

Chapter 623 The Desperate Persuasion Of Liza

The moment the call connected, Liza's incensed voice echoed through the line, "Marco, you finally mustered up the courage to answer your phone? You've truly let me down! How could you incite our employees to defame the Bryant Group online?"

Liza didn't miss a beat, immediately launching into a tirade and blaming Marco for all the problems.

Marco maintained a stoic expression and responded coldly, "Madam, I am no longer affiliated with the Bryant family, so there is no expectation for me to meet, and thus, no opportunity to disappoint you. As for whether those accusations are mere slanders or the hard truth, you are well aware of the answer."

Caught off guard, Liza was taken aback. Over the years, she had manipulated Marco through emotional blackmail, but having her tactics laid bare left her somewhat chagrined. Regardless, she put on a facade and spoke in a softer tone. "Marco, perhaps we were unjust to you, but you should think about the grace we've shown you."

Hearing this, Loraine couldn't help but feel repulsed.

Marco had more than compensated for any perceived favors the Bryant family had granted him with the value he had created and the sacrifices he had made over the years. The Bryant family had exiled him, yet

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they audaciously clung to this illusory notion of his indebtedness.

Wearing a sneer, Marco retorted sharply, "The alleged favors from the Bryant family were repaid in full each time I mopped up your messes. Since the Bryant family was heartless to me first, you have no right to blame me."

Liza's feigned benevolence crumbled under Marco's relentless words. She sternly berated him, "Marco, I have given you an opportunity. I asked Marina to bring you back to manage the company. That was already a generous act. You only have yourself to blame for not seizing it!"

Marco sneered derisively, "You oust me, humiliate me, and now you want me back to clean up the mess. And you have the audacity to call this an act of grace? It seems you're still not aware of the reality. The Bryant Group is not indispensable to me. I could join another company or start my own. You should know that right now the Bryant Group needs me more than I need it, or else you wouldn't be seeking me out."

Marco knew today's upheaval was just the beginning. Considering the arrangements he had in place, a cruel smile played on his lips. Even if the Bryant Group could weather this storm, they wouldn't survive the next one.

"Losing the patent for Qbot's R&D has rendered the entire AI project stagnant. And with public sentiment now spiraling out of control, even the partnership between the Bryant Group and the Universe Group may be beyond salvation. Madam, instead of berating me, perhaps you should contemplate ways to mitigate

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this disaster."

Liza drew sharp breaths, looking as if she might crumble at any moment. Her voice wavered as she accused, "It was you! You orchestrated all this!"

"I'm not that competent. It is the Bryant Group that is digging its own grave. Madam, is there anything else?" Marco replied, calm as ever.

Liza, unable to uphold her pretense any longer, finally crumbled, lowering her once arrogant head that used to look down on everyone.

She adopted a gentler tone and implored, "Marco, I implore you, return and assist the Bryant Group. I promise not to treat you poorly again. Although you're not related to the Bryant family, if you rescue the Bryant Group, I am prepared to adopt you as my grandson, confer you a prestigious status, and reinstate you as the CEO of the Bryant Group."

Such a submissive and desperate demeanor was hardly conceivable for the typically high-and-mighty Liza.

Marco let out a sigh and taunted, "Surely you have a more suitable candidate than me. After all, Marina is your own granddaughter, and I'm merely an outsider, the villain who caused the Bryant Group's stock prices to plummet. How could I possibly return to the Bryant Group?"

Loraine, in silent admiration, gave Marco a thumbs up, amazed by his adept use of sarcasm.

Liza bubbled with indignation, but had to swallow it.

She forced a smile as she countered, "Don't be absurd. What villain? These are baseless rumors! Once you consent to return, I'll promptly arrange for the withdrawal of the previous allegations and publicly reinstate you as the Bryant Group's CEO!"

Marco scoffed dismissively, "There's no need. I quite enjoy my current laid-back lifestyle."

Noticing his steadfast refusal, Liza was gripped by panic. She had already swallowed a lot of pride to make this significant concession, caring little for her dignity anymore.

"Marco, if the previous conditions were unsatisfactory, let me officially recognize you as a member of the Bryant family. How does that sound?"

"There's no need. I have no desire to return to the days of being embroiled in your family's issues," Marco declined resolutely.

