater had bragged in the chat group about a female companion that was going to come to the banquet with

him. He refused to tell anyone her name or upload a picture of her, but he repeatedly boasted about how beautiful she was.

Typical of him, he should have been the first to arrive so as to show and continuously boast about just how beautiful his girl was. Yet, he was nowhere to be seen.

Jimmie chuckled and shook his head. "Just this morning, I called him to ask if we should come here together. But, he told me to go ahead, explaining he had to pick up this female companion of his. Perhaps they got unexpectedly delayed. He should be here anytime soon."

Loraine was aware of Slater's female companion as Marco had told her about the chat. Jennie, on the other hand, was in the complete dark. Shocked by the news, she quickly queried, "Wait a freaking minute. You are telling me that Slater, of all people, has found love? Slater?"

Slater surely cared for this woman for him to describe her as his female companion. He usually used less appealing names to describe the women around him. Although, thanks to Jimmie and Marco, Jennie had warmed up to him, she still didn't trust or approve of him as much as the others did.

Still, she avoided talking down on him whenever she was in front of Jimmie and Marco. It would have been inconsiderate of just how much they had tried to convince her that he was a good guy. Still shocked by the news, she curiously asked, "Does anyone have a picture of this woman? Or is she someone I know?"

Jimmie shook his head sadly and said, "No. She's a total mystery. I just don't understand anymore. He has kept me in suspense before, but never as extremely as this. This is so unlike him."

At that moment, Jimmie's and Marco's phones simultaneously rang. They took them out and together, loudly read the

message in the chat group. It was from Slater, who had announced that he wouldn't be able to make it to the event.

Jimmie couldn't believe what he had just read, so he read it all over again. Jennie shook her head disappointedly and said, "Perhaps, all this was a joke. Maybe there wasn't any female companion to begin with."

Hearing that, Marco and Jimmie looked at each other in doubt.

There was no way what had happened was that simple.

The Slater they knew wasn't one to make up such a joke. In fact, his extremely blunt nature made people to perceive him as a short-tempered man.

For him to have announced to them that he had a female companion, that had to be true. Plus, he wasn't someone to joke with time. He would have never stood them up intentionally.

Just as they were trying to figure out what was going on, the security guard at the entrance approached them and asked, "What on earth are you doing just standing there? You should get inside now. The party shall soon begin and you are blocking others from getting in!"

The fact that the security guard had stared at Marco the whole time didn't escape them. After that, the security guard suddenly looked away and retreated.

Usually, they would tail him to find out what his deal was. But, due to the fact that they were guests, they wanted to avoid causing any trouble.

Marco glanced at the security guard and noticed that he was looking at him again, this time with inexplicable contempt.

After a moment of reflection, Marco realized that he had seen the man before. It was the same man who had followed Clifford and stopped him.

Marco had been specially invited by the Cruz family. But, it wasn't like both parties were best friends. The relationship between both of them could at best be described as ambiguous. Marco came to the conclusion at that moment that something was definitely amiss. He grabbed Loraine's hand and whispered, "Seems we just walked into a trap. You should be on high alert."



Chapter 864 Play It By Ear

Seeing the hostility in the eyes of the security guard, Loraine held Marco's hand tightly and whispered, "Let's just play it by ear. After all, we're in Vagow. No matter how powerful the Cruz family is, they won't dare to do anything to you here."

Marco nodded in understanding. Frankly, he was worried that the Cruz family would use his true identity to hurt Loraine. After all, his identity was pretty much a hidden danger. Sooner or later, it was to be expected that the Cruz family would take advantage of it to target him. Even if he hadn't come today, there was no way he could avoid it.

But now, he would have to play it by ear just as Loraine had said.

The banquet the Cruz family hosted was grand and luxurious. Several elders who had never attended any banquet in Vagow before were present at this banquet and the young people praised and greeted them.

But on the other hand, Loraine and the others came into the venue quietly. Knowing that Jennie had just returned from abroad, Loraine did not expect her to be familiar with the tricks and twists of the Cruz family, so she left Marco by himself and went to look for Jennie.

As someone who had recently returned to her country after a long stay abroad, Jennie felt very excited to be at the banquet. Her unique dress glittered as she walked. But just as she was about to step into the dance floor, Loraine accosted her.

