

Chapter 734 Loraine's Retaliation

Loraine was standing at the doorway holding a water jug, her expression icy and stern. She cast a brief glance at Laura and Marina before stepping into the room.

The mother and daughter felt a lingering sense of intimidation, and they involuntarily stepped back to let her pass. But then, the implication of Loraine's presence soon dawned on them and their expressions turned sour.

Unable to contain her curiosity, Marina asked, "Loraine, what are you doing here?"

"I'm taking care of my boyfriend, of course," Loraine scoffed. "As for you two, you came here to disturb a patient without permission. What's the meaning of such nonsense?"

Boyfriend?!

Laura and Marina exchanged shocked glances. They could hardly believe their ears.

They had assumed that Loraine had long since abandoned Marco, but here she was!

It seemed she had only briefly stepped out to get him some water.

What puzzled them even more was the timing. Why did Loraine choose to return just when they were badmouthing her in Marco's presence?

But since they were not the kind of people that could feel any form of abashment, they didn't dwell too much on the fact that they were caught gossiping about Loraine behind her back. Their primary worry now was how they would be able to take Marco away while Loraine was around.

Loraine walked past the two of them and went straight to Marco's bedside. Then she poured some warm water into a cup and blew on it to cool it down before offering it to Marco. "Why didn't you call me when you were being bothered by these crazy people? Besides, this is a hospital, and there is enough security here," she lightly berated him.

Marco, who had now gone back to being obedient and docile with Loraine's return, lowered his head and replied in a meek tone, "I won't forget next time."

Loraine turned to look at the mother and daughter who were still standing there and staring in disbelief. "Do you two need me to call security to escort you out?" she asked them.

Marina, already irritated by being labeled as "crazy people", became even more incensed. "What gives you the right to chase us away? This is a hospital!" she retorted angrily.

But a thought suddenly occurred to her, and she quickly added, "Oh, I understand now. You're feeling threatened. You're scared that I'll steal him away from you. That's why you're in such a hurry to kick me out! Well, I'm younger than you, and I've known him since we were children. No wonder you're so jealous and scared of me."

Loraine found Marina's triumphant demeanor very amusing. "Jealous of you?" she laughed. "Marina, has the current state of Bryant Group finally driven you insane or what? What do you have that could possibly make me jealous?"

Marina's face turned red with a mix of embarrassment and frustration.

The current dismal state of Bryant Group had become a thorn in her side, constantly causing her embarrassment. She had always believed that becoming the head of the corporation would allow her to outshine Loraine. But the reality had turned out to be very different. Bryant Group had been on a downward spiral for some time now, and not only had she failed to surpass Loraine, she had also faced harsh criticism.

Fueled by anger and resentment, Marina gritted her teeth and said, "Regardless, you have no right to chase us away! This is a hospital! Who the hell do you think you are?"

Loraine couldn't help but chuckle. This reminded her of a similar scenario from the past, though their situations were now reversed. She just never expected that she would hear Marina utter such statements to her one day.

"Well," she said with a smirk, "this hospital is funded by the Torres family, and if I recall correctly, you once threatened to expel me from a hospital owned by Bryant Group. So, what I'm doing now is simply giving you a taste of your own medicine."

After Aldo underwent surgery in this hospital, the Torres family decided to invest in the hospital, effectively fulfilling the ninth-generation robot confidentiality agreement with the Solar Company. Moreover, her call for them to leave was very reasonable. Even without the capital investment that her family had injected into the hospital, she still had the right to ask them to leave based on the fact that she was the recognized guardian of the patient.

Meanwhile, Marina's face immediately displayed her guilt. It seemed she also remembered the time she tried to use her influence against Loraine. But she had never been one to

express regret or even apologize.

Instead, she squared her shoulders and stubbornly retorted, "Well, I couldn't get rid of you back then, and you can't get rid of me now. If you try it, I'll expose your bullying tactics!"