Undeterred, Liza persisted, "I'll adopt you as my son! This way, your status will be elevated. You won't have to answer to Laura or Marina anymore, nor be hampered by them!"

At her words, Marco fell silent, his brow furrowed, while Loraine couldn't contain her laughter. She raised an eyebrow at Marco, silently mouthing the words, "She desperately wants you back."

Marco also hadn't expected Liza to go to such extremes for the sake of the Bryant Group.

Adopting her former grandson as her legal son? Liza seemed unbothered by the prospect of becoming a

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laughing stock for the rest of her life.

On the other end of the phone, unable to wait for Marco's response, Liza anxiously pressed, "Marco, I'm proposing this for your benefit. If you decline, given your current state of having nothing, Loraine will eventually grow weary of you, and her family will not allow her to associate with someone of your status!"



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Chapter 624 Longing For A Family

Upon hearing this, Loraine couldn't restrain herself any longer. She scoffed sarcastically, "Mrs. Bryant, your arrogance seems to have clouded your assessment of others. The Torres family doesn't look down upon Marco. They look down upon your Bryant family. In fact, now that Marco is no longer a Bryant, it's more of a merit than a flaw in the eyes of the Torres family."

Loraine wasn't purposely trying to antagonize Liza with her statement. It was simply the truth.

After Marco was expelled from the Bryant family, Aldo had privately reached out to Loraine a few days earlier, inquiring about Marco's well-being. His concern for Marco was evident, and he even suggested providing Marco with a position in the Universe Group, should Marco feel overwhelmed by his current predicament.

The Torres family's negative bias towards Marco had significantly dwindled due to his relentless efforts to prove his worth. Their only remaining apprehension was the troublesome members of the Bryant family.

With that concern now gone, Marco's standing had undoubtedly improved in the eyes of the Torres family.

Liza was blindsided by Loraine's retort, her anger flaring as she lashed out, "How dare you stand by Marco's side! I knew it, Loraine! You must be the one

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manipulating him against the Bryant family!"

Loraine couldn't help but sneer out of exasperation. It seemed that paranoia ran deep within the Bryant family.

She refrained from offering an explanation and shot back icily, "So what if I am? That's none of your concern."

Liza was seething with rage. Anticipating that her next words would be sharp and stinging, Marco interjected, "I'm not coming back. Stop insisting."

Liza was taken aback and shouted, "Marco!"

Remaining composed, Marco responded, "Perhaps you should spend your energy compensating the laid-off employees appropriately. Once they get what they're entitled to, this public relations crisis will resolve itself naturally."

Speechless, Liza struggled to find her words. After a brief silence, she managed to ask, "Marco, are you sure about this? Are you really not reconsidering?"

Marco replied coolly, "Is there anything else?"

This was his implicit way of making it clear that there was no room for negotiation.

Liza's pretense of benevolence vanished instantly. Unmasking her real self, she burst into a torrent of invectives. "You're a despicable creature! Void of any decency! You'll live to regret this!"

Just as she was about to continue her tirade, Loraine,

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standing beside Marco, swiftly ended the call.

Accustomed to Liza's verbal abuse, Marco didn't immediately react to disconnect the call. He looked slightly stunned as he glanced at Loraine.

Finding his perplexed expression amusing, Loraine pinched his cheek, grinning as she said, "There's no need to subject yourself to such unpleasantness. Besides, you're no longer tied to the Bryant family, so there's no need to feel guilty about rejecting their manipulation, understand?"

Marco nodded, his gaze turning downcast with a touch of melancholy.

Loraine's heart softened, and she gently patted Marco's shoulder in an attempt to comfort him.

Marco moved closer, wrapping an arm around her waist, and found her lips with his.

He tenderly kissed the corner of her mouth before pulling back slightly. Their noses touched as he confessed with a tinge of self-deprecation, "You know, I've always yearned to understand what it feels like to have a family."

"No matter how much effort I put in before, I never truly felt it. I did my best to meet Grandma's expectations. I cleaned up after Marina and Laura's mistakes... yet, in the end, I was always an outsider." He was revealing his deepest thoughts for the first time. "But now, with you here in this small house, I finally understand what it means to have a family."

Loraine listened quietly, her mind wandering to the

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Bryant family members.

