

Chapter 615 Tranquility Before The Storm

Jimmie giving him advice?

As Marco listened, he couldn't help but recall the embarrassing moments he faced when he followed Jimmie's instructions on how to please Loraine. After those incidents, he couldn't bring himself to trust any advice Jimmie gave.

Moreover, it seemed that the so-called "expert in pursuing women" had recently stumbled in his own endeavors.

And Marco said as much to him in a mocking tone, "If your techniques for wooing women were truly effective, why haven't you won over Miss Fowler?"

The mention of Jennie caused Jimmie to choke on his drink which led to him sputtering and coughing heavily.

"What Miss Fowler?" Slater asked in confusion. "Why is it that I don't understand what you guys are talking about? Marco, are you seeking a way to get Loraine? Don't worry, I can teach you. I'm really good at getting women."

The corner of Marco's mouth twitched slightly, but he still managed to keep a straight face as he declined Slater's offer. "You haven't even settled down and yet you want to teach me? Come on."

At this point, Jimmie had recovered his composure. He sighed and rubbed his forehead in exasperation. "Jennie has been fully immersed in her career recently, so... Speaking of which, it's



your fault that we created that CBD project and mall. She's been focusing all her attention on her jewelry store, to the point that she can't even find time for a relationship. But you don't have any right to laugh at me. At least Jennie and I are in a state of ambiguity. But you... you've been pursuing Loraine for so long and you still haven't won her over."

Slater quickly nodded in agreement. "Look," he said to Marco, "if only half your business acumen could be applied to your love life, you and Loraine wouldn't have been running this marathon of love for so long."

Marco cleared his throat, trying but failing to hide his smile. "Well, actually, Loraine has agreed to start over with me."

The incessant chatter from his friends halted abruptly. "Really?!" they chorused in unison.

Marco's smile grew wider. "Well, we're still in the trial period," he shrugged.

Slater's eyes widened in astonishment and he turned to look at the equally surprised Jimmie.

"My goodness, man, are you still the same Marco that we know? You're this ecstatic over just a trial period?"

For crying out loud, this was Marco Bryant! Even though he was no longer the CEO of Bryant Group, with his looks and talent, there were many women out there who would do anything to get him.

Slater couldn't help but sigh, "Indeed, it's said that love can make people lose themselves. Just a simple romantic relationship and Marco is already acting so strangely."

But Marco looked at him with the air of an experienced person and said in a solemn tone, "You haven't been in love, so you



won't understand."

Slater became furious. What the hell did Marco mean by saying he hadn't been in love? He was also highly sought after by ladies of wealthy families in Vagow. And he'd had several girlfriends in the past.

Not wanting to talk to Marco about love anymore, he finally turned to Jimmie for comfort. To his surprise, Jimmie nodded in agreement. "Marco is right. You haven't been in love, so you won't understand."

Slater didn't know what to do with them. Being confronted by both of his friends left him feeling frustrated.

He could understand why Marco had said what he said since at least his pursuit of Loraine was evident to everyone. But Jimmie... When did he start having romantic ambitions?

Could it be related to the Miss Fowler Marco mentioned?

It was at this point that Slater suddenly remembered Jennie Fowler, Loraine's best friend and the heiress of Fowler Group.

As far as he could remember, Jennie was willful and domineering and she often joined forces with Loraine to scold him.

Slater frowned, his expression growing more and more complex. Could it be possible that these girls, whom Jimmie and Marco loved so much, both disliked him?

"Anyway, what's the point of all this romance? The few relationships I've had were so troublesome. It's better for me to be alone or hang out with you guys!" He shrugged in an attempt to divert them away from the current line of discussion. "Look, how about we make plans to go out and have fun these next few days, eh?"

"I'm busy," Marco said without even looking at him.

Slater felt dejected by this response. "Come on, bro, what can you possibly be busy with that would make it impossible for you to hang out with your friends? Weren't you fired from your job? What could be more important than being with friends and loved ones?"

