

Chapter 672 Just Like What We Once Did

Meanwhile, Judie was lounging on the sunlit balcony of her luxurious villa, sipping coffee with anticipation, eagerly awaiting word of chaos at the orphanage and Loraine's downfall.

But the news that reached her ears was far from what she had envisioned. A villager who had been part of the recent upheaval burst in, his face flushed with panic.

"Miss, something awful has happened! The police took Vinnie away!" he exclaimed.

Judie's hand trembled at the news, splashing coffee on her skirt. Furious, she snapped, "What? How did he end up in police custody?"

Stumbling over his words, the villager recounted the events, his disjointed narrative slowly coalescing into a comprehensible story.

Judie's face darkened as she absorbed the shocking information.

"How could this be? Loraine is the CEO of the Universe Group?" she spat, disbelieving.

"Miss, I swear I'm not lying!" the villager insisted. "The construction crew from the corporation has entered the village, calling Loraine their boss! She must be backed by considerable wealth. I think she's fully capable of managing road construction and village development. She must come from

money!"

Judie's agitation grew, and in her anger, she hurled her coffee cup, startling the villager.

He scampered away, leaving Judie to seethe alone, her face a kaleidoscope of fury.

She gritted her teeth, her face contorting with anger as it flushed with various shades of purple and blue.

Her mind reeled at the possibility of Loraine leading the Universe Group.

Her parents had made it abundantly clear that Loraine had been orphaned long ago, following the death of her own parents.

How could an orphan from the countryside rise to such a position? It was impossible!

The thought terrified Judie, and she ran to her mother, Zaria, to share her distress.

"Mom, how can Loraine be the CEO of the Universe Group? She's not as smart or as pretty as me. How can this be possible? Oh, I see! Loraine's benefactor must be the CEO of the Universe Group! But here, in this remote place, she's just pretending to be important, acting as if she's the CEO! Yes, that must be it! Mom, you have to help me find a way. I won't be able to live if I don't take revenge on Loraine!"

Zaria was taken aback by Judie's incoherent sobbing and asked, "What do you mean by all that?"

Through sobs, Judie recounted the report from the villager, and Zaria's face turned pale. Her scalp tingled.

The car they had seen, along with the items they found inside, did indeed belong to a wealthy family. But linking those things to the colossal enterprise known as the Universe Group? How could she have dared?

Zaria felt despair creeping in but managed to comfort her daughter before rushing out to find Becker to discuss the matter.

"Becker, they are from the Universe Group. What should we do?"

Anxious and uneasy, Zaria relayed the news to Becker. His face turned dark, and he erupted in anger, yelling, "It's all your fault! If you hadn't been so softhearted back then, caring for that child, we wouldn't be in this mess now! Now, she's in power, and you've raised a daughter who has offended her. If she discovers what happened back then, our entire family will be doomed!"

Becker paced back and forth, growing angrier by the moment. From an impoverished woodcutter, he had become the wealthiest man in the village. Was he to lose everything now and return to poverty?

He glanced at Zaria, who was nervously wiping away her tears, and his cheeks swelled with rage. Without a second thought, he lunged forward, grabbing her collar and delivering two hard slaps, his eyes ablaze.

"It's all because of our spoiled daughter you raised! She's brought shame to us! And you, always timid and fearful, have invited endless trouble!"

On Zaria's delicately made-up face, two swollen red palm prints appeared. She dared not fight back, only covering her face and sobbing softly. "Becker, please stop hitting me. I know I was wrong, and I won't defy you again. I'll listen to everything you say from now on!"

Becker, having exhausted his anger, flung her aside, gasping for breath as his gaze turned sinister.

Zaria cautiously approached, suggesting, "Perhaps Loraine might not really be the CEO. Could she be under the CEO's protection?"

Becker's face darkened, and he let out an eerie smile, his tone menacing. "Who cares if she's the CEO or not? If I hadn't spared her back then, she would've been dead! I let her live, but she's still not satisfied. Now she's obstructing my path. Don't blame me if I turn ruthless!"

Zaria swallowed hard and asked meekly, "What's your plan?"

"Hmm, we burn everything to the ground, just like what we once did." Becker smirked slyly. "With the autumn heat, it's the perfect time for a fire. You find someone to do it. Remember, make it look clean and find someone unconnected to us!"

Chapter 673 Setting Fire

Without Loraine's knowledge, a dark conspiracy was taking shape behind the scenes, hidden from her.