She embraced him gently, comprehending the hardships he had faced growing up in such a family. It was no wonder he used to be so cold, detached, and unreasonable. Thankfully, since his departure from the Bryant family, he had become more warm and affectionate.

He was now the sensitive, affectionate, and adaptable Marco, no longer the aloof and distant CEO he had been.

Loraine softly patted his back. "This place is near the Universe Group. I can visit you more often in the future."

Even though their relationship was still in its testing phase, their bond had strengthened considerably. Loraine eagerly anticipated more frequent dates with him.

Dealing with a puppy who would occasionally act coquettishly required giving him some affection in return.

"Really?" Marco looked up at her in surprise, before hesitating, "If I had known, I would have bought a bigger house."

It wasn't a problem for him, but he didn't want Loraine to live in such a small place with him. After all, he wasn't truly penniless.

Concerned about his precarious financial situation, Loraine gently coughed and declined, "Actually... this place is rather charming, and its compact size adds to

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the coziness, don't you think?"

She wanted to distract Marco from focusing on financial matters. Swiftly shifting the topic, she asked, "Are you hungry? I'll cook something for you."

With that, she stood and made her way towards the small kitchen. However, upon opening the fridge, she discovered it was bare.

She turned to look at Marco.

His expression became awkward, and he smiled sheepishly. "I'll go buy some groceries."

Loraine glanced at him and inquired, "Buy groceries? Do you know where to go and what to buy?"

Finding himself at a loss for words, Marco tentatively suggested, "Um... shall we go together?"

Chapter 625 Buying Groceries

The thought of Marco living in this place with no one to look after him and an empty fridge, was unbearable to Loraine.

She couldn't possibly let Marco grocery shop on his own either. Accustomed to the life of a high-powered CEO, he knew little about shopping for groceries. So, she consented, "Sure, let's go together."

With a soft smile, Marco naturally reached for her hand, and they made their way downstairs.

The location of his rented house was quite prime, with a comprehensive shopping mall nearby featuring a wide array of amenities.

As was his wont, Marco guided her towards the upscale fresh produce section. The display of various top-notch ingredients was quite enticing.

Indifferent to the prices, Marco nonchalantly picked some salmon and placed it in the shopping cart. Loraine, on glimpsing the price tag, felt her heart jolt.

She worried that if Marco were to grocery shop alone in the future, he might thoughtlessly purchase costly items and eventually run out of funds.

Keeping a cool facade, she returned the items, disregarding the scornful gaze of the shop assistant, and steered Marco away from the fresh produce aisle.

Puzzled, Marco inquired, "What's the matter? I recall you enjoying salmon."

Loraine frowned and responded, "I'm not in the mood for it today. Besides, there's just the two of us. Do we need to splurge so extravagantly? Dining out at a fancy restaurant would be simpler."

Understanding the reasoning behind her words, Marco asked, "Then what should we purchase?"

Loraine sighed and guided him in the opposite direction.

"Let me take you around the local market."

Upon reaching the market, Marco found himself immersed in a completely different experience.

It was his inaugural visit to such a locale. Compared to the bustling streets brimming with food vendors he was familiar with, the market seemed even more chaotic and vibrant, with a blend of diverse aromas leaving him momentarily flustered.

Luckily, Loraine swiftly grabbed his hand and admonished, "Stay close, don't get lost."

Gradually, Marco relaxed as he shadowed her through the vegetable stalls, meat vendors, and bustling crowd.

The busy and vibrant atmosphere of the market allowed them to walk closely together. Unable to hold back his curiosity, Marco queried, "Did you design this too?"

Lorraine chuckled and replied, "Not at all. The market has been here for ages, possessing a rich history. It offers an extensive variety of goods, and you can find just about anything here at an affordable price."

Marco instantly adopted an attentive demeanor, ready to learn.

As they meandered through the market, Lorraine adeptly picked out items from various stalls. They would pause occasionally to peruse goods, and as they passed a meat vendor, Lorraine had no intention of stopping. However, the rotund butcher, spotting them, eagerly approached to draw their attention.

Their attire was conspicuously distinct from that of the regular market-goers, signaling they were here for a taste of a different lifestyle. The butcher's eyes lit up, envisioning a potential windfall.

