

Chapter 399 Hand In Hand

As Loraine and Marco rushed onto the stage, the curtains gradually drew back, revealing the scene.

They arrived at the stage precisely on time, neither early nor late.

Illuminated by a bright spotlight, Loraine breathed heavily, momentarily forgetting that she was still holding onto Marco's hand. She lifted her head and managed a composed smile.

She was about to greet everyone when the crowd erupted in astonishment.

"Why are Loraine and Marco hand in hand?"

"Isn't that different from the usual partners? Are they really rekindling their romance?"

Hearing the murmurs, Loraine realized she still held Marco's hand and hastily tried to release it.

But Marco resisted, gripping her hand even more firmly.

Loraine shot him a glare, urging him to let go.

Marco coughed and obediently relinquished his hold.

To the spectators, it seemed as if the youthful duo was playfully flirting.

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Many exchanged knowing grins.

Jennie, seated in the front row, was stunned, her hand covering her mouth in disbelief. "Lorrie and Marco? Are you—"

Cayson interrupted indignantly, "Don't be absurd!"

His usual grin had vanished.

He had been inspecting equipment with Carl, and it took a while for him to confirm everything was in order.

He never anticipated that it would provide Marco an opportunity to hold Loraine's hand on stage!

Maintaining her composure, Loraine addressed the audience with a warm smile, "Once again, I welcome everyone to this bidding event. Despite facing numerous challenges since our partnership began, Bryant Group and Universe Group, much like Mr. Bryant and myself, will continue to support each other,

standing side by side."

She quickly devised a reason for her and Marco's linked hands, sharing it with the audience through her cheerful smile.

Marco chimed in, "Miss Torres is correct. Bryant Group and Universe Group will always collaborate closely to make the new business district impeccable."

Though not entirely convinced, the crowd's discomfort dissipated, and the atmosphere became lively once more.

Loraine commenced her speech according to the prepared outline. Even though Marco hadn't rehearsed with her, they were both well-prepared and shared an unspoken understanding, enabling them to coordinate flawlessly during the presentation.

In conclusion, the audience erupted into a resounding ovation.

Following the speech, a brief window for the open bidding session ensued. As Loraine descended the stage, Jennie hurried towards her.

Jennie, who was usually petite and dressed in cute, casual outfits, changed her style that day. She wore a sharp suit and had her long hair tied up meticulously, giving her an air of intelligence.

Loraine couldn't help but marvel at her best friend's significant improvement in fashion sense.

However, Jennie's true nature emerged as soon as she opened her mouth.

"Lorrie! You were absolutely fantastic up there! How can you be so brilliant? You're my idol!"

Loraine grinned, replying, "Alright, enough with the flattery. How are things going for you? Do you think you'll win the bid?"

Jennie confidently retorted, "Really, Lorrie, where's your faith in me? Don't worry, it's mine!"

She then leaned in closer to Loraine, her curiosity piqued. "So, what's the deal between you and Marco? I saw you two racing to the stage hand-in-hand earlier. You never cease to amaze me!"

Loraine shoved her away, reprimanding, "Buzz off! Can't you focus on something else for once?"

"I'm keeping an eye on things! I wasn't kidding when I said I'd nail this. I've assessed the competition from all the top stores and companies present this time. Lorrie, you can count on me. I'm extremely confident!"

Jennie raised her chin proudly as she spoke.


Loraine teased, "The most desirable bid is for the well-situated shop in the commercial district, and the companies here today are not short on funds or vision. Don't get too cozy with your competition."

"Chill, Lorrie. Whatever it takes, I'll secure the bid!"
Jennie clenched her fists, brimming with energy.

Smiling, Loraine patted Jennie's head, saying, "Alright, I trust you."

She knew that Jennie had been working diligently for the bid lately, and the Fowler family had backed her

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wholeheartedly. Jennie's confidence stemmed from thorough preparation rather than baseless arrogance. In other words, Loraine was genuinely thrilled for her best friend.

As the two of them chatted joyfully, they failed to notice someone snapping a photo from a corner.



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Following the bidding session, an array of emotions swept the room. Some reveled in joy, while others nursed their disappointment.

The bids offered by the different companies remained unknown due to the blind nature of the process.

Those who competed against their opponents for the same storefront were very anxious.

They faced the risk of losing not just the storefront, but also their companies' prestige and influence.

Some individuals desperately tried to extract information from others, while some started to concoct falsehoods. This turned the venue into an intense field of conflict.

