

Chapter 561 Truth And Falsehood

As Colette's declaration resonated throughout the room, eyes drifted towards Loraine, clouded with doubt. Loraine's status suggested she wouldn't stoop to counterfeit goods, yet Colette's bold assurance had everyone on edge.

Shaking her head, Loraine met the crowd's gaze with a knowing smile.

The gathering tonight, a joint effort by the Bryant and Universe Groups to uplift spirits, wasn't meant for such squabbles. She neither had the inclination nor the stamina to tussle with Colette.

"Colette, you're a guest here, and I've no intention to bicker. Should you maintain your peace, I might spare you the embarrassment before our fellow attendees."

Regrettably, Colette missed the veiled sarcasm. Interpreting Loraine's words as a retreat, a triumphant gleam lit her eyes as she held her ground.

"So you resort to threats now? Loraine, don't let your current standing inflate your ego. The Universe Group isn't the sole host tonight; you can't simply throw us out. You're nothing more than a fraud flaunting a fake jewel," she declared.

Marina, growing more alarmed with every passing moment, tugged Colette's arm in a hushed plea, "We should leave, Colette."

As the situation escalated, Marina was overcome with regret.



However, Colette drew her back, thrusting her into the spotlight. With a dramatic gesture towards Marina's necklace, she retorted, "See this? It's the real Stellar Galaxy, an exorbitant gift Marco bought exclusively for Marina as a family. But you, Loraine, you're just his ex-wife, an outsider! Perhaps you got wind of Marco's purchase of the Stellar Galaxy, and had someone mimic it to feed your vanity!"

Marina's face turned ashen, and she backed away, wishing for a place to disappear into.

Loraine, however, seemed amused at Colette's tirade. Casting an interested glance at Marina, she lightly brushed the necklace resting against her collarbone.

Receiving the Stellar Galaxy as a gift from Marco had been a delightful surprise.

She had long admired the handiwork of Master Laims, and the Stellar Galaxy was a testament to her exquisite style. However, securing one of her pieces required more than money; it also hinged on the master's whims. Thus, Loraine had admired the piece from afar, never intending to go to extraordinary lengths to possess it.

Yet, Marco had done precisely that, presenting it to her as a gift.

The authenticity of her necklace was never a question for Loraine. However, confronted with such baseless claims, she refused to let her dignity take a hit.

An amused smile played on Loraine's lips as she threw a dismissive glance at Marina. "So you're telling me your necklace is genuine while mine is a copy?"

Marina, her face a ghostly shade of white, shivered under Loraine's stare. Were it not for Colette's firm grip on her arm,



she would have bolted long ago.

Nonchalantly, Loraine continued, "If it's real, surely you have a proof of purchase and a certificate of authenticity?"

"Who brings those to a party?" Marina managed to mumble.

Undeterred, Loraine pressed on, "Even so, you should recall the distinctive emblem exclusive to certified pieces."

Marina stuttered, lost for words. Colette, finding Loraine's poise unnerving, retorted with defiance, "Why should Marina reveal anything to you? It's possible your necklace is the fake one, and you're prying for details from Marina to keep your deceit going!"

Blinded by rage and envy, Colette was far from her sensible self. No matter the reality of the situation, she clung to her claim like a lifebuoy, determined to save face before the crowd.

Loraine, unfazed by their theatrics, retaliated with a hard-hitting fact. "The Stellar Galaxy is a masterpiece adorned with the finest Cartier diamonds, fashioned into stars that emit a soft, natural glow. Marina, would you say the necklace you're wearing meets that description?"

Marina, shocked into silence, found herself unable to respond. The gathered elites, no strangers to subtleties, took note of Marina's apparent discomfort, their disdainful eyes drifting from her to Colette.

At her wit's end, Colette allowed her feelings to boil over and persisted in her allegations, "Loraine, the liar here is you! Everyone knows Marco bought the necklace, and it's more likely he gifted it to his sister rather than an outsider like you!"

As her accusation lingered in the air, a stern male voice echoed from behind her, "True, I purchased the necklace, but Marina isn't the recipient. I presented it to Loraine."