Intrigued, Marco glanced in his direction, and Lorraine deemed it the right moment to pause.

The butcher beamed, his tobacco-stained teeth on full display, and offered, "Take a look at my meat. It's the freshest in the whole market. Are you newlyweds who've just embarked on living independently? My meat would be an excellent choice for you!"

Lorraine assessed the meat he was touting, noting its lackluster hue, a sign of prolonged storage. She bypassed his sales spiel and instead pointed to a different cut, gesturing the butcher to slice it for her.

The butcher was taken aback. He had pegged Lorraine as a clueless young individual, oblivious to the

nuances of choosing meat. However, she had picked the most fresh and superior cut.

Could it be... a fluke?

He shrugged off the thought and proceeded to weigh the meat, package it, and hand it over, stating, "Exactly two pounds, here you go!"

As Loraine accepted the bag and verified its weight, she sensed something was amiss. She eyed the butcher's scale and smirked, asserting, "Sir, it appears your scale is faulty."

Feigning astonishment, the butcher responded, "Miss, how could you suggest such a thing? I'm an upright tradesman. My scale is precise. I never swindle my patrons."

Loraine's expression remained frosty as she pointed to the bag of potatoes Marco was holding, purchased from a nearby stand. "These potatoes also weigh two pounds. So, do you reckon it's your scale that's inaccurate, or are you attempting to hoodwink us?"

Panicked, the butcher's eyes darted around as he mopped his brow. He surreptitiously removed a small magnet from under the scale, his hand resting innocently on its side.

"Alright, I'll re-weigh it for you. I don't want to be wrongfully accused," he said, visibly agitated.

He placed the potatoes on the scale, and they weighed exactly two pounds.

Sporting a triumphant grin, he feigned innocence. "See,

the scale is perfect. You were mistaken..."

Lorraine acted swiftly, swapping the potatoes for the meat on the scale.

The weight barely tipped one and a half pounds, falling significantly short of two pounds.

Lorraine gave a cool laugh, eyeing the flabbergasted butcher, but said nothing. Instead, she set down the meat, seized Marco's hand, and prepared to exit.

The butcher, unable to maintain his facade, burst out, "What's your problem? You are so elegantly dressed that you hardly seem to be financially strapped! Why harass a small vendor like me, request a specific cut, and then refuse to purchase it?"

His gaze targeted Lorraine's petite figure, and he tried to seize her. But she deftly sidestepped his attempt. Instead, a powerful hand secured the butcher's wrist, squeezing tightly.

"Ah! It's painful, it's painful!" he cried out in distress.



Chapter 626 A Dishonest Vendor

The butcher tried but failed to free himself from the tight grip that held his wrist like unyielding steel.

"Help! Everyone, come and see! These rich folks are trying to cheat me and even resort to violence!" The butcher's desperate plea echoed through the crowd.

Curious onlookers began to gather, their eyes scanning the scene.

Among them were some nosy elderly folks, muttering speculations about the young couple and why they would bully a small business owner. "This girl is so pretty, and the young man is handsome too. They don't seem to be short of money."

Noticing the commotion, Loraine's frown deepened.

She gestured for Marco to release his grip on the butcher's hand, sensing that the butcher might have assumed they were easy targets due to their well-dressed appearance.

But Loraine was no stranger to deceitful tactics.

Before being taken in by the Torres family, she had grown up in an orphanage, navigating a world where dishonesty lurked around every corner. She had encountered both the kind-hearted and the cunning.

Remaining calm, Loraine turned to the butcher, a composed smile on her face.

"Alright, I'll pay. Just give me the meat. By the way, how much did you say it was for a couple of pounds?"

The butcher hesitated, taken aback by Loraine's level-headed response.

He had expected a big scene, but she seemed more composed than he had imagined.

With a self-satisfied grin, he retorted, "The meat is two pounds. Of course, you have to pay the exact amount for it."

Unknown to Loraine, the butcher had slyly slipped a magnet under the scale, confident in his deceit and oblivious to the resourcefulness of the young girl before him. "See? Two pounds, honest business, no cheating!"

With the magnet in place, the scale showed exactly two pounds, and a little extra. He felt victorious, ready to challenge Loraine.

