

Chapter 495 Absolute Trust

Suddenly, the phone on the desk vibrated. With a swift motion, Loraine grasped it. Marco was on the other end.

"Loraine, I'm in the lobby of Universe Group. Can you spare a moment to meet me?"

A spark ignited in Loraine's eyes. She walked towards the window, glancing downward. Unsurprisingly, Marco's vehicle was in view.

A maelstrom of emotions welled up within her, creating a whirlpool of confusion.

Marco's timely appearance stirred feelings of warmth in her, yet simultaneously planted seeds of confusion. Did he have any clue about Keely's grand return? Had they met each other?

Eventually, Loraine reined in her chaotic thoughts and descended to meet Marco.

Over the past couple of days, she had been engrossed in organizing her design drafts, leaving little room for rest and relaxation. The exhaustion was apparent in her countenance. Upon catching sight of her, Marco's eyes flickered with a trace of sympathy. Without uttering a word, he moved purposefully towards her, enveloping her in a tight embrace that spoke volumes of his affection.

In a voice laced with concern, he asked, "Have you been overworking? Why aren't you taking proper rest?"

Loraine was taken aback by his intimate embrace.



Immersed in the warmth of his embrace, she realized how weary she truly was. Unable to resist the comforting hold, she let herself sink into his arms for a few moments, letting her defenses down.

"Don't worry. I'll handle everything." Marco's voice resonated in her ears.

The sensation of being cherished so sincerely improved Loraine's mood. A smile crept onto her face as she questioned, "What is it that you plan to handle?"

Marco hesitated momentarily before replying solemnly, "I've come to know about the false accusations regarding your plagiarism."

"How are you so certain they're false? Leopold, a globally recognized authority on architectural design, has pointed fingers at me for plagiarism..."

Marco's brows knitted together. With a straight gaze, he cut her off, "I have faith in you, Loraine. I've witnessed your brilliance in the smart city project. As for this so-called expert, who can attest to his professional expertise without proper scrutiny? The world is flooded with experts the moment big marketing budgets enter the game."

Loraine chuckled, feeling a surge of warmth.

Despite Leopold's allegations, she refused to question her self-worth. She'd been meticulously going through her manuscripts to defend herself.

But Marco's anxious visit, coupled with his unwavering faith in her, stirred her emotions profoundly.

Because Marco had chosen to believe her.

Seeing that Loraine remained silent, Marco

stammered, "No matter what the world claims, I'll always stand by your side. I..."

Before he could complete his sentence, Loraine extended her arms and reciprocated his earlier embrace.

Resting against his arm, Loraine let out a contented sigh. "I'm grateful you trusted me."

There was something comforting about being the one chosen with certainty.

Marco paused for a moment before he gently embraced her, his hands resting on her waist. He offered a gentle pat, reassuring her, "Of course, I have faith in you. Loraine, I apologize. I should have done this sooner... If I had believed in you and protected you during our three years of marriage, perhaps we would not have ended in divorce..."

Hearing these words, a pang of pain shot through Loraine's heart. She lifted her gaze, meeting his caring eyes.

"Come on. Let's not dwell on the past."

But Marco leaned in closer, his words brushing against her nose. "No, it's my fault. I can't just erase it. Despite its ugliness, it's still our past. I don't want to act like it never occurred. Will you let me make amends and begin anew?"

As his breath warmed her lips, on the verge of a kiss, a camouflaged military vehicle thundered into view, executing a flawless quick turn and stopping before them.

Rowan stepped out of the car, his face cold.

"Lorrie, what's happening?"

Caught in their embrace, they were startled into a state of frozen stillness.

Loraine met Rowan's intense gaze, her voice low.
"Uncle Rowan..."

Rowan took a second glance, spotting Marco's hand on her waist. Seeing them so close, his face darkened further.

He had only been gone a few days to take care of Aldo in the hospital, and this brat was already swooping down on his beloved niece.

Stalking up to them, Rowan commanded in a low voice, "Brat, hands off!"

Marco held his tongue, reluctant to release Loraine. Feeling a sudden pinch on his waist, he winced, grudgingly letting go.

Seizing the moment, Loraine pushed Marco away, offering an awkward smile. "Uncle Rowan, what brings you here?"

