

## Chapter 721 You Will Always Come First

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In the hospital room, Marco, perceived as Loraine's kept man, had just wrapped up a conversation with an executive from Solar Company.

He emotionlessly launched his social media app after ending the call.

Marco had already caught wind of the internet uproar concerning Loraine, but by the time he geared up to intervene, the storm had already passed and resolved itself beautifully.

A smile crept onto Marco's face, as he inwardly acknowledged how fortunate he was to have someone as excellent as Loraine by his side.

Yet, Marco didn't dismiss the incident lightly.

Past encounters with Laura and her daughter, who were known for employing online trolls, had made him vigilant. He'd sensed something was off as the controversy unfolded.

He noticed that the social media accounts marketing against Loraine seemed synchronized, using identical wording to tarnish her reputation.

The strategy struck him as all too familiar. Clearly, someone had paid a group of internet trolls to focus on Loraine.

Upon recognizing this, Marco directed his team to dig deeper. They promptly reported back, "Sir, it appears the accounts



Jefferson contacted were the same ones responsible for uploading the video and guiding the trolls."

Jefferson?

The revelation startled Marco. He couldn't fathom why Jefferson, teetering on the edge of financial ruin, would be involved.

He chided himself for being so inattentive, letting such a minor irritant create any disturbances.

Evidently, the folks at Bryant Group had too much idle time if they could still muster the energy to meddle in others' affairs.

With a snort, Marco dialed in Sullivan's number.

"Hello? Mr. Bryant?"

Sullivan's voice came through the line, tinged with sleepiness and interrupted by a yawn.

Wasting no time, Marco cut to the chase, "We can proceed with the development of the ninth-generation surgical robot without involving the Bryant Group."

During his time at the Bryant Group, Qbot had often collaborated closely with the teams working on the ninth-generation surgical robot, even going as far as to formalize a goodwill agreement.

However, circumstances had changed. Neither he nor Qbot were part of the Bryant Group anymore, rendering the contract obsolete.

Sullivan took a moment before replying, "Alright, I get it. Mr. Bryant, the team members at the Bryant Group have already renewed their contracts with the Solar Company. So, regarding





the ninth-gen surgical robot, are we partnering up or going independently?"

Just as Marco prepared to answer, he heard Loraine's voice through the door.

Loraine was speaking to Marco's primary doctor, asking, "Dr. Brown, is today the day for Marco's cast to come off? Should we wait a bit longer before taking it off?"

Though the doctor seemed to say "no need to wait," Marco couldn't make it out clearly. Realizing Loraine would enter soon, he hastily said into the phone, "Put the contract on hold. We'll discuss details later. I have to go..."

Almost as soon as he ended the call, Loraine swung the door open and stepped inside.

Noticing that Marco looked like he had just ended a conversation, Loraine grinned and questioned, "Who were you chatting with?"

Marco eased up and casually responded, "Oh, it was no one important, just a friend. We talked a little while you were away. I hung up as soon as I heard you return."

Even though Marco didn't have a large circle of friends, the ones he had were genuine. Loraine guessed that either Slater or Jimmie might have checked on him during his hospital stay, but she didn't dwell on it, finding it slightly odd.

"You've been here quite some time, and none of them have even visited you."

This was rather unjust to Slater and Jimmie. The truth was, Marco, prioritizing his relationship with Loraine over friendships, hadn't told them about his hospital stay at all. Every day, Slater and Jimmie would message Marco in the





Certainly, Marco had his reasons for this secrecy.

Without hesitation, he took Loraine's hand and sincerely said, "Wouldn't they just be a distraction if they showed up? I'd rather they didn't. Especially given Slater's rash nature. If he discovers I'm in the hospital, he'll certainly make a fuss."

And if Slater found out about the deepening relationship between Marco and Loraine, kept under wraps, he wouldn't let it slide.

Marco's strategy was to wait until Loraine and her family embraced him, then surprise his two mischievous friends with a wedding invitation. Their faces would be a blend of astonishment and admiration.

Loraine had never seen Marco so full of life before. He was grinning, seemingly lost in thought, slightly proud but not boastful. He resembled a puppy proudly displaying a newfound bone.

Puzzled, Loraine softly said, "I have no objections. Plus, it's nice that you have some company when I'm away at work."

Grasping her hand, Marco drew it closer, bent down and kissed it, earnestly declaring, "You should know, in my heart, you will always come first."



## Chapter 722 What Matters

Marco gazed into Loraine's eyes softly and grinned. "You know, I can think about you when you're not around. Far from boring, really."