She was just a naive girl. What could she do even if she noticed the discrepancy? How could she know what he had done?

Unfazed, Loraine accepted the meat and walked over to a neighboring stall, catching the vendor off guard. "Excuse me, sir, can I borrow your scale for a moment? I'll pay for it."

Infuriated, the butcher protested, "What's your

intention? You weighed it here, and now you want to weigh it somewhere else? Don't you trust me?"

Loraine, with genuine surprise in her eyes, replied, "I don't know you; I just want to confirm if the weight is accurate. Isn't that reasonable?"

Unable to argue in front of the gathering crowd, the butcher reluctantly agreed.

Loraine placed the meat on the borrowed scale, revealing the truth for all to see—it only weighed 1.2 pounds!

The nearby vendor who had lent her the scale scoffed at the dishonest butcher. "Mack, you're so heartless in your business dealings! You shorted them so much on two pounds of meat! And you have the nerve to make a fuss? Shame on you!"

Mack, now red-faced and embarrassed, desperately tried to defend himself. Trying to shift the blame onto Loraine and Marco, he yelled, "His scale is the problem! He's jealous of my good meat, so he conspired with this girl to frame me!"

However, the vendor who had lent Loraine the scale knew better. Fuming with anger, he stepped forward and firmly pushed Mack aside. With a swift motion, he opened Mack's electronic scale, revealing the hidden magnet used for deceitful gains.

"Do you think everyone is as dishonest as you?" The vendor's voice resonated with a mix of disdain and moral integrity. "If this girl wasn't smart enough, she would have fallen for your trick!"

The crowd had now pieced together the truth.

They despised dishonest vendors like Mack, and their fury ignited as they hurled insults and rotten vegetable leaves at him.


The commotion attracted the attention of the market regulators, who swiftly arrived at the scene. Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, they promptly shut down Mack's stall, putting an end to his deceitful practices.

With justice served, Loraine and Marco resumed their shopping, but not before returning the borrowed scale to the kind vendor who had helped expose Mack's trickery. Loraine paid for her purchases and the agreed-upon compensation with a sense of satisfaction and integrity. As they made their way through the lively market, Marco couldn't help but ask, "Loraine, how did you know that vendor was cheating on the weight?"

In the business negotiation, he wouldn't miss even the slightest issue on a contract, but when it came to life skills, Marco had zero experience. He couldn't help but admire Loraine's resourcefulness.

A playful glimmer sparkled in Loraine's eyes as she let out a chuckle. "It's nothing special. When I was younger, I used to sell vegetables at the market. I learned a few tricks of the trade."

Moreover, her passion for cooking had honed her sensitivity to such deceptive tricks, allowing her to see through Mack's deceit.

Chapter 626 A Dishonest Vendor  +120 Points at most

Marco was taken aback by Loraine's words. It seemed that she hadn't grown up in the luxurious confines of the Torres family, but rather in the countryside that he had once uncovered during his investigation of her.

Before he could ask more questions, a hesitant and uncertain voice interrupted them from behind, "Lorrie? Is that you?"

Chapter 627 Old Acquaintance

The voice was vaguely familiar. Loraine, perplexed, turned around, directing her gaze towards the origin of the sound.

By a small stall stood a humble, neatly dressed woman from the countryside. The woman nervously gestured at her, uncertainty in her eyes, her face sunburned from years of labor, her smile genuine and warm.

Loraine was momentarily taken aback, yet, even after all these years, she instantly recognized the woman.

The woman hailed from the same village as the orphanage where Loraine lived. She frequently visited and would distribute sweets to her.

Loraine hadn't anticipated encountering such a familiar face here. Her initial surprise swiftly gave way to delight, and she hastened towards the woman with a beaming smile. "Mrs. Thatcher? How unexpected!"

The village was far from Vagow. Due to poor transportation and other circumstances, Loraine hadn't managed to return there in a long while.

Henna Thatcher hesitated as she scrutinized Loraine from head to toe. When she heard Loraine's excited words, a smile danced in her eyes and she instinctively wanted to reach out and hold Loraine's

hand lovingly.

However, she quickly noticed Loraine's opulent attire and became painfully aware of their contrasting social statuses.

She withdrew her hand awkwardly, muttering, "It's really you. I thought I was mistaken."