As the moment of truth approached, everyone held their breath and directed their anxious stares towards the stage.

The victorious bidder would claim the storefront situated in the prime area of the new business district. Speculation buzzed around the room about the identity of the fortunate individual.

The audience was extremely anxious that they almost leaped from their chairs as soon as Loraine emerged on the stage, carrying an envelope.

With a smile, she broke the seal on the letter she held. Clearing her throat, she announced, "The victor of this bid is..."

Representatives from the various companies rose, their hearts beating fast as they met her gaze.

But Loraine's eyes moved beyond them.

"Jennie Fowler from Fowler Jewelers!"

"Yeah!"

Even though Jennie tried to maintain a confident facade, she was still nervous. As the results were announced, she hopped around in exhilaration, shaking her assistant's shoulder with such enthusiasm that it looked almost violent.

"Can you believe it? It's actually me! I knew I could pull it off!"

Lorraine returned her enthusiasm with a warm smile. "Congratulations."

But before the celebrations could fully take off, a man in the crowd stood up.

"Hold on! Are you joking? Can you believe that a girl won the bid? This bidding process smells fishy!"

The protest came from a middle-aged, balding man. His appearance screamed nouveau riche, with a belly straining against his shirt and a gold chain around his neck.

Loraine instantly recognized him as Hurley Castro, a recent entrant to the jewelry industry. Once married to a rich woman, he had started his jewelry business with her wealth. The Fowler family was his business rival.

His antagonism towards the Fowlers had grown since he began raking in money from selling low-grade jewelry in the last two years.

A scowl formed on Cayson's face as he sternly cautioned Hurley, "Mr. Castro, mind your words!"

Marco rose and moved swiftly towards Loraine. Hurley instinctively recoiled when Marco shot him a cold glance.

In a chilly tone, Marco retorted, "The bidding outcome is unequivocally fair, as it honors only the highest bidder. If you didn't win, it's because your bid was inadequate. Jennie is from the Fowler family. Why are you questioning the integrity of the bidding process only after your loss?"

Hurley's face turned red with anger. When the people around him heard Marco's words, they started discussing him.

"He's nothing more than a rich bumpkin, no doubt about that. His vision is so narrow. Does he think he's bidding on a decrepit shopping center? This shopping area was created by Bryant Group and Universe Group!"

"Mr. Castro, you could simply admit to not having the funds. Losing to the Fowlers is no dishonor. You mustn't act so rashly. Do you not see the amusement

you bring?"

At these words, Hurley's face contorted in rage. "What are you implying? Are you all conspiring against me?"

Marco's expression hardened as he warned, "Enough of this! This is not the venue for your theatrics. Any more disturbances, and security will see you out."

Hurley had previously taken liberties with Loraine and Jennie, viewing them as naive young women, their wealth notwithstanding. He thought he could easily intimidate them.

However, he was well aware that tangling with Marco was a bad idea. He was an unrelenting businessman who'd stop at nothing to crush his competition.

Seeing no one aligning with his views, Hurley's bravado faded quickly. He fell into a disappointed silence.

Reluctantly, he seated himself.

Observing the situation, Cayson reclined in his chair, recognizing that Marco had effectively defused the situation.

Marco, after a scrutinizing glance around, positioned himself next to Loraine.

Anyone seeking to stir up trouble would now have to weigh the risk of antagonizing both Bryant Group and Universe Group.

"Thank you..." Loraine's voice was a mixture of emotions as she watched Marco take control of the situation.

She was unsure of Marco's feelings towards her.

He stepped in to shield her, fearing she might get hurt.

Yet, ironically, he was the one who had inflicted pain on her in the first place, all for his family's sake.

Even if Marco harbored feelings for her, his family would pose a significant obstacle to their relationship. That was the primary reason they hadn't moved forward.

Unaware of her internal conflict, Marco leaned in and whispered, "Let me handle the rest."

With Marco's presence, the signing and delivery procedures went smoothly.

The crowd's emotions ranged from elation to despair and anger. Eventually, people started dispersing from the venue.

Hurley's loud outbursts ensured he left alone, his anger his only companion. As he stormed out, a stranger intercepted him.

"Mr. Castro, my employer wishes to discuss a potential business venture. Would that pique your interest?"

"And who might your employer be?" Hurley responded,

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suspicion narrowing his eyes.

"My boss wishes to discuss a proposition regarding today's bidding session. He also claims to possess a solution to recover what you've lost."



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