

Chapter 1031 Marco Didn't Recognize Her

Old acquaintances met again, yet Marco didn't recognize her.

Marco stayed as handsome and radiant as ever, while she seemed messy and pitiable.

Victoria fought back a sneer. The harsh trials of the past six months had changed her a lot. She managed a polite smile as she offered Marco a cup of tea.

Marco hardly looked at her, declining politely. "No, thanks. I'm here to wait for Loraine."

A huge bouquet of flowers blocked his view, hiding the resentment in Victoria's eyes.

Victoria inwardly cursed, but maintained a professional facade and asked, "Do you have an appointment? Miss Torres is quite busy."

Marco's frown deepened as he stated, "I'm her boyfriend, Marco Bryant."

Victoria looked surprised, then understanding dawned, and she apologized. "I'm so sorry for not recognizing you, Mr. Bryant. Miss Torres isn't here yet. Please, have some tea while you wait."

She eagerly handed over a cup of tea, and Marco, sensing an unusual zest in the receptionist's actions, was about to politely refuse when Victoria suddenly lost her balance. In a clumsy cascade, she spilled tea all over Marco and nearly stumbled into him.

Marco's expression turned cold as he looked down at his drenched clothes, visibly upset yet holding back his irritation.

Just as Victoria teetered towards him, he instinctively stepped back to dodge her clumsy advance.

Realizing she was missing her mark, Victoria remembered her boss's words, bit down hard, and lunged forward with renewed determination. She fell with a thud, her eyes brimming with tears, casting her in a vulnerable, innocent light.

However, Marco stood by, his indifference palpable, almost as if he were observing her fall on purpose.

Victoria began to cry softly, pleading, "Mr. Bryant, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to soak your clothes. It was an accident..."

When Loraine descended the stairs, she found herself in the middle of a dramatic scene: a receptionist in tears, seemingly the victim of a harsh reprimand, with Marco looking on, his face a mask of frost and his brows knitted in annoyance.

Upon seeing this, Loraine cast a puzzled glance at Marco and quickly moved to help the distraught receptionist to her feet.

Looking down, she saw a face she didn't recognize, yet oddly familiar.

As a designer, she immediately noticed something off about the person's facial contours, suggesting possible plastic surgery. However, she refrained from judging others' choices. Out of concern for her employees, she asked kindly, "Are you okay?"

Victoria shook her head, her eyes wide with fear as she looked down and stammered, "I'm sorry, Miss Torres. It's my first day, and I didn't recognize your boyfriend. I was worried about neglecting him, but I messed up in my rush..."

Seeing Victoria's smeared makeup and woeful expression, Loraine assured her, "It's okay. You can head home early today. Don't worry, he's really nice."

When Loraine turned around, she caught Marco's stern look. Hesitating for a moment, realizing her comforting words might not seem genuine, she motioned to him and said, "Come and apologize. Look how frightened you've made her!"

Marco squinted at Victoria, feeling an odd sense of familiarity.

Yet her face seemed completely new to him, and her voice triggered no memories. He dismissed it as his mind playing tricks on him and apologized as Loraine had suggested before they both left.

As soon as they left, Victoria's scared and pitiful look vanished.

With a blank expression, she wiped her tears, walked back to the front desk, and resumed typing the message she had left unfinished earlier.

Her hands shook as she sent the message and closed her eyes, relishing the thought of confronting her enemies once more.

The bitterness she harbored had kept her going, day and night, turning her from a spoiled heiress into a humbled bar girl.

She barely had to wait before her phone buzzed with a response.

The text, from a contact named "Boss", read, "Head to our regular spot, and make it quick."

Victoria's complexion drained at those words.

After wrestling with her thoughts, she clenched her fists, made a decision, gathered her belongings, and got ready to leave.

Yet, as she stepped through the doorway, a wave of emptiness washed over her. She could almost see Marco and Loraine, hand in hand, walking away from her.

She stood there for a long while, then narrowed her eyes, her expression stony, and murmured to herself, "Just you wait, Loraine and Marco. I won't make things easy for you."



Chapter 1032 The Mysterious Boss

In the parking lot, Marco pulled Loraine over, his expression one of extreme displeasure.

Loraine was puzzled, unsure of what had upset him. Just as she was about to inquire, Marco removed his coat, which was stained with tea, and grimaced. "This is ruined. Throw it away," he said in disgust, tossing it to the driver.