Loraine felt a scorching heat bloom on the back of her hand where he had kissed her, a sensation that quickly spread to her cheeks, tinting them rosy.

His words felt more like a heartfelt proposal than mere sweet nothings. The sincerity in his voice mattered more to her than the most articulate compliments.

Blushing, Loraine shifted her eyes away and swiftly switched topics. "The doctor said the plaster can come off today. I'll go with you."

Who knew that a simple appointment with the doctor would turn into another episode of Marco's charming flirtations, leaving her disoriented?

Noticing Loraine's rosy cheeks, Marco grinned. He was aware that she was a shy one, prone to scratch like a feisty cat when embarrassed.

But removing the plaster was a serious matter, so Marco suppressed his teasing spirit. He extended his hands for Loraine to assist him.

"Okay, darling, will you come with me to get this plaster off?"

Though the cast removal was quick, healing the bone and tendons would be a lengthy process. Dr. Emerson Brown, who'd



+120 Points at most  
jokingly claimed he wanted to be at their wedding, began  
outlining care instructions for Marco.

"Once the plaster is off, try to keep the area dry. No strenuous activities, and you should use a wheelchair for a while."

As Emerson continued, Loraine intently took notes on her phone, afraid to overlook any details that could delay Marco's recovery.

Just as she was jotting down instructions, she realized Emerson had gone silent. She glanced up to see him chuckling. "Mr. Bryant, you're lucky to have such an attentive wife. She's even taking notes!"

Lorraine's hand froze, and her cheeks went an even deeper shade of red. She muttered, "Dr. Brown, I'm not his wife."

Marco quirked an eyebrow and clutched her hand. "Well, she'll be my wife soon enough!"

"Remember, you promised me wedding invitation, and you can't go back on that now," Emerson said.

Feeling cornered, Loraine shook Marco off in embarrassment.

Unexpectedly, Marco seemed to lose his balance, tipping backward. Alarmed, Loraine instinctively reached out to catch him but found herself being pulled into his embrace instead.

He hugged her tightly, grinning from ear to ear. "Worried about me, are you? My dear?"

Emerson coughed discreetly into his palm before exiting the room, leaving them alone.

Lorraine tumbled into Marco's embrace, her pulse racing.

She found herself unable to stay mad, and her entire body felt like melting butter. Plus, she didn't want to risk Marco falling, given his medical condition.

After shooting Marco an icy glare, Loraine rose to her feet, assisted him into the wheelchair, and wheeled him back towards his hospital room.

As they made their way, onlookers cast curious glances, and clearly, a man as good-looking as Marco confined to a wheelchair was an unusual sight.

Spotting this, Loraine dipped her head and teased, "How's the view from down there? Bet you'd get a seat in a crowded place now, huh?"

Looking up at her with a helpless grin, Marco confessed, "Public opinion doesn't bother me. What matters is you don't dislike me."

Inside, he couldn't help but chuckle. This unfortunate injury had, in a twisted way, deepened their relationship.

Once back in the hospital room, Loraine meticulously set to work following the doctor's guidelines. She shot Marco a stern look as he remained seated in his wheelchair. "This applies to you as well. Be mindful, alright?"

Marco nodded, a portrait of obedience. Yet, Loraine's concern lingered, so she emphasized, "If you're careless, you could end up in that chair for good!"

After categorizing the medicines, Loraine was reminded of the doctor's recommendation to focus on leg massages for nerve relaxation. She then knelt down and began massaging Marco's legs.

Although they couldn't be seen through his pants, the fierce wounds and their scabbed-over marks were clear in Loraine's mind. She delicately navigated around them as her hands worked through his muscles.

Emotion brimming in his eyes, Marco tenderly took Loraine's hand, murmuring, "You've had a tiring day at the office. My hands are still functional, even if my legs aren't. I can manage this myself."

Loraine gazed into his tender and affectionate eyes.

When their gazes locked, he noticed her in a trance, igniting his desire once more.

Caught unawares, Loraine was swiftly enfolded into Marco's arms, as he planted another impassioned kiss on her lips.





## Chapter 723 Always Be By Your Side

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A breathless kiss unfolded, leaving Loraine feeling utterly weak, her breaths uneven.

She leaned on the arms of Marco's wheelchair, her cheeks flushed, her gaze slightly dazed.

Marco seized the moment, drawing her closer into his embrace. He gently parted her legs, allowing her to sit on his lap, preparing to deepen the kiss.