Chapter 562 His Sincerity

All eyes swiveled in the direction of the voice, and there was Marco, sauntering casually with a glass of wine in his hand.

Tonight, he was clad in an understated black suit, his striking features betraying no emotion, instantly captivating the elegant women in attendance.

His destination was clear: Loraine.

Arriving at her side, his typically stoic demeanor softened. He extended the wine glass towards her, his voice gentle, "Loraine, I intended to bring you this wine earlier, but I was waylaid by a few shareholders. I apologize for the delay and for leaving you at the mercy of these individuals."

Loraine acknowledged his words with a nod, her attention drawn to the other man accompanying Marco.

He was an older gentleman, slightly balding with a rotund figure. His eyes were almost obscured by the creases formed by his broad smile.

Loraine vaguely recognized him as Jefferson Foster, a shareholder from the Bryant Group.

Jefferson had planned to extend his greetings to Loraine, but Marco's words had momentarily stunned him.

His previously warm smile rigidified, leaving him slightly flustered.

However, his demeanor brightened upon spotting Bella among



the crowd.

He was intrigued to see his daughter standing so near Loraine. Had Bella truly managed to acquaint herself with Loraine?

Jefferson momentarily disregarded Marco's comments, breaking into a chuckle, "Miss Torres, meet my daughter Bella Foster. She regards you as a role model. It appears Mr. Bryant was correct. You younger folks indeed have more in common. Enjoy your evening, I'll take my leave now!"

Loraine responded with a gracious nod and a smile. After Jefferson retreated, a sense of restlessness permeated the crowd, their eagerness to engage with Marco evident. However, his imposing presence held them at bay, preventing any further advances.

Turning back towards Marina, Marco's gaze hardened. The fleeting tenderness from moments ago seemed like a mere illusion as his icy stare bore into the necklace around Marina's neck.

Without mercy, Marco directly exposed her lies. "Marina, what game are you playing? I never gifted you the Stellar Galaxy."

Ever since Marco's entrance, Marina's face had paled significantly. His direct confrontation left her trembling, too petrified to form a coherent response.

Colette's complexion too turned ashen. She glanced between Marina and Marco, her confusion morphing into a demand for answers.

"Marina, what's happening? Didn't you claim this was a gift from your brother? You're Marco's sister, the Bryant family's precious daughter. How could your necklace be fake?"

Under Marco's frosty gaze, Marina was on the verge of breaking

down. Fumbling over her words, she attempted an explanation, "Brother, I... I didn't mean any harm. I'm sorry. I lied about the necklace because I didn't want others to look down on me. I had no idea you'd purchased it for Loraine!"

Marina was keenly aware of what mattered to Marco. Her immediate goal was to extract herself from the escalating situation as quickly as possible.

Marco's expression remained frosty, revealing his perception of Marina's insincere apology.

His attitude was telling, and the spectators didn't hesitate to demonstrate their disapproval, stepping back to put distance between themselves and Marina and Colette.

Colette's complexion cycled through various shades of red and purple, the embarrassment palpable. She chastised herself for overestimating Marina. Now, their fates seemed intertwined, making it challenging for her to extricate herself from the situation.

Clinging to a shred of hope, she turned to Marco, attempting to diffuse the situation. "Even if Loraine's necklace is genuine, it doesn't automatically render Marina's fake. Perhaps it's a similar design by pure chance?"

She hoped that Marco would afford Marina some grace, given their sibling relationship.

But Marco merely smirked, his voice icy, "Master Laims crafted the Stellar Galaxy necklace specifically at my behest, to delight Loraine. It's unequivocally unique; the idea of a coincidental design is inconceivable."

With that, he swiveled, extending his hand to Loraine.

Unsure of his intentions but choosing to trust him, Loraine laid



her hand in his.

A subtle smile graced Marco's lips as he drew her closer. He then gently caressed the Stellar Galaxy necklace adorning her neck.

Everyone watched with bated breath, and what ensued was an unanticipated spectacle.

As Marco interacted with the pendant, it gradually morphed, ultimately forming several stars orbiting two diamonds nestled together, mirroring constellations huddled in the infinite cosmos.