Jennie was slightly taken aback and looked at Loraine in confusion. But Loraine patted her hand to calm her down and

told her with a smile, "I have something I need to tell you."

Jennie immediately understood what she meant and quickly retreated to a secluded corner with her. Marco also followed them quietly, but he was suddenly stopped by Jimmie.

"What's up?" Marco asked him.

Jimmie touched his nose and smiled awkwardly. "It's girl talk. We'd better stay away. Why not come have a drink with me?" he offered.

But Marco retorted in a whisper, "Why can't you even keep your lady by your side? Why do you allow her to pester my girlfriend all the time?"

Jimmie grinned and replied honestly, "Well, I'm still pursuing her."

Since Loraine and Jennie were still together and in sight, Marco was not in a hurry to go close to them yet. Hence, he decided to keep making small talk with Jimmie.

"So how is your relationship with her now?" he asked casually.

Jimmie rubbed his forehead, sighed, and then broke into a bitter smile. "Well, Jennie has softened significantly. She is now willing to go on a date with me, but she still hasn't agreed to be my girlfriend yet."

The look of dissatisfaction was evident in his eyes as he spoke.

After all, because of Marco, it was difficult for Jimmie to pursue Jennie the way he would have liked.

If not for the negative impression that what happened between Marco and Loraine left on her, it wouldn't have taken so long for Jimmie to make Jennie fall for him.

But recently, Marco and Loraine had been having a good time. When Marco heard that Jennie still hadn't agreed to be Jimmie's girlfriend, he smiled complacently and said with a chuckle, "Come on."

In his mind, he felt lucky for not listening to Jimmie, the so-called master of romantic relationships.

Now, he and Loraine were about to get married, but Jimmie was still struggling to get Jennie to agree to date him!

Still, Marco was a little surprised that Jimmie was failing so miserably in love, while he had become successful.

In the past, Jimmie used to teach him that if Loraine didn't talk to him, he should stick to her shamelessly and keep trying to get her attention. How come the same Jimmie had become so unsuccessful in the same thing?

Jimmie, on his part, seemed to know what Marco was thinking. He smiled bitterly and said, "Well, it's easy to preach the truth. But it's not always so easy for me to practice it. Jennie looks like she doesn't care. But the truth is that she is very sensitive. I have to let nature take its course. If I stick too closely to her, she will feel suffocated and that will be counterproductive."

Marco began to think about what Jimmie had just said. But Jimmie suddenly chuckled and added teasingly, "Marco, to be honest, you're the most surprising one among all of us. Back then, we all thought you would certainly be the last of us to find true love. We never expected that you would take the lead."

Marco used to be quite cold and heartless. His friends thought that even if he could get married, he would get divorced sooner or later.

Truly, he did end up getting divorced, but he also fell in love with

Lorraine.

Sometimes, Jimmie felt that Marco was imitating Lorraine. At the beginning, Lorraine was the one who hid her identity and got married into the Bryant family, but now, the tables seemed to have turned. Marco hid his identity and lived with the Torres family, trying his best to please Lorraine.

Anyway, it was to be expected and it made perfect sense.

In response to his friend's statement, Marco only shrugged carelessly. He didn't try to refute Jimmie's words. "I've always been one step ahead of you. You should be used to it by now," he joked.

When Jimmie heard this, he glared at him. But when he saw his face, he realized that he was joking and he couldn't help but burst out laughing.

People in love really did act differently. But truly, Marco was ahead of them, both in his career and in his relationship.

After his brief reminiscence, Jimmie suddenly remembered Slater and said worriedly, "Slater unexpectedly said he was not coming to the banquet. That's not his style at all. Didn't he excitedly say earlier that he wanted to outshine us?"

Marco nodded solemnly in agreement. But just as he was about to say something, a mocking voice came from behind, "Wow, it's so strange. Isn't today the date of the Cruz family banquet that's being hosted to entertain the rich and powerful families in Vagow? So why was a bankrupt person allowed to come in?"



Chapter 865 Florence's Hostility

Marco turned his head, noticing Florence's disdainful gaze. She was accompanied by a group of wealthy women in Vagow.

Florence, clearly resentful towards Marco, tried to find fault in him, but she failed.