But it was Jimmie who responded to Slater. He patted his shoulder sympathetically, his gaze filled with pity. "When I say you are brainless, I'm not actually insulting you as it is a fact. Even if you don't care about what goes on in the business world, you must have heard about the recent sharp decline in Bryant Group's stock price, haven't you?"

Slater nodded in a daze, and a sly smirk appeared on Jimmie's face. "So, what do you think? Could it be Marco's doing?"

Seeing Marco also smiling calmly, Slater suddenly realized what Jimmie meant. "Oh, I get it now! Well done, Marco! The Bryant family has neither moral nor conscience. You need to teach them a tough lesson!"

Jimmie leaned back in his seat and said leisurely, "With the group's stock price dropping like this, they will soon face a financial crisis, won't they? So, Marco, what are your plans? Why not let the Solar Company intervene and completely suppress Bryant Group?"

But Marco shook his head in disagreement. "Even though I have a hand in the current state of Bryant Group, I don't want to settle it so easily. Marina and the others should not be let off the hook too lightly."

As he poured himself a drink, he spoke with an icy determination. "I've made arrangements. Let them enjoy a moment of tranquility before the storm hits."

Chapter 616 The Position Of CEO

The change in the CEO position not only started heated discussions online, but as well stirred chaos among the shareholders. And of course, Marco played a major role behind the scenes to add more fire to the unrest. With his calculated measures, complete chaos took over the company from inside and out.

Jefferson was unable to sit still any longer at this point, even more so after his fallout with Marina. There was no reason to keep playing it by the book. He eagerly arranged a shareholders' meeting without informing Marina.

The other shareholders did not bother about Marina's presence either. To most of them, she was the cause of the current messy state of the Bryant Group after all. A CEO like Marina who failed to perform adequately would naturally be unable to gain support.

Jefferson prepared well for this moment and was confident he would have no one to oppose him. He walked onto the stage and assumed a pretentious stance with a smile. "Ladies and gentlemen, we all make up the Bryant Group, and it's up to us to safeguard the company. Having seen the recent events, we can't just sit back and do nothing.

Concerning the newly appointed CEO, Marina Bryant, everyone has witnessed what she has done. She is incapable of leading the company to a brighter future. I, on the other hand, hold a 36% stake, even higher than the former majority shareholder, Liza Bryant. I'm currently the biggest shareholder and I put myself

forward to take over the position of CEO in the company."

Then he paused and looked around, waiting for his applause. Suddenly, the door was shoved open and several bodyguards walked in with an elderly woman with gray hair and a gloomy aura.

Although Liza had left the limelight for years, her prestige still commanded respect. Her entrance silenced the meeting room. She walked in with a timid-looking Marina and Laura.

Jefferson's eyes widened in shock for a second the moment he saw Liza, but then he quickly narrowed them again and put on a fake warm smile and greeted her politely, "Madam, you are quite elderly now, why would you stress yourself in attending the shareholders' meeting?"

Liza's eyes flickered over him disdainfully then she snorted. "You've been in the Bryant Group since the days my son was still here, Jefferson, and I always respected you. How come you've become so ambitious now and are trying to snatch my granddaughter's seat for yourself?"

Jefferson's smile faded. No longer bothering to conceal his intentions, he ridiculed, "We backed Winifred in establishing the company because he was capable of doing so. Now, the Bryant family has chosen an unfit successor named Marco to become the CEO, ignoring the wisdom and experience of us elders. We aren't allowed to voice our opinions, huh?"

Liza's expression turned grim as Jefferson went on, his voice dripping disdain.

"Still, Marco managed to bring prosperity to the Bryant Group so I brushed over it. But now, allowing someone like Marina, who's more a liability than an asset to take over the group? Is your intention to destroy the Bryant Group?" Jefferson sighed, feigning care for the company. "It is not my intention to have

a fallout with you, madam. However, you've seen all the messes Marina has made since becoming CEO. All I'm doing is for the sake of the company. Would you want to watch it get destroyed under her leadership?"

Marina turned red with anger behind Liza. She was about to retort but was quickly shut down by a sharp glance from Liza. She then quietly bent her head in defeat.