Loraine had been a beautiful child, and with age, her beauty had only amplified. Thus, Henna hadn't found Loraine unrecognizable. Furthermore, after hearing Marco address her as Loraine, she dared to confirm, and to her surprise, it was indeed Loraine.

Henna, blushing, used her country drawl to explain, "Not long after you left, my family and I moved to the city to earn a living. Life isn't easy here, but fortunately, we found work and opened this small vegetable stall. It's not much, but we've managed to settle down."

Loraine immediately asked, "Mrs. Thatcher, why didn't you seek me out?"

Embarrassed, Henna scratched her head, offering a shy smile.

Although the director of the orphanage had informed her that Loraine had been adopted by a wealthy family, she had deliberated whether to impose on Loraine. She had never been the type to exploit others or pursue petty gains.

"It's alright. I sell vegetables now, and I'm managing fine." With that, Henna selected a bunch of fresh, vibrant lettuce from her stall, offering it to Loraine. "I

don't have much to offer. Take these fresh vegetables home and try them. They're homegrown by my family in the countryside, completely organic!"

Loraine hadn't encountered such warmth since her return to the city. She was briefly stunned but sought to politely decline. However, when her refusal was met with insistence, she had to accept the vegetables. She planned to offer money in return.

But Henna's face clouded over in displeasure as she retorted, "Lorrie, are you belittling my humble vegetables?"

Loraine could only accept the lettuce with a sense of helplessness, thanking Henna with a warm smile. Subsequently, she handed it to Marco, casting him a sideways glance as she suggested, "How about we have this for dinner? How would you like it prepared? Soup or stir-fry?"

Marco, already holding the groceries they had just purchased, now with an added bunch of lettuce, looked at Loraine affectionately and said, "The choice is all yours."

Henna had noticed Marco earlier. She was curious about the tall, handsome man accompanying Loraine. Observing their familiar and affectionate exchanges, she couldn't help but offer a knowing smile, teasing, "Loraine, you've blossomed into a beautiful woman, and now you've snagged such a handsome beau. What a lucky lady you are!"

Loraine blushed, dropping her gaze, and cleared her throat softly, trying to clarify, "Mrs. Thatcher, you've got it wrong. We're not a couple."

Marco appeared displeased, covertly nudged her waist, which coincidentally was a sensitive spot for Loraine. She jolted instantly, shooting him a glare as if warning him not to overstep.

They were still in the trial phase! They weren't officially together yet!

Seeing the exchange of glances between them, Henna covered her mouth, evidently more amused, and said to Loraine, "Lorrie, you are a little shy. I've seen enough of life to know a couple when I see one. The two of you, standing together, exude a couple's aura. There's no need to be embarrassed. If you're happy, I'm happy for you!"

Loraine's face deepened in hue, and she found herself speechless. Concerned that Marco might be uncomfortable with such fervor, she stole a glance at him.

Thankfully, Marco didn't seem put off at all. Instead, his smile broadened, clearly enjoying Henna's words.

Henna's eyes crinkled with more pronounced wrinkles as she felt a wave of emotion. She sighed and stated, "It's a good thing you left early, Lorrie. Had you stayed in that desolate, remote place, your life could've been wasted. Look how well you've done now!"

Remembering their village, Henna expressed her disdain. It was a backwater filled with petty-minded people. Despite having been married there, she had always yearned to leave. Otherwise, she wouldn't have relocated her family to the city in pursuit of a better life.


"The locals were envious of you. After your departure, they propagated numerous rumors about you. They were utterly spiteful! However, seeing you flourish now warms my heart. As for them, they're still stuck in the countryside tending to minuscule plots of land. Lorrie, your success serves as poetic justice! I'm thrilled to witness your progress," Henna said with a satisfied smile.

Marco furrowed his brow, inquiring, "Are you implying that Loraine had a difficult past?"

Before Henna could respond, Loraine lightly coughed to indicate it wasn't necessary to delve into her past miseries. She attempted to steer the conversation away, stating, "It's all history now. There's no need to rehash it."

Indignant, Henna exclaimed, "Lorrie, how can we ignore it? The past wasn't pleasant! Especially that girl, Judie Cooper. She went around spreading rumors that you had fallen pregnant and left to conceal it!"



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