After all, Loraine had personally chosen Marco's attire, consisting of top-tier brands and designs. These clothes enhanced his handsome features and elegance, surpassing even his style as the former president of the Bryant Group.

Marco's tall, imposing figure only added to his dignified appearance.

Seething with envy, Florence had hoped to highlight Grady's charm at the banquet, dressing him impressively. However, next to Marco, Grady seemed unremarkable.

Frustrated, Florence couldn't contain herself. She shot Marco a scornful look and taunted, "No matter the finery, one can't mask their true, unsavory nature. Such a person is nothing but a stain on this banquet!"

The event, hosted by the Cruz family in Zodiac, saw Florence as a distant Cruz relative. The wealthy ladies by her side, though perhaps not fully agreeing, chimed in with her sentiments.

Marco initially intended to dismiss Florence's comment, but recalling Loraine's advice against tolerating bullying, he faced Florence with a cold expression. "Are you referring to yourself?"

he retorted.

Jimmie, unable to hold back his amusement, burst into laughter, eagerly watching the unfolding scene.

Marco was known for his sharp remarks, which always caught people off guard.

Florence took a moment to gather her thoughts, her face flushing with anger. She stared at Marco and Jimmie, clearly embarrassed. "You two!" she exclaimed.

Jimmie frowned, leaned in closer, sniffed the air, and then covered his nose, looking disgusted. "You really stink!"

Florence felt deeply humiliated by his comment, which only made her more furious.

Just then, a lady named Evie Rayne, hoping to impress Florence, turned her attention to Jimmie. Seeing him acting oddly, she assumed he was as lowly as Marco and quickly came to Florence's defense. "Who do you think you are? You're so rude! Did you sneak in here with Marco? You're both good-for-nothings."

This was the first time Jimmie had been pointed at and scolded like this, but he just smiled, showing no anger. He came across as a coward, yet surprisingly friendly.

This reassured Evie. She concluded that Jimmie wasn't someone with a strong background, someone she could freely insult.

Recently, Evie's husband's business faced serious challenges and was entangled in legal issues, leading to a financial crunch. The opportunity for Evie to attend this prestigious banquet came only after she had flattered Florence, and she was determined to make the most of it to gain Florence's favor.

As Evie was about to scold Jimmie again, he greeted her with a smile, "Are you Mrs. Rayne? It's unfortunate that I've made a poor impression on you. Given that, I guess I won't be able to assist your husband. Please let him know he should seek another lawyer."

Evie, caught off guard, froze for a moment. Her eyes widened in shock, and her face lost its color.

Her husband had confided in her that their only hope, aside from money, was the assistance of the nation's most renowned lawyer, Jimmie Todd.

After realizing her insult to Jimmie, Evie crumbled and nearly lost consciousness. She swiftly regained her composure and offered an apology. Nevertheless, despite Jimmie's smile, his stance remained resolute. Clearly, there was no room for bargaining.

Evie felt anxious and turned to Florence, seeking assistance. "Mrs. Cruz, I supported you. You can't just stand by and watch my husband's company lose this lawsuit!" she pleaded.

Florence, maintaining a stern expression, ignored Evie's plea and gazed at Marco, deep in thought.

The Cruz family, influential figures in Zodiac, had organized this lavish banquet to celebrate Ariadna's recovery. However, as a distant relative, Florence was aware of the fact that Ariadna would not be attending.

This raised the question. What was the real purpose behind the Cruz family's grand event?

Florence was convinced it had to do with choosing an heir.

In her view, Ariadna, being unwell for so long, couldn't compare

to Grady, even if she got better.

The reason why this banquet was held in Vagov seemed obvious. Grady was the only Cruz in Vagow besides Ariadna. Florence was sure this event was to declare that Grady would enter Zodiac and become the new family heir.

If Grady became the heir, that would make Florence his mother, a position no one would dare disrespect.

She even imagined the Cruz family in Zodiac demanding a public apology from Marco, who had crossed her earlier.

With these thoughts, Florence looked at Marco scornfully. "Your sharp words won't help you, Marco," she sneered. "Better leave now before you're embarrassed. Don't say I didn't warn you."

She was filled with disdain. "Loraine must be blind to prefer you over Grady. She'll regret it!"

Marco, unfazed and expressionless, replied coldly, "You're the one who's going to be embarrassed, not me."



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