Both Loraine and the onlookers were spellbound, their eyes riveted on the exquisite design. They had seen an array of jewelry before, but this level of artistry was a first.

Marco's velvety voice interrupted the mesmerizing silence, "Initially, Master Laims was reluctant to commercialize the Stellar Galaxy. However, convinced by my sincerity, she acquiesced to make an exception for me. She modified the necklace's design, inspired by our narrative."

Loraine was confused, her thoughts filled with Marco's soothing voice as he continued, "Do you understand why I had Master Laims design it in this manner? I intended to offer you a fragment of the galaxy, Loraine. These two stars, nestled so closely, symbolize you and..."

Their eyes locked, and Loraine's cheeks flushed a vivid crimson. In a barely audible whisper, she reminded him, "Remember the occasion."

Given that the banquet was a collaborative event between the Bryant Group and the Universe Group, Marco continued with a wink, "They symbolize that you and I will have a close interaction in this project and signify my earnest desire for a


Chapter 562 His Sincerity



+120 Points at most
deeper collaboration with you, Loraine. Here's hoping the
Universe Group continues to thrive."

His profession of affection was audacious yet subtle.
Surrounded by a multitude of curious eyes and murmurs,
Loraine felt her heartbeat accelerate with every passing second.



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Chapter 563 Marina's Babbling

Marina's eyes were filled with resentment as they darted between the dazzling necklace adorning Loraine's neck and the crowd that encircled her, showering her with praise and admiration. The feel of her counterfeit necklace against her skin felt like a burning rebuke, making her wish she could rip it off and crush it beneath her heel.

Tonight had been progressing smoothly, precisely as Laura had predicted. She was on the brink of reclaiming her status as the darling among her circle of wealthy female friends.

But the moment Loraine stepped into the picture, the whole scenario changed!

Full of indignation and ready to voice her thoughts, Marina caught Marco's glance.


The warmth he had earlier showered upon Loraine was now replaced by a gaze that was frigid and unforgiving. Marina's newly summoned courage dissolved instantaneously. She stuttered, "B-Brother..."

"Marina, I recall warning you that if you stirred up trouble again, I wouldn't be lenient." Marco's voice was frosty.

Marina pleaded pitifully, "Brother, I realize my mistake. Please grant me another chance!"

But Marco had heard enough of her deceit and cut her off sharply, "I've afforded you plenty of chances, but you failed to



 +120 Points at most value them. You weren't invited to tonight's banquet. Leave now, and we'll discuss this later."

Marco hadn't anticipated Marina's interruption at the event. Typically, she and Laura would still be under house arrest, per Liza's orders.

However, tonight's gathering was a celebration, and he had no intention of dampening the mood. He merely wished to dismiss Marina temporarily.

After a brief pause, he added, "Without my authorization, you are forbidden from leaving the house!"

The unpredictability of this troublemaker was a risk. Though Marco was loath to address her, he had to factor in the reputation of the Bryant Group.

As for Colette, Marco didn't spare her a second glance. He summoned security to have the extraneous party removed.

Security arrived promptly and, at Marco's gesture, began to escort Colette away. She resisted, screaming, "By what right are you ejecting me? I possess an invitation!"

Marco's brow furrowed, and he finally deigned to glance at her, as if recalling her existence. He spoke dismissively. "As of now, your invitation is null and void. All ties between the Bryant Group and the Moreau Group are severed. Future collaborations are off the table."

Colette's face turned ashen, the picture of despair, as she submitted to security's removal.

In that moment, Colette deeply regretted entangling herself with Marina. How could she have trusted someone as blatantly inept as Marina!



Following Colette's departure, whispers rippled through the crowd of guests. Wishing to avoid becoming a topic of gossip, Marco took Loraine's hand, preparing to make their exit.

In regards to Marina, Marco, considering Liza's feelings, chose not to have security escort her out. Instead, he cast her a frosty look, a clear directive for her to remove herself.

Just then, a figure obstructed their path. Bella, her face adorned with a pleasant smile, said, "Mr. Bryant, Miss Torres, I was the first to voice my skepticism and disbelief towards Marina and Colette. I've always held that these two individuals are unreliable, so..."