As their lips almost met again, Loraine, still in a daze, suddenly snapped back to reality. She pushed herself away from him, her expression stern and serious. "No, I can't sit on your lap!"

Due to the fiery desire building within Marco, he almost ignored her words. However, he couldn't disregard the earnestness in her eyes and her blushing face.

She was urging him to follow the doctor's instructions.

Marco's passionate gaze darkened a bit. He moistened his dry lips, his voice hoarse as he said, "It's alright..."

Before he could continue, Loraine frowned and fixed him with a stern glare. "Say it again. Who promised me to listen to the doctor's advice just now? I told you to take good care of your legs, but you turned a deaf ear to me?"

Marco was left momentarily dumbfounded. He suddenly understood how those husbands felt who were scolded by their

wives yet still sweetly indulged them.

Seeing Loraine's flushed face, he decided to change the subject. "Loraine, I saw some news online today. How is Universe Group doing now? Have you been affected?"

Fortunately, Loraine was easily diverted, her attention shifting to the business matters at hand. She thought carefully about how to respond.

Seeing her engagement, Marco breathed a sigh of relief and continued, "What are your plans for the next step?"

Loraine had no intention of hiding anything from him. Now that Marco was her love, honesty was paramount in their relationship. Plus, she believed that Marco's experience could be a valuable asset.

After contemplating for a moment, she voiced her thoughts. "In a week, many businesses will participate in the investment for the smart city project. This will bring in funds to make up for the losses and stabilize the shareholders."

Marco gently touched her forehead, attempting to smooth out her furrowed brows. "Are you upset?"

Loraine blinked in surprise. How was he able to read her mind? Nevertheless, having someone who shared her opinions and burdens made her feel more at ease.

"I was thinking that if I had just followed their advice to deal with Reynolds secretly, maybe the situation would have ended up more favorable. But I don't want to stoop to Reynolds' level! I have to make sure that he faces legal consequences!"

In this moment, the dignified and confident CEO Loraine was in front of others appeared more like a stubborn young girl, puffing up her cheeks in indignation and hesitating slightly at

the end.

"You know, Marco, even though I don't regret any decisions that I have made, sometimes I do wonder... Were my choices truly correct? Perhaps there could've been better and more suitable solutions."

Marco chuckled softly upon hearing this. His eyes held deep affection, enough to melt anyone's heart.

His girl was acting coquettish.

He took Loraine's hand, gently caressing it. In a soothing and patient voice, he said, "Loraine, don't doubt yourself. What you've done is undoubtedly right. If you didn't assert your dominance, more people would become restless later."

Having spent years at the Bryant Group, Marco had learned that some people, driven by their interests, could never be satisfied.

If Loraine yielded this time, what she faced wouldn't be just Rico's discreet threats in the office. Instead, it would be a group of defiant individuals pressuring her.

Seeing Loraine lost in thought, Marco continued to console her gently, "Loraine, don't burden yourself too much. No one can think of every detail. You've already done exceptionally well."

In this moment, they understood each other better than anyone else. They stood on the same level, facing similar dilemmas. Their approaches and thought processes were surprisingly in sync.

After Marco had finished speaking, Loraine felt a sense of relief and nodded. "I understand."

Suddenly, Marco recalled his earlier conversation with Sullivan.

Sullivan had asked whether they should collaborate with others or work independently on the follow-up development of the surgical robot.

Both Qbot and the ninth-generation robot were huge opportunities, possibly too overwhelming for Solar Company alone to handle. This was why Marco had been inclined to collaborate. However, the partners had not been finalized yet.

A plan formed in his mind.

He looked at Loraine with a soft smile. "Don't worry so much about the projects. You've done so many good deeds. I'm sure you will be blessed with good luck."

Loraine furrowed her brows, not understanding why Marco, who wasn't usually superstitious, kept mentioning "good luck" while consoling her.

The man's lips curled up to form an amused smile as he patted her affectionately on the head. "Loraine, I will always be by your side, supporting you."

He believed that as long as he was there, no one could ever harm Loraine.



## Chapter 724 Rico's Exhibition

With Loraine's reassuring words, the Universe Group shareholders managed to maintain some semblance of calm for a while.

However, as a week swiftly passed, the restlessness among the shareholders grew, and they began to frequently inquire about updates from Loraine's office.

Loraine, with an intent to prolong their anticipation, finally called for a shareholders' meeting.

Inside the meeting room, the shareholders exchanged furtive glances, each harboring their own thoughts. The room fell silent only when Loraine made her grand entrance.