Wordlessly, the driver swiftly disposed of the garment in a nearby trash can.

Loraine's confusion deepened. Marco was known for his cold demeanor, but such a strong reaction over a minor spill seemed out of character.

After the driver had thrown away the coat, Marco's stern expression eased. He turned to Loraine, who was still trying to piece together the situation, smiled, and gently explained, "About that incident with the receptionist—I've always felt something was off. She seems overly eager to get close to me. I suspect she might be trying to plant a surveillance device on my clothing, like a pinhole camera."

Though Marco might not be the most romantic of men, he wasn't naive. He could distinguish between genuine affection and calculated advances.

Despite Victoria's careful efforts to mask her intentions, Marco detected a subtle hostility from her. Clearly, she was not smitten with him.

A wave of unease washed over her as Loraine listened to his explanation.

Victoria had arrived only two days ago, and rather than seeking Loraine out, she had focused her attention on Marco.

Furthermore, she hadn't gone to the Solar Company but had instead waited for Marco at the Universe Group.

Did Victoria possess knowledge not only of Loraine's connection to Marco but also of his predictable actions?

The more Loraine mulled it over, the more her suspicions grew. With a frown, she suggested, "It's odd. Should I dismiss her then?"

However, Marco responded with a cautionary tone, shaking his head, "Don't alert her. When I discarded the coat, I made sure to say something innocuous, just in case there were any recording devices present."

Despite the potential threat, he wasn't frightened. On the contrary, he seemed intrigued to see what Victoria would do next.

Loraine remained silent, her eyes betraying her lingering concern.

Marco felt a flicker of warmth and shifted the conversation to a pressing business issue. "It looks like the Wilson family's government connections are deliberately obstructing the Universe Group," he remarked casually.

Loraine was momentarily stunned, and then her expression turned grim. She scoffed, "Oh, is this the same Wilson family that Vincent claimed would never abuse their power?"

She knew that Vincent couldn't be held responsible for this situation. Lost in thought, she pondered how to navigate the obstacle posed by the Wilson family's influence.

The task seemed daunting, given the Wilsons' extensive connections within Zodiac.

As Loraine deliberated, Marco tenderly placed his hand on her head and murmured, "Take a look outside."

Confused, Loraine complied, glancing out the window. Instantly, her countenance brightened, and she shot Marco a mischievous grin before tracing a single word in his palm.

Their eyes met, and they shared a knowing smile.

Marco gently clasped her hand, his voice soft and reassuring. "I will be with you, but first, you need to stabilize the situation inside the Universe Group."

Businessmen always prioritize profit over emotions; thus, when Jaden, a long-time branch manager, suddenly lost his position, he felt utterly isolated and helpless. In the cutthroat world of business, failing to deliver profits meant losing support, and Jaden's downfall was inevitable once he couldn't meet shareholder expectations.

With numerous projects obstructed and the timing of Jaden's downfall, it was certain that opportunistic individuals would exploit the situation, causing further trouble and obstacles for Loraine. She had to tread carefully.

Loraine nodded, clasping Marco's hand in reassurance. Her demeanor exuded composure and confidence as she said, "Fear not. With you as my 'mentor,' how could I falter?"

Their shared smile conveyed volumes, a silent understanding passing between them.

Meanwhile, Victoria approached the grand entrance of a luxury hotel.

Her face was ashen, a visible manifestation of her inner

turmoil. Summoning her courage, she glanced at the opulent entrance before stepping inside.

Outside the presidential suite on the hotel's top floor, Victoria bowed humbly and timidly before cautiously knocking on the door.

It swung open swiftly, releasing a rush of cold air that made her shiver. With a thud, she sank to her knees and crawled forward in a position of submission, her voice trembling as she addressed. "Boss..."

Inside the dimly lit room, the curtains were drawn shut, enveloping everything in darkness.

A man's cold voice pierced the silence. "Victoria, do you still want to go back to being that nobody, Marina Bryant?"

Chapter 1033 Revenge

The voice slithered through the room, dripping with malevolence, as if it were the hiss of a venomous snake. Victoria, once known as Marina, felt the grip of fear tighten around her neck, making it difficult to draw in a breath.

She couldn't help but sink lower, pressing her face against the plush carpet beneath her, but even then, her trembling wouldn't cease.

"Boss, I... I don't want to! I've worked at the Universe Group and tried to manipulate Jaden as you instructed. Now he is willing to follow you. I'll obey all your commands..."