After bidding farewell to the villagers and calming the scared Eloise and the orphanage's children, Loraine returned to her room, with Marco absent saying he needed to address some matters. She sat alone on her bed, lost in thought.

For several days, a certain issue had occupied her mind. While Marco was present, she couldn't fully explore it. But now, she had the opportunity to scrutinize every detail.

Loraine felt sure that there were no links between the Torres and Cooper families. So why had Zaria responded so when she spotted Loraine the other day?

Besides, Eloise had said the Cooper family had inquired after Loraine when she journeyed to the city. What made them worry so?

Zaria had asked her if she knew something back then. Did that mean Loraine should be aware of something in the past? Or perhaps there was something hidden, and the Cooper family feared she might uncover it?

Loraine sensed the truth was near, like a fog-veiled landscape; yet every time she reached for it, it eluded her, plunging her back into confusion.

She had been but a child then. How could she have spotted any clues at such a tender age? Her early memories were dim.

But then, a realization struck her.

Her eyes brightened with understanding. True, she was a child, but Eloise wasn't! Eloise had resided in the village for ages. If something was amiss with the Cooper family, she would know!

With this insight, Loraine lost no time; she set out to find Eloise.

The continuous upheavals of recent days had worn Eloise down, both mentally and physically. She spent most of her time recuperating in bed, but was awake when Loraine came.

Beside the matron's bed, Loraine behaved playfully and said, "Madam, I'm puzzled about something, and I've come to you for answers."

Eloise's dry yet warm hand affectionately stroked her face, reminiscent of her childhood, and she tenderly said, "I will tell you everything I know, my dear. What do you need to know?"

Distraught, Loraine described her meeting with Zaria and the odd response it triggered.

"What does it mean? How am I connected to her?"

Eloise's expression briefly showed surprise before she smiled and shook her head. "That's a perplexing one, dear. But speaking of strange occurrences, there was one incident back then that struck me as odd."

Loraine had been left at the orphanage's doorstep, and all Eloise had to identify her was the surname Torres.

"In those days, Zaria often peeked at you from behind the wall. I caught her more than once and even wondered, could you be her child? But later, I learned that wasn't the case."

Loraine's suspicion was confirmed; it had indeed been Zaria,



secretly watching her through the wall.

Lorraine's belief grew that her survival following her parents' tragic accident, along with her subsequent placement in the orphanage, must somehow be tied to the Cooper family.

Yet, the precise nature of this connection eluded her.

Lost in contemplation, she thought back to the Torres family's inquiry, which had concluded that her parents had perished in a car crash. Could the Coopers be linked to this incident?

The truth about her parents' demise seemed tantalizingly close.

Feeling a knot of nerves, she turned to the matron and asked, "What can you tell me about the Cooper family before I came to the orphanage?"

Lorraine recalled a previous conversation with the matron, where she had noted the Coopers' sudden wealth, despite not seeming like a business-oriented family. How had this transformation occurred?

The matron considered the question before responding deliberately, "Their home was once a humble thatched hut on a cliff near the mountain's edge, outside the village. Poverty was their constant companion. As I think about it, a fire did rage in that direction when you were brought here. Shortly thereafter, the Coopers moved into the village. The local folks said an autumn mountain blaze had consumed their old dwelling."

Lorraine's brow furrowed; what an uncanny coincidence!

A surge of anxiety propelled her to her feet. "I must go see for myself," she declared.

But as she approached the door, Marco's hand encircled her

wrist, halting her progress. His brow creased in concern, he said, "It's too late now. I'll go with you tomorrow if you wish."

Lorraine's eyes flicked to the darkening sky, and disappointment weighed on her shoulders. She nodded faintly.

In another part of the town, at the police station, a young, rough-looking man named Vinnie was being shoved out the door.

The impatient officer warned him, "You're fortunate this time. Someone paid your bail. Don't stir up trouble again!"

Vinnie feigned respect but spat out his true feelings once his back was turned. "Cursed be Lorraine Torres, that vile woman! She won't escape my wrath!"

A sudden tap on the shoulder startled him. "I was only kidding, I..." he stammered, only to find one of the Cooper family's bodyguards before him.

The bodyguard's face was icy as he thrust an envelope filled with cash at Vinnie. "My boss thinks you have potential; he's the one who bailed you out. Lorraine caused you trouble. If you're worth anything, take action against the orphanage. Otherwise, your next home will be a jail cell."