However, Marco paid her no mind, leaning towards Loraine to speak to her, completely overlooking Bella as he moved past her.

"Some shareholders expressed a desire to meet you. Allow me to take you to them," Marco addressed Loraine, not sparing Bella a single word.

This left Bella standing there rigidly, her face morphing into an unflattering expression.

As Bella had eagerly attempted to initiate a conversation only to be blatantly ignored, Marina discovered an outlet for her irritation, releasing a scornful laugh. "Who is so desperate to curry favor? It's a pity no one even acknowledges you! Such a pitiful sycophant!"

With indignation flaring in her chest, Bella retorted with a smirk, "Is that so? At least I wasn't expelled. Marina, Marco just personally asked you to leave. Are you not going, or are you waiting for someone to physically remove you?"

At this, Marina's countenance darkened.



Bella, feeling triumphant, turned to the fawning crowd around her, proclaiming, "Did you all see that? I told you! Cozying up to Marina won't help in collaborating with the Bryant Group! What is she? Not only is she irrelevant to the Bryant Group, but she's also an embarrassing burden even within her own family!"

A wave of fury surged within Marina. Earlier, she had already harbored resentment towards Marco after his public humiliation of her. Despite her innate fear of him, the knowledge that he was merely a bastard child further inflamed her indignation.

How dare an illegitimate child treat her this way!

Furthermore, Bella's taunting only stoked her anger, and Marina found herself unable to restrain her explosive retort. "I didn't even want to attend this damn banquet! The only reason I showed up was to save face for the Bryant family! Who does Marco think he is? Without my mother, he's nothing! He has no authority over the Bryant Group! What's his standing? What right does he have to chastise me, the legitimate daughter of the Bryant family?"

Hearing this, Bella's eyes widened in surprise. She questioned, "What are you implying?"

Was Marina suggesting that Marco's identity was dubious?

A momentary satisfaction filled Marina after her tirade, but the realization of what she had inadvertently revealed made her face turn pale. Frantically scanning the vicinity and not spotting Marco, she hastily excused herself, "I was just babbling! It doesn't mean anything!"

In a fluster, Marina made a quick exit from the scene.

The other socialites chuckled derisively, "Marina's brain isn't





functioning correctly. Look how upset she is. She is just spouting nonsense!"

Marina had cried wolf too many times, and they no longer took her seriously.

Except for Bella.

She mulled over Marina's words with a thoughtful look but maintained her composure for the rest of the banquet.

Upon the conclusion of the evening banquet, Bella entered a luxurious car and addressed the person in the driver's seat, "Dad."

Jefferson responded with a smile, "So, were you able to engage in a conversation with Loraine and Marco?"

Thinking about Marco's dismissal, Bella tensed up and sidestepped the question. Instead, she revealed, "Dad, I have some crucial news to share with you."



Chapter 564 Secret

In the luxury car, Bella hushed her tone and hastily relayed the events she had just been privy to.

Jefferson's eyes narrowed, his face awash with doubt.

After a moment, he said gravely, "Bella, you shouldn't speak such things without evidence. I am no fool."

Seeing that Jefferson was skeptical, Bella's anxiety mounted. "Dad, Marina may be simple-minded, but she would not fabricate such a tale. If there was nothing amiss with Marco's past, would she mention it unwittingly?"

Jefferson contemplated her words with a solemn expression, and then a mischievous grin spread across his face.

"Well, well, well. Seems like we have something on Marco!"

Reminiscing about Marco's audacious behavior earlier, Jefferson's lips curled into a sneer.

"That brat Marco, using his CEO title to look down on us seniors. He dominates the company, dictating every decision, and I've been infuriated by him for quite some time. Now I've finally found a way to deal with him!"

The Bryant Group was the Bryant family's legacy. If Marco's history was indeed murky, it would be irrational for him to take the reins of the Bryant Group. Jefferson did not aim to topple Marco at once, but he certainly intended to wound him severely!

On the other hand, Marina stormed into her home, seething



with anger after the humiliating incident at the feast. As she entered through the doorway, she forcefully threw her purse onto the couch in a fit of rage.