After subduing Marina, Liza spoke, her tone dripping with arrogance. "The company is called the Bryant Group because it belongs to the Bryant family, Jefferson. You know exactly what you're planning. You don't need to fake this righteous act."

Jefferson flashed her another fake smile. "Why don't we ask the shareholders if they'd be willing to accept an incompetent waste as the CEO? I am not here to seek your opinion, madam. I speak based on my shares. Removing Marina is not out of the question."

Liza sneered, "Based on your shares, you say? Unfortunately, Marina transferred 10% of her shares to me. Holding 45% of the shares, I remain the largest shareholder. It remains up to me to decide who becomes the Bryant Group's CEO, and it has nothing to do with an outsider such like you."

"What?" Jefferson paled, and his eyes widened as he stared at Liza in shocked disbelief.

He didn't anticipate this move! And he knew that even if he tried to gather the scattered shares of the remaining shareholders, he still wouldn't surpass Liza's. He had failed!

A while passed with Jefferson stuck with a grim expression on his face, then finally he turned to Liza and said harshly, "You're in power. Fine, I won't touch the CEO position. However, I remain the second-largest shareholder. That much remains true. Therefore, I expect an explanation for the significant drop in



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the stock prices of the Bryant Group. Else, Marina would have to resign from the CEO position and compensate us for the losses!"



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Chapter 617 The Importance Of Marco

Following Jefferson's speech, the shareholders wasted no time in joining the cause. "That's right, madam. The decline in the Bryant Group's stock price has had the biggest impact on us, the shareholders. While your family may be wealthy enough to withstand it, you cannot just disregard our situation."

"Exactly, you have to provide an explanation today!"

Instantly, the meeting grew chaotic as everyone began demanding answers.

Liza's face darkened as she observed the increasing tensions in the room. Sick of the noise, she finally raised her head and shot a cold glare at everyone. Instantly, the voices began to die down.

Liza spoke when it was finally quiet. "I will provide answers as soon as I can. However, the meeting is adjourned for now."

Jefferson scoffed in defiance and was about to speak again, but Liza shot him a sharp glance, and her bodyguards stepped forward menacingly, glaring at him as well. The other disgruntled shareholders kept their mouths shut when they saw this. Jefferson then stormed out of the room after a disdainful snort, and almost immediately, the rest of the shareholders followed after him.

Liza sat with her head bent in the office chair, feeling a sense of powerlessness she had not felt in ages. With a heavy sigh, she massaged her temples. She looked visibly exhausted and

felt a deep migraine coming on.

She found herself reminiscing about the time when she had insisted the idea of Marco stepping up as CEO. He had never left her feeling as mentally drained as she felt at this moment. On the contrary, the boy always easily took control of every situation, making it possible for her to retire easily and begin to enjoy her later years in peace.

The Bryant Group, under Marco's leadership, had rarely ever encountered any setbacks. This made her believe that things would still continue to run smoothly under Marina's leadership as well. After all, Marco and Marina had both been raised by the Bryant family. They were to be equally capable, logically speaking.

However, with Marco gone, a bunch of devious individuals sprung out of the shadows. Now Liza finally realized Marco's presence was the only reason the Bryant Group had remained stable, and she was able to get into a peaceful life.

His undeniable abilities were what had kept them afloat all this while. Unfortunately, the Bryant family had acted rashly, causing chaos. At the moment, only Marco was capable enough to return the company to its former glory.

Liza was getting old. She no longer had the stamina and courage to handle such matters. And as for Marina... Liza's migraine intensified. If not for the silly girl, the Bryant Group wouldn't have been thrown into so much chaos! She had to make a decision to keep the company alive.

Liza was a decisive woman. Her gaze hardened as she finally said, "We have to find a way to reach out to Marco and get him to return to the company to temporarily assume the CEO position."

Marina had already been feeling smug about how Liza

pressurized the shareholders. However, when she heard Liza's words now, her smugness faded and her eyes widened in shock. She protested immediately, "Have you lost your mind, grandmother? Marco is a lowly bastard! Why would you want him to return? I am the Bryant Group's CEO, not him! You drove him away yourself, why do you keep thinking of him?"