But Loraine remained unfazed and instead, calmly stated, "You couldn't get rid of me back then because I came to the hospital to visit my family member. So, what brings you here today? If you've come to disturb the patient, I can certainly kick you out."

Marco, who was the patient she was referring to, quickly concurred by clearing his throat.

Marina was left speechless. When Laura saw Loraine reaching for her phone to call security, she cried out anxiously, "Loraine, for crying out loud, we're here to visit Marco! We're his family. How can the visit of family members be considered as disturbance?"

But Loraine had already sent a message to security. In less than a minute, they arrived at the scene. Even from outside the room, they could hear Laura's aggressive and unreasonable arguments.

When they got in, Laura quickly informed them that she and Marina were Marco's family. The security men were confused. So they turned to Marco and asked him, "Mr. Bryant, are these two truly your family members?"

Lying comfortably in the hospital bed, Marco's expression was cold and devoid of any emotion as he cast an icy glance at the mother and daughter. "I don't know them, and I have no relationship with them whatsoever," he told the security. "Kindly help me by asking these people who are unrelated to me to leave this premises. They've severely disrupted my rest."

The security personnel no longer hesitated. In spite of Laura's

and Marina's protests and struggles, they stepped forward and escorted the mother and daughter out.

As they were being dragged out, Laura vented her anger and frustration. "Marco, you heartless bastard! Just wait and see. I won't let you and that wretched Loraine get away with this!"

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Inside the hospital room, a sense of tranquility prevailed. Loraine gently closed the door behind her as she returned to Marco's bedside, continuing her caring task of assisting him with drinking water.

Marco, though maintaining a calm exterior, was inwardly delighted.

His recent gestures of affection seemed to have borne fruit. Loraine was now willingly taking care of him without any prodding, serving his meals and quenching his thirst.

He decided not to reveal this newfound advantage. Instead, he accepted the glass of water she offered, sipping obediently. Seizing the opportunity, he clasped her hand, tilted his head back, and gazed into her eyes, his expression bright and affectionate.

"Loraine, I'm truly delighted that you don't find me repulsive," he confessed with a soft smile.

Loraine, concerned that Marco might have been affected by the words of the mother-daughter duo from earlier, furrowed her brow. She reassured him gently, "Please don't pay any attention to what Marina and her mother said."

Lowering her gaze to Marco's delicate features, her heart raced. She reached out, cradling his face with her hand, and spoke in a hushed tone filled with sincerity. "I appreciate you for who you are as a person, and that won't change regardless of your

circumstances. Whether you're prosperous or facing adversity, my feelings for you remain unwavering."

A shadow briefly crossed Marco's eyes, a dangerous glint Loraine failed to notice, like a predator preparing to strike its prey.

Loraine, much like Marco, wasn't skilled at expressing her feelings directly, especially with such straightforward declarations.

However, her words conveyed her genuine desire to provide him with a sense of security.

Loraine felt the intensity of Marco's gaze and averted her eyes uncomfortably, attempting to lighten the atmosphere playfully. "Honestly, I prefer you when you're down on your luck. You're so much more obedient and sensible."

As she made this comment, a hint of guilt briefly flashed in Marco's eyes.

Should he come clean now about his true identity as the CEO of the Solar Company?

The moment felt right, and he knew that the longer he delayed, the more complicated the explanation would become.

However, just as he cleared his throat to begin explaining, Loraine's phone rang, abruptly interrupting the moment.

Loraine glanced apologetically at Marco, retrieved her phone, and noticed an email.

Recognizing the sender, she raised an eyebrow, chuckling softly.

Marco missed his chance to confess and sighed inwardly. He then inquired with genuine concern, "What's going on?"

"It seems like the Bryant Group is up to something again," she remarked with irony. She continued reading the message, her brows furrowing slightly as she went through the contents. "They're hosting a banquet, supposedly to maintain cooperation with both parties, and they've invited me."

Although she wasn't entirely sure about the Bryant Group's ulterior motives, she had a strong sense that it couldn't be anything good.