A snort sliced through the darkness, followed swiftly by a cry of pain escaping Marina's lips.

A pen struck her forehead with force, throwing her head to the side. A painful bump formed instantly, accompanied by a trickle of blood.

Marina dared not touch the wound, her body wracked with trembling, and she wished she could hide into the very floor beneath her.

The figure lurking in the shadows seemed like a devil incarnate.

The pen rolled and quickly stopped on the carpet. Its movement on it was eerily silent, as if stepping on the carpet would produce no sound at all.

In that moment, a shadow materialized before Marina, intensifying the oppressive atmosphere. He gazed down at the pitiful woman like an ant and said, "You are now Victoria, no

longer the Marina you once were."

Marina trembled in response. The shadow let out a weary sigh, his tone frigid and drained. "I believe damaging your brain might just improve its function. Do you comprehend who Marco truly is? Do you think such foolish tactics would allow you to approach him easily? He discarded the coat, rendering one of my specially crafted cameras useless."

In his voice, it seemed that the camera held more value than the insignificant woman before him.

Marina felt an icy chill course through her veins. She couldn't help but crawl a few steps forward, but she dared not touch the man. She whispered with desperation, pleading for mercy.

The man chuckled, his voice echoing with cold amusement, "Victoria, employ your mind. Do not forget the purpose behind your transformation."

Marina's teeth chattered as she heard his words. "To manipulate your intervention in Marco and Loraine's relationship, and to take Marco's life! You despise him, don't you?"

"That is why I went to great lengths to save you, to mold you into this form, and to teach you the art of pleasing men. All of it is for revenge!"

As he spoke, he gripped Marina's chin, forcing her to look up.

Yet, Marina could not see his face clearly. In the darkness, she merely made out his eyes, cold and ruthless, akin to those of a beast.

Her body quivered uncontrollably, and the man appeared thoroughly disgusted. He snorted and pushed her away, commanding, "Leave!"

Marina dared not waste a single second. The moment she heard the order, she scrambled out of the room without delay.

Finally, the door closed behind her, and as she sensed the air outside, it felt like a rebirth. Overwhelmed, she couldn't help but weep bitterly.

She envisioned tearing Marco apart into countless pieces.

If it weren't for Marco annihilating her family, she would have never descended into this hellish life!

The only reason she continued to draw breath was to ensure that Marco tasted the torment of damnation one day!

The following day, Marina tended to her wound, carefully bandaging the bump on her forehead, and made her way to work. However, her face remained ashen, with a pallor that not even makeup could hide, rendering her visage ghostly.

When Loraine arrived at the company and caught sight of her appearance, she was taken aback and expressed concern. "Victoria, what's happened? What's wrong with you? Your injury seems even more serious today."

Faced with the compassionate girl, Loraine couldn't help but worry about the noise from Victoria's fall the previous day exacerbating her injury.

Hearing Loraine's words, Victoria's eyes flickered, and she covered her forehead, whispering timidly, "Thank you for your concern, Miss Torres. But I'm fine. I have to support my family, so I must come to work."

Loraine hesitated. Was Victoria implying that she shouldn't have granted her any time off?

At a loss for words, Loraine could only offer a few words of care for her well-being.

Once back in her office, confusion still clouded Loraine's mind.

Though Victoria's behavior seemed peculiar, she appeared undeniably pitiable. Loraine felt that Marco's reaction the previous day had been excessive.

After contemplating for a while, Loraine summoned Remy and instructed her to investigate Victoria. "I heard she needs to support her family. If her family is struggling, arrange for some subsidies."

Remy nodded and went to investigate. Moments later, Remy returned with a strange expression on her face.

"Miss Torres, it seems she was hired by Mr. Benton." Remy revealed.

With Jaden's waning influence in the company following his loss of power, his grip wasn't as strong as before. Nevertheless, it was still easy to uncover the truth that he had a hand in Victoria's employment.

Loraine was stunned by the revelation, marveling at Marco's keen intuition.

Curiosity piqued, she wondered why Jaden would arrange for a receptionist to join the company without an apparent reason. There had to be a motive behind it all.

Before Loraine could ponder further, a commotion erupted at the office door. Jaden stormed in, accompanied by several shareholders.

As the shareholders entered, they began clamoring anxiously, their voices blending into a cacophony.

"Miss Torres, did our company offend the government? Why hasn't the project received government approval even after a week?"