To Marina, Marco was a far greater threat than Jefferson. If he was brought back, she feared he would completely replace her.

Laura felt the same and immediately jumped in to persuade. "Mom, please remember Marco is not part of the Bryant family! If you allow him back, you'd just be inviting an outsider into our home! If we allow the Bryant Group to remain in the hands of an outsider, what would others think of the Bryant family? It is totally unacceptable!"

Liza shot a piercing glare at Laura and Marina. "Do not think for a moment I have brushed over the reason for this sharp decline in stock prices."

Marina immediately averted her gaze to the side in shame as she heard this.

Liza scoffed and went on, "If you had not fired Marco's assistant and deliberately withheld his salary after driving him away and causing such a large scale resignation, the Bryant Group would not be in this current situation! You are the cause of everything!"

Both mother and daughter remained defiant. Laura shot back, "Well, if we're looking at that, then Marco is still the main culprit. He has probably been secretly working with Carl to sabotage us. We finally found a way to rid of him. Please don't act crazy and bring him back."

Liza sighed and shook her head. "Idiots. I no longer have control over the situation. We either return Marco to salvage



the situation, or the Bryant Group is finished, and we go down together."

Marina and Laura saw the seriousness in Liza's eyes and dared not speak any further.

Then after sitting a while longer, Liza got off her chair with the support of her cane and stared at them intensely. "You both caused this, so find a way to get Marco back immediately. Else, you would have to bear the brunt of the losses this time."

After that, she walked out the meeting room with her bodyguards, leaving Laura and Marina pale-faced, standing in the room.

"What are we going to do now, mom? I don't even know where to find Marco, let alone how to get him to come back!" Marina was filled with worry and fear. "Plus, do you think he'd still be willing to help after how we treated him?"

Laura's face turned grim as she thought for a while. "The boy is a bastard who was left with nothing after getting driven from the Bryant family. He's probably living a miserable life right now. I'm sure he won't refuse us so long as we offer him some benefits."

Marina's head bobbed nervously. Then she hesitantly pulled out her phone and dialed Marco's line.



Chapter 618 A Kept Man

Marina kept dialing Marco's number, only to be met with silence each time.

She persisted, only to discover that he had blocked her calls.

A cloud of anger washed over Marina, her face turning stormy. She stamped her foot in vexation, exclaiming, "Mother, look at this jerk! He dares to act superior after everything that's transpired! He actually blocked me!"

Laura, hearing the unending dial tone, offered a comforting suggestion, "Maybe you should try to reach him with my phone?"

Marina pressed her lips together and nodded. She took Laura's phone and dialed the same number, only to meet the same fate —no connection.

Marina's expression darkened further, while Laura simmered with rage. Marco's ingratitude incensed her. At the same time, considering Liza's directive, they were left worrying about how they could possibly get in touch with Marco.

At that moment, a janitor entered the room, intending to clean. Noticing the room wasn't empty, she immediately apologized and started to retreat. An idea sparked in Laura's head as she swiftly intercepted the janitor, persuading her to lend them her phone.

They redialed Marco's number, their gazes pinned nervously on the screen.

After three rings, the call was finally answered. Marco's

detached voice floated from the other end. "Who is this?"

Seizing the opportunity, Marina immediately responded, "Brother, it's me, Marina! Please, don't hang up, just hear me out!"

Marco hesitated, his voice chilling further, "What do you want?"

"Brother, since you were ousted from the Bryant family, I know it must be hard for you. We've been siblings for so long; surely there are still some lingering emotions. Given our past relationship, I want to help." Fearing that he might cut her off, Marina hurriedly put forth her proposition. "Come back and be my executive assistant. You'll manage the group's affairs just as before. Of course, I'll remain the CEO, and you'll be my assistant!"

Convinced that her appeal to Marco's sentiment and rationality would sway him into gratefully accepting her offer, Marina's tone oozed arrogance as she added, "I can offer you a monthly salary of \$9, 000. I wouldn't extend such a generous offer to anyone else, but I'm doing this because of our former sibling bond!"