Laura was startled by Marina's tantrum and quickly swung her gaze. Observing that Liza was yet to descend the stairs, she exhaled in relief and stared at her daughter in puzzlement. "Marina, weren't you to join Colette at the elite gathering? What happened?"

Marina's lower lip quivered, tears threatening to spill, as she rushed towards Laura with her grievances.

"What elite gathering? It was obviously a celebration banquet hosted by Bryant Group and Universe Group. And to top it all, I bumped into Marco!"

Laura inhaled sharply and hastily clutched her hand. "You encountered Marco? Did he uncover the necklace incident?"

Marina, overwhelmed with guilt and fury, averted her gaze and dramatically recounted the events of the evening.

Laura's expression darkened at her account, particularly when she learned that Colette had insisted on displaying the necklace. Laura cursed under her breath, "I thought we could reestablish our ties with the elite through the Moreau family, but it appears Colette is an utter imbecile. She not only failed to assist you but further shamed you publicly!"

Marina proceeded to rant about Marco's mistreatment.

"Mom, Marco pays no heed to the Bryant family at all! How much longer do I have to suffer? By rights, I am the legitimate daughter of the Bryant family, while Marco is just a bastard. Still, he has the audacity to challenge me, humiliating me in public!"

Laura chimed in, her words dripping with scorn. "This ungrateful bastard! After being his mother for so long and you being his biological sister, he treats us with such disdain, completely favoring that outsider Loraine in tormenting us!"

After venting their frustrations, Laura settled on the couch, her expression somber. After a moment's reflection, she said, "Initially, I intended to mend your image within a small circle with this counterfeit necklace, and then reclaim our influence by leveraging connections to those wealthy heiresses' families. But as this tactic seems to be ineffective, we need a new approach. We can't let this continue. If we allow Marco to remain victorious, we will have no standing in this family."

Marina, agitated, inquired, "Mom, what should we do? Even if these so-called friends abstain from worsening my current predicament, none of them will assist us!"

Laura reassured her distraught daughter and pondered for a moment before grudgingly dialing some familiar shareholders of the company.

These longtime shareholders had been part of the Bryant Group prior to Marco's takeover. Laura assumed that since she was Mrs. Bryant, they would at least lend her a hand. But as she dialed each number, they either disconnected the call or a house help informed her that the person was not present.

As Laura neared the end of her contact list, her heart was heavy, and she muttered, "A bunch of heartless people!"

Just then, a call came through.

Laura looked at the caller ID flashing on the screen and hesitated before answering. A cheerful, benevolent voice greeted her. "Mrs. Bryant, I am aware of your predicament, and I can lend you a hand."

The straightforward comment took Laura aback.

"Mr. Foster, could you please elaborate?"

"Laura, you're an intelligent woman. I won't sugarcoat it. I possess a method to restore you and your daughter to your former status, but the question is, are you truly determined? If you decide to ally with me, you will inevitably antagonize Marco."

Laura and Marina glanced at each other, their excitement barely concealed. However, Laura still had a shred of caution and lowered her voice in reply.

"Mr. Foster, as long as we can regain our previous prosperity and influence, the cost is inconsequential! But how can I be certain that you can accomplish this?"

They had crossed swords with Marco ages ago. Laura's concern was whether this usually prudent shareholder within the group genuinely had a plan to assist them?

Jefferson let out a chuckle. "Where there's a will, there's a way. There are numerous ways, but the key lies in your sincerity, Mrs. Bryant."

A thought struck Laura, and she hesitated briefly. As she was about to speak, Jefferson's voice echoed once again. "Mrs. Bryant, I am aware that Marco is not your biological son. He's merely an illegitimate child undeserving of the spotlight. Why the hesitation?"

Laura's eyes bulged in shock.

How did Jefferson unearth this buried secret?

Chapter 565 Competing With Marco

Only the Bryant family was privy to the truth about Marco's birth out of wedlock, and it was a certainty that Laura and Liza had no intentions of broadcasting such information.

Laura's inquisitive look promptly settled on Marina.

Marina's eyes sunk guiltily to the floor, steering clear of Laura's piercing gaze. Witnessing this, an understanding washed over Laura. It must have been Marina who inadvertently revealed it at the banquet!