Recently, the Universe Group had been gradually distancing itself from the Bryant Group, but due to their previous entanglements, progress had been slower than desired. However, terminating the contract was only a matter of a day or two. It seemed the Bryant Group had sensed something amiss and was now acting out of desperation.

Marco sneered, recalling the visit from Laura and her daughter earlier. "This is undoubtedly the doing of the Bryant family, attempting to cling to the Universe Group."

This turn of events further confirmed that the Bryant Group was indeed in a precarious position.

A thought struck Loraine. "Well, I can use this banquet as an opportunity to have a candid conversation with Liza. I'll make it clear that our cooperation with the Bryant Group was because of you, and now that you've left the Bryant Group, there's no need to continue it."

Although she could have delegated this task to someone within her company, she saw an opportunity to let Marco express his frustrations at the banquet. It made sense to seize such an opportunity.

With a snort, she added, "The Bryants have some nerve coming to make a scene in front of you. This time, you and I will attend

the banquet together. Let's see how their faces change when they realize the contract is about to be terminated!"

Marco's eyes brightened with approval as he nodded in agreement. "Alright."

Yet, a concern gnawed at him, and he hesitated as he looked down at his injured leg. "But my mobility is limited at the moment. If I attend as your escort, won't it be embarrassing for you?"

Loraine, however, reached out and held his hand, offering reassurance. "Your limited mobility is only temporary, not a lifelong condition. Besides, your injury occurred while protecting me. How could that ever be an embarrassment?"

Marco was about to express his gratitude when Loraine leaned in suddenly and planted a tender kiss on his lips, effectively silencing any further words.

Her voice, as soft as a soothing melody, assured him, "Don't worry, even if you need a wheelchair at the time, I'll push it for you."

Loraine chuckled, her tone laced with pride. "Besides, even in a wheelchair, you'll exude more dignity than the conniving Bryants."

In that moment, Marco gazed at her in a daze. Since leaving the Bryant family and inadvertently concealing his true identity as the CEO of the Solar Company, he had witnessed both the darkness and beauty of human nature.

Some had treated him with disdain, much like the Bryant family, while others, like Loraine, had remained unwavering in their support, regardless of his fortune or misfortune.

An overwhelming surge of emotion washed over Marco, and he

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pulled Loraine into a passionate embrace.

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Chapter 736 Feeding Water

In this tender moment, the kiss between Marco and Loraine transcended the ordinary, carrying with it the depth of Marco's complex emotions.

Their gaze locked in a steady and unwavering connection, Marco felt a rush of feelings surging within him, threatening to drown everything else around him.

Loraine, lost in the depths of Marco's eyes, found herself reaching for his shoulders, her eyes fluttering closed. She surrendered herself to the torrent of emotions flowing through their passionate kiss.

Normally composed and self-assured, Loraine seemed to lose her sense of control whenever she was near Marco.

Her heart raced like the beat of a drum, syncing with the warmth of Marco's breath. Every part of her body responded to his touch, familiar yet irresistible emotions washing over her.

As their lips parted after the kiss, Loraine's eyes remained hazy, taking a moment to regain her composure. She looked at Marco's slightly swollen lips and felt a flush creep up her cheeks.

Clearing her throat with a touch of coquettishness, she teased, "Why are you such an incorrigible flirt?"

They had been discussing important matters, but Marco never missed a chance to flirt.

Loraine's breath quickened as she suppressed the tingling

sensation in her body, keeping her demeanor composed.

Marco, however, met her response with innocence, stating, "I'm not being incorrigible. You kissed me first. I couldn't help myself."

Unable to conceal her discomfort, Loraine shifted slightly.

She caught sight of the water jug on the table and poured herself a glass of water, drinking as she tried to mask her earlier bashfulness.

But Marco wasn't one to back down. He playfully chided, "Isn't that water for me? How come you're keeping it all to yourself?"

With a blush on her cheeks, Loraine reluctantly handed him the glass, avoiding his gaze.