For a moment, there was no response from Marco's end. After what seemed like an eternity, a contemptuous laugh broke the silence.

The derision in the laughter was clear, even to Marina. Flustered and irked, she retorted, "What are you laughing at? I'm offering you a chance to work!"

"Marina, I never thought that a few days as a CEO would make you even more senseless. The Bryant Group isn't faring well, so Grandma has sent you to plead with me to return and salvage the situation, hasn't she?"

The realization that Marco had seen through her scheme made



Marina's heart plummet. Her face hardened, but she forced herself to maintain a strong front. "So what? You should consider it a privilege that we're willing to hire you back!"

"Is that so? Then, keep that 'privilege' to yourself. I've made it clear; I've severed all ties with the Bryant family. Even if the Bryant Group's stocks plummet, it won't concern me."

Marina's face flushed with humiliation as she retorted angrily, "Marco, you're blind to what's good for you! It is now public knowledge that you are a lowly bastard. You've not only offended the Bryant family, you've also been expelled from the Bryant Group. Who do you think would dare hire you now? I'm offering you a lifeline, but if you're too arrogant to grasp it, then prepare to wallow at the bottom for the rest of your life!"

Marco questioned with calm defiance, "What nonsense are you spouting? The Universe Group isn't afraid of the Bryant family. I'm currently with Loraine, and my life is far easier than it was at the Bryant Group."

There was a trace of pride and satisfaction in his otherwise indifferent voice.

Hearing Loraine's name sparked a surge of anger in Marina. "Marco, are you truly content with being Loraine's kept man and living off her for the rest of your life?"

Much to her astonishment, Marco chuckled, "That's precisely what I want."

Marina's face twisted with frustration. She couldn't provoke him with her taunts, and her efforts to rile him were in vain. Instead, she found herself consumed by her own rage. Before she could spit out another retort, Marco ended the call.

Marina screamed in frustration, "Who does he think he is? Does he fancy himself as something extraordinary? I, the



distinguished daughter of the Bryant family, personally offered that illegitimate child an opportunity to return, and he had the audacity to hang up on me! What a nerve he has!"

The janitor couldn't help but think that Marina appeared far more uncouth compared to Marco. However, fearing her phone might be the victim of Marina's fury, she quickly asked for it back and hurriedly exited.

Feeling deflated, Marina turned anxiously to Laura. "Mom, what should we do now? If Marco doesn't return, will Grandma strip away my shares? I can't return to those days of living at someone's mercy!"

Laura's expression hardened as a thought struck her. "Marco isn't in the company right now. How does he know about the Bryant Group's troubles and that your grandmother wants you to bring him back? Unless he has a hand in all this!"

Marina was skeptical. "But Marco is just an outsider now. Does he really hold that kind of power?"

"Who knows? But if we can pin the blame for the Bryant Group's plummeting stock price on him, once your grandma finds out, she won't welcome him back, and our shares won't be jeopardized," Laura declared resolutely.

Marina repeatedly nodded, acknowledging the wisdom in Laura's words.

Not long after, several online news outlets started featuring an explosive headline that quickly topped the trending list: "Stunning Insider Scoop on the Tumbling Stock Price of The Bryant Group!"



Chapter 619 Secret Dealing

Inside the CEO office of Universe Group, Loraine was busy reviewing new proposals after a successful food exhibition trial when a knock on the door disrupted her concentration.

The public relations department head stepped into the room, wearing a troubled expression.

"Miss Torres, we have a situation," he announced.

Loraine looked up, curiosity piqued. "What's the matter?"

He sighed heavily. "The Bryant Group has been facing a string of issues recently, and they've just become a trending topic once again. The negative publicity is far from ideal. I believe it's time we reconsider our association with them."

Given the recent debacle surrounding the Bryant Group, it wasn't unexpected for such concerns to surface within their company. What caught Loraine's attention, however, was the mention of a trending topic.

"What trending topic are you referring to?" she queried.