Chapter 1034 I've Already Shouldered Accountability

Loraine settled into her seat, a regal tilt to her head as she surveyed the room with an authoritative gaze. The energy among the shareholders swiftly waned in response.

Jaden at the forefront, his eyes narrowing with determination, he pressed on. "Lorrie, please, what's happening? We deserve an explanation!"

Calmly meeting Jaden's gaze, Loraine reassured him. "Jaden, there's no need to fret. It's simply a matter of the recent policy shifts. Our collaboration with the Solar Company encompasses substantial projects, hence the extended approval timeline."

The shareholders that Jaden brought weren't significant players; in fact, only a handful of minor shareholders were currently influenced by him.

Already on edge, the shareholders felt a twinge of uncertainty upon hearing Loraine's words, leaving them partially persuaded and inclined to withdraw their support.

Jaden, determined as ever, couldn't let Loraine off the hook that easily. He snorted, "Is that so? I believe it's your partnership with the Solar Company that's causing this debacle! The Solar Company is a foreign entity. Can they grasp our domestic procedures? It's no surprise we're stuck in this quagmire!"

Loraine couldn't help but find it somewhat amusing. After their heated exchange, Jaden didn't bother with pretenses anymore, resorting to such flimsy excuses.

However, there was a silver lining to this situation. In contrast to deceitful alliances, dealing with genuine animosity was far simpler and easier to navigate.

Her gaze sharpening, she retorted pointedly, "Perhaps your lack of discipline is to blame for letting your subordinate antagonize the government."

Jaden's expression shaded momentarily, his features etched with a brief shadow before he spoke in measured tones. "I've already shouldered accountability and faced demotion over that incident. Shouldn't that suffice? Loraine, we're discussing your selection of a partnership company! Your decision has significantly hindered project progress. How do you plan to address the concerns of our other shareholders?"

The handful of shareholders, clearly spurred into action by this, reengaged with renewed fervor, their nods of agreement cascading one after the other.

Loraine's lip curled in a sneer, her eyes scanning the crowd methodically as she proclaimed with gravity, "Rather than squandering time creating issues with me, it would serve you well to focus on refining your own projects! Every moment you prolong this discussion is impacting the interests of the Universe Group. What measures do you propose to compensate our fellow shareholders?"

At these words, the crowd visibly paled, their demeanor shifting once again.

Jaden seethed with fury, ready to interject, but Loraine merely glanced at her watch and retorted icily, "Jaden, you and your accompanying shareholders have only been present for two minutes. According to my prior dealings, your actions have already incurred a one-million-dollar loss for the Universe Group."

Her chuckle held a weighty significance as she asked pointedly, "Are you going to bear the burden of this loss together?"

Even Jaden's expression mirrored the shock of someone swallowing a fly, rendering him momentarily speechless.

The other shareholders, already taken aback, found themselves firmly in the camp of the fence-sitters, too stunned to voice any further objections. They collectively pleaded for clemency, "Miss Torres, please forgive the misunderstanding. We were merely conducting routine inquiries as shareholders, not intending to complicate matters for you. We shall take our leave now."

The crowd dispersed in a flurry of hurried retreats. One individual, still clinging to a semblance of conscience, pulled Jaden away from the scene.

Jaden's face contorted with anger, but he had no option but to allow himself to be dragged out of the office.

Despite successfully convincing them to depart, Loraine found little solace. She gazed icily at the doorway, a storm of unresolved tension brewing within her.

As the individuals departed, Loraine harbored no illusions; this was merely the first wave of challenges. If the matter regarding the government assessment remained unresolved, the next wave of anxiety would grip the influential shareholders.

Confirming that the Wilson family had framed the Universe Group proved elusive, making it an angle difficult to pursue.

Possibly, the most viable solution lay in building a sterling reputation for the Universe Group. A reputation so impeccable that even the government would not obstruct their projects without just cause.

Just then, her phone rang.

As Loraine glanced at the number, her eyes sparked with anticipation. Moments after ending the call, she wasted no time in reaching out to Marco.

"I've got an idea! Marco, are you available to join me?"

Marco, unfazed by her sudden decision, replied in a calm yet resolute tone, "I'll be there whenever you need me."

The hustle and bustle of Zodiac continued unabated, the departure of the two figures seemingly insignificant in the grand scheme of things.