Marco, unfazed, leaned in to sip from the glass she offered, the soft sound of drinking filling the room. Loraine, her thoughts wandering, glanced down and realized that the glass was already empty.

She stammered, "... I'll get more."

Before she could rise, Marco gently grabbed her wrist, pulling her closer.

The glass slipped from her grasp, rolling under the bed, but neither of them paid it any mind.

Amidst the rolling sound of the glass beneath the bed, Marco once again captured her lips, silencing any further words.

This time, Marco had a clear purpose in mind as he kissed her with passion, bypassing all barriers and diving deep into the moment.

Loraine then realized that, along with Marco's tongue, there was a hint of sweetness — the water he had sipped.

He shared half of the water he had sipped, using this intimate gesture to feed her.

Loraine's face flushed with embarrassment as their tongues met once more, passing the water between them playfully, tracing their intertwined mouths, leaving a teasing, sensual sensation.

As they shared this fleeting moment, Marco, still longing for more, gently explored her lips again, savoring every precious second.

Finally, he released her lips. Unable to contain herself, Loraine playfully punched him.

But to Marco, this was just part of the flirtatious game, and he maintained his innocence. "I thought you might still be thirsty," he said with feigned innocence.

Loraine was left at a loss for words, unable to retort, and simply stared at him, her embarrassment evident.

With a soft chuckle, Marco leaned closer, his breath warming her ear.

"The water is sweet."

Predictably, her ear turned a deeper shade of red.

Loraine couldn't help but feel dumbfounded. Where had the aloof, tongue-tied Marco from before gone? The current Marco was playful and coquettish, and she found herself unable to resist his advances.

His hand, wrapped around her waist, tightened, suggesting he

had something in mind. Loraine's heart raced, and just as she thought he was about to make another move, a knock at the door interrupted them. A nurse entered the room, momentarily blocking their view. "Mr. Bryant, it's time to change your bandages."

Taking advantage of the nurse's presence, Loraine practically leaped out of Marco's embrace, coughing awkwardly. Her words stumbled as she hastily said, "I... I'll leave you to change the bandages first. I'll come back to check on you later."

As Loraine escaped from the room, Marco broke into a smile, the earlier gloom brought on by Laura and her daughter seeming to have dissipated.

Once Loraine had left, Marco's expression grew serious

as he began to speculate about the Bryant Group's invitation.

After he left the Bryant Group, their projects either failed or were taken over by him. So why would they suddenly seek cooperation with Loraine now?

He had an instinctive feeling that this so-called banquet was far from simple. After some thought, he sent a message to his subordinates, instructing them to investigate the organizer of this Bryant Group banquet.

Regardless of the conspiracy that might lie ahead for him and Loraine, he wouldn't allow the other side to succeed!

Chapter 737 Liza's Plan

Laura and Marina's hospital expulsion left them simmering with frustration, their complaints echoing in the air. They'd come dangerously close to a showdown with hospital security before deciding that retreat was the wisest course of action.

Their wallets had grown thin from the expense of gathering information about Marco. A luxurious hotel was out of the question. Reluctantly, they made their way back to the Bryant estate, secretly hoping that Liza wouldn't slam the door in their faces – at least not just yet.

Even if they secured temporary refuge, their predicament remained unchanged. Marco's return to the Bryant family was a distant dream, one that could only lead to their swift eviction for failing their mission.

Marina's face contorted into a bitter expression, and she sighed, "Mom, your brilliant idea didn't just fail to bring Marco back – it made us the laughingstock of Loraine's cruel jest. What's our next move?"

Laura seethed, her frustration evident. "I can't believe Marco would willingly play second fiddle to Loraine instead of seizing the CEO position. He's traded his dignity for a pitiful existence!"

Despite their anger and disappointment, no alternative solutions presented themselves.

Marco was proving to be an elusive quarry, evading their every attempt.