The words "take action" left no doubt in Vinnie's mind that he was being asked to set fire to the orphanage.

Fear flickered in his eyes, and the money seemed to sear his flesh.

But Lorraine's earlier humiliation fanned his anger into a blaze. A ruthless determination settled in his eyes, and a decision was made.

Chapter 674 Smoke

As autumn settled in and the nights grew colder, Eloise, the host, expressed concern about Loraine and Marco catching a cold. Generously, she provided two extra thick blankets.

However, this only made the small bed even more crowded for them.

As night closed in, they squashed into the bed, ready to sleep.

Loraine felt uncomfortable as warmth spread through her body, causing her lips to tremble.

The troubles that had been plaguing her swarmed into her mind, making it difficult to fall asleep.

She tossed and turned until finally, the heavy blanket that lay between them was lifted by a hand and tossed aside, and Marco's broad, warm body pressed up against her.

Loraine's breath caught in her throat.

The man behind her hugged her closely, his warm breath brushing against her neck as he murmured, "What are you thinking about?"

His voice seemed charged with electricity, sending shivers down her spine.

Loraine's throat tightened, but she relaxed when she realized he wasn't making any further advances. Feeling a need to share her burdens, she opened up to him.

"Today, I asked Eloise about some things. I was wondering what happened back then, why I survived while my parents met a tragic fate."

This question had haunted the Torres family for over a decade, and Loraine sensed she was nearing the truth but was still missing the final piece of the puzzle.

Marco lightly hummed, his fingers playing with her hair.

"We'll find out eventually, no matter how difficult it may be. I'll accompany you through the search."

His words made Loraine's heart flutter, and she turned to face him, only then noticing how tall Marco was.

She felt like a large doll in his embrace, her relatively tall figure dwarfed by his.

A smile crept onto her face as she considered the oddity of them, with their respective statuses, squeezed onto this small bed. She found the situation amusing and laughed, her eyes twinkling.

Marco chuckled softly, his warm breath tickling her.

"What are you laughing about?"

Loraine looked up, her curiosity piqued. "During that time when you were particularly down, was it because you found out that Laura wasn't your biological mother?"

Though Marco appeared indifferent, his behavior at that time revealed that he cared deeply about his family and heritage.

Marco was silent for a while, then softly kissed her hair and whispered, "Yes."

He then explained, "Lorraine, when I said I envied you for having a loving family, I meant it. You are fortunate. Even though your parents are not with you, you still have your grandfather and uncles, who will tell you how much your parents loved you. They left behind photos and mementos to fill your memories of them. In my memories, there were never any parents."

Marco paused, his eyes blinking and his lips curling into a self-mocking smile.

"When I was young, Laura didn't care for me. Now, I find out my deceased father isn't even my biological father. I'm someone without any known origins."

Lorraine's heart ached; she instinctively hugged him and looked into his eyes with a serious expression. "Does your origin matter? No, it doesn't. Just remember where you belong; that's enough!"

Bending down to accommodate her, Marco laughed lightly and asked, "Then where do I belong?"

He wrapped his hand around her waist, rubbing it gently now and then.

Lorraine's face turned red; her legs felt weak, and a certain warmth blossomed where their skin touched.

"Marco," she stammered, her voice a whisper.

He chuckled and leaned down to kiss her gently. "Let's just sleep. Good night; we still have things to do tomorrow."

Lorraine's tense body relaxed as she took in his words, and soon she fell asleep.

In a state between waking and dreaming, she thought she

heard the sound of water. Reaching out, she found the bedside empty.

Then, a strong, choking whiff of smoke filled the air, which was alarmingly out of place.

What was happening?

Loraine sat up, turned on the lights, and saw thick white smoke seeping through the window, growing denser every moment.

Was it a fire?

Her face drained of color. She put on her shoes, got out of bed, and called out, "Something's wrong... there's a fire!"

Marco, wearing only a bathrobe, wet from the shower, rushed out of the bathroom. Loraine didn't have time to admire him; her face was filled with anxiety.

The smoke was so thick it was suffocating, and the source of the fire remained hidden.

Loraine's face turned even paler as she exclaimed, "Eloise and the children are in danger. We need to go and wake them up!"

Marco's brows furrowed. In this critical moment, his priority was Loraine's safety, and he was prepared to take on the rescue himself.

However, her determined face made him loosen his grip. Human lives were at stake; one more person might mean saving one more life.

With no more hesitation, he followed Loraine towards the smoke-filled dormitory.