Dressed formally in a business suit, Loraine exuded competence and authority, radiating a strong sense of charisma as she took her place at the head of the table.

Her gaze, filled with an air of authority, briefly scanned over the attendees. A subtle nod signaled her acknowledgment before she settled into her seat.

Before she could fully take her place, Rico, with a sly smile on his face, rose to his feet, eager to impress Loraine.

"Miss Torres, you mentioned earlier that you'd provide us with an explanation today. Is that the reason for this shareholders' meeting? Have you decided to use your own wealth to rescue the company from its financial woes?"

Without waiting for Loraine's response, he went on, lavishing

praise, "Miss Torres, your selflessness in the name of Universe Group's welfare will surely earn you the gratitude of every shareholder!"

Loraine regarded him with a calm smile, but Rico's interruption had cornered her into a position where it seemed she would take responsibility for resolving the deficit, making any other options appear passive.

In the minds of the shareholders, a range of thoughts swirled. If Loraine admitted to it, she would be seen as the scapegoat; if she denied it, there could be widespread dissatisfaction.

After a soft chuckle, Loraine adopted a more serious tone. "Although I have the financial means, Mr. Balder's approach may not necessarily be the most prudent."

Rico grew anxious. "How could this not be the best solution? Miss Torres, are you unwilling to rescue Universe Group? Don't let a mere financial hurdle come between us!"

Loraine's composure remained unwavering. "Rico, you're jumping to conclusions. I never stated that I wouldn't address this issue."

Rico paused for a moment and cleared his throat. "Then, Miss Torres, what is your plan?"

Loraine signaled her assistant, who promptly displayed a PowerPoint presentation on the screen.

Curiosity piqued, everyone's attention shifted to the projection. They exchanged puzzled glances as they tried to understand the purpose behind this unexpected presentation.

Displayed before them was an analysis chart of investment trends for completed phases of the smart city project. The Universe Group shareholders had seen this data before, and

they couldn't grasp why Loraine was revisiting it now.

Loraine's expression turned serious. "As you can see, this is an analysis chart for the projected investments in Phase 1 of the Universe Group's smart city project. With the government's prior approval, the number of businesses vying for project participation is steadily increasing."

Nods of agreement swept through the room, but confusion still lingered. Loraine pressed on, "We only need to wait a bit longer. Once these businesses start investing, the funds will be more than sufficient to restart our various projects. I firmly believe Universe Group can afford to be patient."

A voice of skepticism arose from the crowd. "Miss Torres, are you planning to divert the funds from the smart city project to cover the deficits of our other ventures?"

Loraine nodded, explaining, "Investing capital operates in this manner: money begets money. This approach is far more practical than using personal finances, as Rico suggested, to plug the company's financial gaps."

For most shareholders, making a profit and avoiding losses were their primary concerns. The finer details mattered less to them. Many found themselves convinced by her reasoning, nodding in agreement.

Rico's expression grew increasingly gloomy. After a moment, he voiced his worries. "Miss Torres, does this mean we must wait? The business world evolves rapidly, and with all due respect, youthfulness doesn't always guarantee a grasp of the market dynamics. How can you be certain these projects will remain viable until the funds arrive?"

Unlike Reynolds, Rico had a knack for positioning himself. He appeared genuinely concerned while subtly criticizing Loraine's decisions. Now, sensing an opportunity, he seemed to grasp

something.

"Does this mean, Miss Torres, you have no intention of covering the deficit and plan to halt our projects?"

Lorraine remained silent, responding with nothing more than a cold smile.

Rico, taking on an appearance of concern for the greater good, continued, "Miss Torres, it's just that I don't have the necessary funds at the moment. If I did, I would gladly contribute to fill the deficit. We're all stakeholders in Universe Group, and I genuinely can't bear to witness the company suffer losses!"

Though he claimed not to have the funds, everyone knew he was indicating that he didn't, while Lorraine did.

Reading the room, Rico expressed regret. "Miss Torres, with your family's wealth and Universe Group being part of the Torres family's enterprise, why not invest your own resources? You're willing to spend money on unrelated rural development projects to bolster your reputation. Surely, as CEO, you wouldn't neglect Universe Group's interests?"

Changing his tone, Rico wore a look of innocence, appealing to the shareholders. "We, the shareholders, cannot afford to suffer losses for the sake of your reputation. Don't you all agree?"

Once more, he directed the spotlight onto Lorraine, reserving his ultimate challenge for the closing statement.

"Miss Torres, if this is your final decision, then I shall consider selling my shares!"