Their grim musings were interrupted by the sight of Liza

descending the grand staircase. She stood there, an imposing figure, gazing down at the mother and daughter with a stern expression. "Why have you returned? Have you resolved the matter? Is Marco willing to come back?"

Laura and Marina couldn't muster the courage to confess their failure. Instead, they stuttered, "W-We've tracked down Marco, and we're working tirelessly to persuade him to return."

Liza had long recognized the limitations of these two. Just by observing their demeanor, she could tell that their mission hadn't been a success. Disapproval emanated from her as she forcefully slammed her cane onto the marble floor, sending a chilling tremor through their spines.

"You two are utterly inept. I knew from the very beginning that relying on the likes of you would never suffice."

In truth, Liza wasn't completely oblivious to the impracticality of Laura's plan. However, given the precarious state of the Bryant Group, it appeared there were no better alternatives.

Unless, of course, a miracle were to occur. Yet, she had more faith in Marco returning to wed Marina than in Marina suddenly gaining competence.

At this point, Liza's primary concern wasn't even about Marina assuming the role of CEO anymore. Her sole focus was on luring Marco back and minimizing the damage. She was prepared to employ any means necessary to secure the future of the Bryant Group.

The mother and daughter trembled with fear, silenced by a sense of powerlessness despite their grievances.

After berating them for some time, Liza finally paused, releasing a weary sigh. She cast a disdainful glare at the mother and daughter before speaking icily. "Your timing

couldn't be more fortuitous. The company has informed me of an upcoming banquet to foster relations with the Universe Group. I've already accepted the invitation, and I've noticed that both Loraine and Marco are on the guest list."

Laura instinctively straightened in her seat upon hearing this, knowing that Liza wouldn't mention it without reason.

As expected, the elderly matriarch chuckled with a sense of satisfaction before explaining, "I've arranged for someone to spill wine on Marco during the banquet. This will force him to go to the lounge to change his clothes. Marina, it will be your responsibility to entice him in the lounge."

A cunning glimmer sparked in Liza's cloudy old eyes as she continued, "Once the trap is set, I refuse to believe we won't capture him. And if you were to bear his child, it would be even more advantageous. This way, I can groom a Bryant family heir to take over the Bryant Group, with or without Marco. We'll thrive!"

Seeing that Liza had meticulously planned everything, Marina stared wide-eyed in astonishment. It took her a moment to gather the courage to vehemently protest, "I won't do it! I am a daughter of the Bryant family, not a commodity to be traded..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Liza fixed her with a cold and oppressive gaze. Under the intensity of that penetrating stare, Marina faltered and couldn't help but voice her concerns. "Grandmother, what if someone discovers our scheme? I'll lose all my dignity!"

Liza scoffed dismissively, "Dignity? Do you still possess it? Do you think I don't care about the family's reputation? But have you ever considered the disgraceful actions you've committed in the past?"

Marina found herself without a rebuttal, feeling wronged and

resentful. Liza continued, "I've given you numerous opportunities. If you could have convinced Marco to return for marriage, that would have been acceptable. But since you failed, I have to take action."

Seeing Marina still wore an unhappy expression, Liza spoke coldly. "Remember who you are, Marina, the daughter of the Bryant family. Still discontented? Recall when you willingly compromised your status by sending those compromising photos to Marco's assistant? Why didn't you concern yourself with your dignity then? Marco's conditions are far superior to that assistant's. You have no reason to feel aggrieved," she added, her voice resolute.

Despite this, Marina remained defiant, weakly attempting to argue, "But..."

"No buts! Marina, you've enjoyed the Bryant family's favor for so long. It's time for you to repay the Bryant family. This matter is settled, and there's no room for negotiation!"

Liza's stern reprimand rang out, solidifying the decision.

Chapter 738 Banquet Trap

Liza's meticulous plans allowed Marina no room for refusal.

She departed with unwavering determination, leaving Marina standing there, utterly bewildered. Overwhelmed by frustration, Marina stomped her foot and clung to Laura's arm, her emotions swinging between tears and tantrums. "Mom, I can't do that! You've got to come up with a way out of this!" she pleaded.