As they rushed into the fire, Marco's eyes were icy cold.

This fire had broken out suddenly and was undoubtedly an act of arson. He wouldn't let the culprit escape.

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Chapter 675 The Raging Fire

Within the confines of the dormitory, a thick haze of smoke prevailed. Upon entering, Loraine was besieged by a coughing fit. Guided by memory, she made her way to Eloise's room.

The fire hadn't spread yet, mercifully; but the smoke was intense. She seized a wet towel from the bathroom, placing it over her mouth and nose, and hurried to Eloise's side.

Eloise seemed weakened, her spirit dimmed. She was a light sleeper before. But recently, she was mostly in a state of somnolence, and even the fierce fire hadn't roused her.

Loraine woke her up, helping her cover her nose with a wet towel; then she assisted her out of the room.

Still somewhat groggy, Eloise recognized the smell of the smoke and the fog in the room and knew instantly there was a fire.

"Lorrie, what's happening?" she inquired with urgency.

Biting her lip, Loraine replied, "It's likely due to the autumn dryness. I need to get you out."

A worried look crossed Eloise's face. "I'm old; I might hinder you. Go save the children first!"

"Don't fret. Marco is already with the children," Loraine assured her.

They both choked on the smoke, coughing uncontrollably. Time was of the essence, and Loraine whisked Eloise away.



Halfway to safety, they ran into Marco, guiding the children out and sending the older ones to alert others.

He stood tall, a natural leader, instructing the children to cover their faces with wet cloths. The sudden fire had them frightened and tearful, yet they didn't lose control, evacuating with composure.

As they went their separate ways, Loraine's and Marco's eyes locked for an instant, a fleeting but meaningful connection.

"Stay safe."

Loraine's duty was to manage the rescued children outside. She couldn't hear Marco's words to them, but they were visibly comforted, even trying to reassure Eloise.

"Madam, don't worry. We're safe, and we'll earn money to rebuild the orphanage!" they promised.

Eloise turned, wiping tears, her voice heavy with emotion. "My dear ones, your well-being is what matters."

The children told Loraine that Marco had called the firefighters, easing her anxiety.

With Marco, they seemed to triumph over any peril.

Yet, the origin of the fire was unknown.

The dry season was just a soothing lie for Eloise. Loraine looked icily at the building, now nearly consumed by smoke.

This fire was intentional!

Who harbored such bitterness against the orphanage to endanger all these lives?

Thanks to their quick discovery, all the children were safe, although a few were lightly affected by the smoke. Loraine administered immediate care to them.

The fire, however, continued to spread, relentless and threatening.

The orphanage, standing forlorn and ablaze, resembled some terrifying creature of the night, its very existence threatened by the flames.

Though the children tried to be strong, their brave faces dissolved into tears at the sight of their home being consumed. Their youth betrayed them, and they were overtaken by sorrow.

Eloise tenderly caressed their heads; her face suddenly contorted with concern. "Dillon, where's Sam? Wasn't he with you? Why isn't he here?"

Dillon, his face streaked with tears, shook his head. "I didn't see Sam."

Fear etched on her face, Eloise started toward the flames, her cane tapping urgently. "The child might be trapped. What if he's in danger? I must find him!"

Loraine intervened, her voice firm. "I'll go look for him. I can move faster. The younger children know you, but they're strangers to me. They've been so frightened; stay and comfort them."

Eloise's brow creased. "No, it's perilous. I can't let you go."

But Loraine's eyes were steadfast, allowing no debate. "I'll be careful. You need to stay with the children!"

A reluctant nod came from Eloise as she met Loraine's

determined eyes. With a reassuring smile, Loraine turned and sprinted into the fire, her figure quickly swallowed by the inferno.

Eloise's heart ached as she stared at the flames, offering silent prayers for safety.

Loraine's shape vanished into the smoke, and soon afterward, Marco emerged, leading over a dozen children to safety.

His once white bath towel was blackened beyond recognition. Clutching a child and leading others to safety, he exhaled a sigh of relief.

But the respite was fleeting.

All children were safe, but where was Loraine?

Marco's mind reeled, consumed by a sudden panic. Their connection, so deep and wordless, had been sealed with a fleeting glance during the chaos – a promise that they would emerge unscathed, that everything would turn out fine.

But Loraine was missing.

His face a mask of fear, Marco's voice broke as he asked, "Where is Loraine? Why isn't she here?"