Regardless, criticizing her now would serve no purpose. Furthermore, this revelation might not necessarily have negative consequences.

Laura chose to confront Jefferson directly, "What's your next move, Mr. Foster?"

Noticing her change in stance, Jefferson broke into a satisfied smirk. He scoffed, "That ungrateful Marco has lost touch with his roots after a few years as CEO. He shows no gratitude at all! The Bryant Group belongs to the Bryant family. How dare an illegitimate child compete with the rightful heir?"

His words struck a chord in Laura, provoking a heated response, "Precisely!"

Jefferson further fueled Laura's anger, stating, "Historically, children born out of wedlock held no status. It was your generosity, Mrs. Bryant, that prevented his expulsion. The



Bryant Group is no small venture. It deserves a rightful heir, not a wolf in sheep's clothing with dubious origins. Marco not only forgets your benevolence, but he also suppresses and torments you. It's intolerable, even from an outsider's perspective!"

His words resonated with both Laura and Marina, stirring their memories of Marco's torment, and they nodded in agreement.

Forgetting her culpability in revealing the secret, Marina said in indignation, "Exactly! What rights does Marco, an illegitimate child, have?"

Maintaining a composed demeanor, Laura posed her question to Jefferson, "What's your proposal, Mr. Foster? I will do all in my power, provided it's within my reach."

"Since you are being upfront, I'll be the same. The reason you and Marina are oppressed by Marco is because of your past leniency. You should regain control of Bryant Group and make Marco realize who the true heir is!" Jefferson laughed. "As long as you dare to challenge Marco, I'll be there for you. This way, you'll reclaim your positions, perhaps even ascend to higher ones."

The idea of competing with Marco for control over the Bryant Group left Marina agape in astonishment.

Could it mean she would ascend to the role of Bryant Group's CEO?

Marina's face was a blend of thrill and anxiety. While she wished to humble Marco, she was daunted by the icy look he had given her and doubted her capability to compete with him.

Besides, she preferred the life of a carefree, rich heiress and had no aspirations of managing a massive conglomerate. Recollecting Marco's hectic schedules and constant overtime,

she was wary of being similarly occupied.

However, before she could voice her concerns, Laura was already gleefully agreeing, her eyes ablaze with anticipation. She stated, "Mr. Foster, you are right! The Bryant Group belongs to the Bryant family, and the rightful descendant should call the shots. How can Marco, born out of wedlock, seize the family business?"

Laura had previously pondered Marina taking over, but with Marco's competency, any attempt to overthrow him would only seem ridiculous.

But the situation had now changed. With the aid of Jefferson, a key stakeholder, and considering Marco's background, she was confident in their success!

Once Marina assumed control, it would be their turn to make a mockery of Marco. They'd expel him, forcing even Liza to rely on them.

The prospect thrilled Laura. After a few directives, Jefferson ended the call, promising to coordinate the plan later.

Observing Laura's excited demeanor, Marina expressed her apprehension. Noting Marina's hesitation, Laura comforted her, "Marina, don't worry. You are the legitimate bloodline of the Bryant family. Marco, the child born out of wedlock, certainly cannot surpass you! Once you become the CEO, no one will belittle you anymore!"

Recalling the humiliation she experienced at the party, Marina considered her potential as CEO. If she ran the Bryant Group, she could purchase as many Stellar Galaxy necklaces as she desired. With the entire Bryant fortune at her disposal, no one would ridicule her for wearing imitation jewelry anymore.

With these thoughts in her mind, Marina's determination



solidified.

Consumed by her fantasies, Laura growled, "Those rich ladies in Vagow are all snobs who step on others and flatter those above them. Ever since we lost power, they've been laughing at us. Just wait, once you ascend as CEO of the Bryant Group, they'll be begging for my attention!"

She clasped Marina's hand and implored, "Marina, you are my daughter, far more potent than that illegitimate child! Now that Jefferson is siding with us, what do you have to fear?"

Marina clenched her fists and nodded, her heart brimming with resolve.

She had made up her mind. She would compete with Marco!