Laura, who had endured Liza's oppressive control within the Bryant family for decades, sympathized with her daughter's predicament. She understood that in this situation, there was no room for negotiation.

The mother-daughter duo teetered on the edge of eviction, at Liza's mercy. Defying her was simply not an option.

Their only recourse was to make Marina and Marco appear together.

An idea suddenly struck Laura, and she offered a soothing reassurance. "Marina, listen to me. You don't have to actually sleep with him. You just need to create the illusion that you're entangled with him and make everyone believe it."

Marina, confused, questioned, "Really?"

Laura nodded with determination. "It's not a loss even if you do end up with Marco. After all, he's handsome and capable, far better than those rich snobs around here. If you win him over, it'll give Lorraine a run for her money."

Marina hesitated, pondering her mother's words.

Normally, she wouldn't be able to seduce Marco, but her grandmother's plan seemed like the best choice in this desperate situation.

Laura noticed her daughter's wavering resolve and pressed on, "As for Loraine, she may seem glamorous on the surface, but who knows how crude she might be behind closed doors? You, Marina, have been raised with delicacy and refinement. Once Marco experiences your charm, he'll surely recognize your true worth!"

Blushing, Marina lowered her head and mumbled, "Mom..."

Laura's smile took on a sinister edge as she added, "Men think with their dicks. When the time comes, claim that Marco tried to take advantage of you. With public opinions in your favor, Marco won't be able to escape responsibility."

Laura couldn't help but sigh as she considered the cunningness of Liza's plan. "Your grandma's moves are shrewder than any game we've ever played."

Initially hesitant, Marina's resolve softened under her mother's persuasive and enticing words. She began to imagine scenarios with Marco.

Regardless, this plan would tarnish her reputation.

When it happened, Marco would surely feel guilty, leading to him doting on her and accommodating her every whim.

She could use this as an opportunity to assert control over him and flaunt her affair with him in front of Loraine, making Loraine seethe with jealousy.

With laughter bubbling up within her, Marina impatiently awaited the upcoming banquet, envisioning the triumph she could achieve.

Unbeknownst to Marco, the Bryant family's treacherous scheme remained concealed.

Late at night, the hospital lay in silence. Marco, unable to sleep, lay in bed.

Loraine had other commitments this evening, leaving him yearning for her presence.

In the darkness, his phone screen suddenly lit up, and Marco's heart leaped with anticipation. He hoped for a message from Loraine but was met with an update from the subordinate he had tasked with investigating the Bryant Group's banquet.

With a resigned sigh, Marco answered the call, adopting a stoic composure. "What have you found?"

"Mr. Bryant, the banquet's planner is a Bryant Group shareholder named Jefferson Foster. He has explicitly instructed his team to ensure that Miss Torres attends the event. It appears the banquet has been organized with her in mind."

Narrowing his deep eyes, Marco let out a disdainful huff after ending the call.

It was Jefferson, that cunning old fox, who had orchestrated this banquet for Loraine.

He had previously traced Jefferson's involvement during an online backlash against Loraine, and now it seemed that Jefferson was scheming once more.

Marco doubted that this banquet held any genuine benefit for Loraine. It was undoubtedly a trap.

His phone screen illuminated once again, revealing the meticulous work of his subordinate, who had even obtained the guest list for the event.

Marco scanned the list and noticed Liza's name, accompanied by a note stating that she was unwell and would be represented by Marina.

Marco was well aware of the absurdity of the Bryant family's schemes.

A cynical chuckle escaped Marco's lips. This intricate trap was not solely for Loraine – it harbored sinister intentions aimed at him as well.

These people were truly asking for trouble!

Marco swiftly replied to his subordinate and then returned to his screensaver – a picture of Loraine.

His icy demeanor melted as he gently caressed her image, a warm smile gracing his lips.

"Loraine, I promise to fulfill my pledge. I will protect you and ensure you're not harmed again."