"It's a leak claiming that the former Bryant Group CEO, Marco Bryant, was not just ousted due to his background but also for a more severe transgression. Allegedly, he exploited personal relationships and divulged sensitive company information during the collaboration with Universe Group. Even after his dismissal, it's said that he deliberately sabotaged several projects, leading to the Bryant Group's complete dysfunction and a consequential stock market crash."

As he relayed this information, he kept stealing glances at Loraine's expression.

Ever since she took over the Universe Group, Loraine had developed a close partnership with the Bryant Group.

The news leak insinuated her as the personal relationship Marco had taken advantage of.

Everyone was aware of Marco's attempts to win Loraine's favor. As such, this revelation sparked doubt among many within Universe Group about whether Loraine had used Marco's position for personal benefits.

But that was only a subsidiary concern. The primary issue was the potential harm this scandal could inflict on the Universe Group, leading to suggestions of cutting ties with the Bryant Group for self-preservation.

The news left Loraine's expression cold.

Misinterpreting her reaction as disapproval of the suggested severance, the department head cleared his throat before continuing, "The Bryant Group's shareholders, many of whom have lost significant investments, are infuriated. They've taken to social media to express their anger, condemning Marco with severe criticism. Some accuse him of treachery, blaming him for the stock price crash and demanding he be held accountable. Miss Torres, if you maintain an association with him, there's a high risk that the scandal will affect you."

Loraine responded with a sneer, "The situation's blown out of proportion incredibly quickly. Clearly, someone's manipulating this. I'm sure there's a significant number of people jumping on the bandwagon to criticize me as well, isn't there?"

The department head squirmed uncomfortably, reluctant to

confirm her suspicion.

Reading his reaction, Loraine knew she was right. Without any blame towards the nervous man, she picked up her phone to see the online reaction herself.

As she suspected, she was now the subject of substantial criticism, painted as a femme fatale responsible for seducing Marco, leading him astray and causing the downfall of the Bryant Group.

Loraine managed a smile, though her annoyance was clear to see.

Observing her expression, the department head was quick to console her. "Internet users have a tendency to exaggerate. They don't have the full picture. Don't let their words affect you! What should our next step be? Should we attempt to silence these comments?"

Loraine dismissed the idea with a shake of her head. "Silence them? Why should we? That would only make me look guilty."

She paused momentarily before revealing a sly grin. "However, I won't stand by and let Marco and me take unjust criticism. Direct the public relations department to disclose all the particulars of the Universe Group's collaboration with the Bryant Group. Let's address every issue head-on. Despite Marco's willingness to compromise during our collaboration, I refrained from taking advantage of him. Our partnership has always been mutually beneficial."

The department head was awestruck by Loraine's resolve. He stood there, absorbing her confidence.

Meeting his gaze, Loraine added, "Don't fret, you'll all receive overtime pay for this."

His face blossomed into a grin at this, and he bobbed his head in agreement before dashing off to execute her instructions.

Loraine sat in contemplation, mulling over the unfolding drama. Her thoughts strayed to Marco, and a frown of concern furrowed her brow. Resolving to act, she picked up her phone and dialed his number.

Marco answered almost instantly, a note of surprise in his voice. "Why are you calling me at this hour?" he inquired.

Loraine hesitated, unsure if she should be upfront about the ongoing situation, but Marco beat her to it. "Is it because the trending topic is causing a stir?" he proposed.

"Yes... I've already set people in motion to manage it. Are you holding up okay?"

Her evident concern warmed Marco. "Don't fret. It's just Marina and Laura's meddling. I'm not bothered by it," Marco reassured her.

Marina and Laura might have deemed him worthless, left with nothing but a reliance on Loraine, but Marco was unfazed. He had already planned his next move and wasn't letting their tactics disrupt him.

Continuing with her line of concern, Loraine asked, "That's good to hear. Where are you right now?"

Clearing his throat, Marco responded, "I'm currently house hunting."

Taken aback, Loraine realized her oversight.

Of course, when Marco was ousted, all his properties would have been seized. How could she have neglected to consider his

living conditions?

"Send me the address; I'll join you immediately," Loraine offered, regretting her oversight.



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