In a secluded village, now thriving thanks to a recently constructed road, a silver-haired director overseeing a newly renovated orphanage gazed affectionately at the children before her. They were busily preparing to sell the handicrafts they had lovingly crafted, eager to showcase their creations in the newly opened market.

All of a sudden, a child dashed over in excitement, exclaiming, "Eloise! There's a stunning car at the entrance!"

Eloise narrowed her eyes in curiosity upon hearing the child's exclamation. Soon, her gaze settled on a young couple strolling towards her, their smiles warm and their voices calling out to her in greeting.

Chapter 1035 Return To The Orphanage

Eloise's face lit up with joy as she greeted Loraine. "Lorrie, it's wonderful to see you again! You've really surprised me!" she exclaimed with delight.

Eloise appeared much more vibrant than at their last meeting, possibly revitalized by the recent renovations at the orphanage. Her days seemed fuller, actively engaged in the children's activities.

Loraine was happy to see Eloise looking so lively and responded warmly, "I've missed you so much, I just had to come!"

Eloise's smile widened, and she affectionately patted Loraine on the head before shifting her attention to the man behind her.

She noticed a subtle change in the young man's demeanor, which had become more reserved yet profound.

Yet, his deep affection for Loraine remained evident.

Marco, holding many gifts, stood behind Loraine without holding her hand. He caught Eloise's eye, bowed slightly, and warmly said, "Eloise, it's a pleasure to meet you."

Eloise nodded in approval, happy to see Marco and Loraine still showed great affection towards each other.

The children in the orphanage had all received gifts, filling the courtyard with laughter.

After asking someone to bring the gifts inside, Eloise playfully

scolded Loraine, "Lorrie, you shouldn't spend so much."

Loraine replied with a smile, "Now that the road is repaired, it's much easier to drive in."

Eloise expressed her satisfaction with the road improvements, saying, "This road is fantastic. You've done a tremendous service for the village! Now the market is thriving, and even people from other villages are visiting. The villagers are earning well and living more comfortably than ever!"

Upon her arrival, Loraine noticed various cars parked at the village entrance. The once-neglected area had transformed into a vibrant market, where villagers sold their farm products directly, and even the orphanage children's handicrafts found buyers.

The village was developing just as Loraine had hoped, and it was improving continuously.

Hearing Eloise's comments, Loraine felt a surge of happiness. This was her childhood home, and she was committed to contributing to its welfare, without any expectation of personal benefit.

Additionally, the development of Woodshill had unexpectedly benefited her as well.

Just then, she spotted the small baskets in the children's hands and realized they were off to the market. Intrigued by its current state, she offered to carry some of their baskets and proposed with a smile. "Let's all head to the market together."

The market, once a deserted land near the orphanage, was not far away.

The market buzzed with activity, surpassing her expectations. Numerous visitors drawn by its reputation mingled there, and the local vendors, displaying wide grins, seemed to thrive.

It was clear that the villagers remembered Loraine and Marco well. Upon their arrival with the kids, they were immediately embraced by the community and showered with gifts.

Loraine sighed contentedly as she helped the children set up a stall, arranging their crafts with care and kicking off their sales for the day.

For both her and Marco, running a market stall was a new experience. They shared amused glances and laughed joyously.

As noon approached, just as Loraine was about to suggest returning to the orphanage for lunch, she noticed the children pulling out bread for their meal.

Loraine looked concerned and asked, "Is this what you're having for lunch?"

Dillon, once very thin but now looking healthier, offered a shy smile and explained, "Bread is easy to manage, and we have some other things to eat. Plus, there's plenty of bread!"

Then, adopting a serious tone as though he were an adult, he continued, "Eloise would be too tired to provide lunch for so many people. We don't need fancy food."

Loraine lowered her gaze, feeling heavy-hearted.

She knew she could solve the orphanage's financial issues, but with so many children to care for and educate, Eloise really couldn't manage every detail.

Suddenly, she felt a comforting grip on her hand. Marco, sensing her concern, looked at her thoughtfully and suggested, "Why don't we set aside some funds for the orphanage to enhance their meal program once we're back?"

Loraine nodded, then, deep in thought, added, "Increasing the meal budget is a start, but it's a temporary fix. The children

need a way to sustain better meals."

Marco laughed and said, "What do you have in mind?"

Loraine paused for a moment, then smiled confidently, "I didn't learn to cook just for fun. I grew up here and I know what we can do."

Turning to the children, she cleared her throat and asked cheerfully, "Would you like to help me with a little project?"