Rowan snorted, a spark of hostility in his eyes. "The internet's buzzing with scandal about you. If I don't step in, people might think the Torres family is washed up!"

With that, he deftly positioned himself between her and Marco, shoving Marco further away.

Marco, now at a distance, looked at Loraine with a plaintive expression. After a brief silence, Loraine decided to inform Rowan about the recent events.

"Rest assured. I have everything under control."


But Rowan's eyes blazed with rage. "How can you manage on your own? Some cheeky professor accuses you of plagiarism without proof! Does he disrespect our family? I'll get someone on his case right now!"

Touching her forehead helplessly, Loraine quickly intervened, "Easy, Uncle Rowan!"

His eyebrows furrowed in confusion. Loraine let out a sigh as she clarified, "At the moment, public opinion claims that I'm leaning on the authority of the Torres family, which is why nobody dares to accuse me of plagiarism. If you intervene now, wouldn't it only validate these rumors? Please trust me, I can handle this situation independently."

Though he wasn't entirely convinced, Rowan was willing to defer to her judgment. "How do you intend to resolve this, Lorrie?"



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Chapter 496 I Really Liked Her

With an air of confidence and a bright smile, Loraine declared, "Of course I didn't plagiarize. Now, all I need to do is prove it!"

She had gathered and organized all the manuscripts from conception to final product, serving as solid evidence against any claims of plagiarism.

Moreover, she didn't believe that Leopold, a world-class master, would attempt to slander her due to a minor disagreement with his student. It wasn't just her reputation at stake, but his as well.


There must be other underlying reasons fueling his confidence. And this was precisely what she aimed to uncover.

Rowan nodded in agreement, furrowing his brows. "That's right. But we can't ignore the public opinion circulating online, can we? Lorrie, Leopold didn't mention any names. Why are people lambasting you on the internet, as if they're convinced that you're the plagiarist?"

"Someone must have intentionally misdirected the public. I'm trying to find out who is behind it," Marco interjected, his tone icy.

A spark ignited in Loraine's eyes as she glanced at Marco. After a moment of hesitation, she shared her suspicion.

"I believe Keely might have some involvement. If you

Chapter 496 I Really Liked Her  +120 Points at most
wish to investigate, you could start with her."

On hearing the name, Marco appeared taken aback.

Lorraine's heart dropped at his faint reaction.

Had he not moved on from Keely?

Unable to help herself, Lorraine scoffed, "What? I'm about to investigate Keely. Do you feel sympathy for her?"

Marco quickly regained his composure, shaking his head while voicing his allegiance. "Of course not. I'm merely regretful that I didn't investigate her earlier. Lorraine, I promise to uncover the truth and ensure you get the justice you deserve."

Given his feelings for Lorraine, how could he sympathize with Keely?

Marco's eyes darkened at the recollection of Keely's assurance to vouch for Lorraine.

Turning to Lorraine, he swallowed his hesitation and assured her in a low voice, "I will protect you. Don't worry."

Before Lorraine could respond, Rowan interjected dismissively, "We're capable of protecting our own. We won't trouble you!"

Embarrassed, Lorraine coughed. With her grandfather still in the hospital recovering from surgery and her uncles by his side, she felt guilty for distracting Rowan with this matter. She didn't want her family to lose focus because of her.

"Uncle Rowan, it's not a big deal. I can handle it. Please don't inform Grandpa..."

"Alright," Rowan agreed, his brows furrowed. He then cast a vigilant glance at Marco before addressing Loraine. "Wesley and I will take care of your grandfather. If you need anything, just give us a call. Don't try to shoulder everything yourself!"

Awkwardly, Loraine nodded.

After expressing his concerns for a while, Rowan called Marco aside for a private conversation.

"Listen here, kid. If you hurt Lorrie, even your deeds of saving my father and me won't save you from my wrath!"

Marco met Rowan's gaze unflinchingly. "Mr. Torres, I truly care for Loraine. I want to protect her. I hope you can give me a chance to prove my intentions."

Rowan stared at him with a stern expression, thinking that Marco seemed to mean it. He'd caught Loraine and Marco together on multiple occasions.

Aside from Marco, Loraine had never expressed distinct feelings for anyone else from childhood. She'd even opted to elope with Marco over her family's objections. Their divorce had been final, but they seemed to be caught in each other's orbit again.

Their bond wouldn't be easily severed by his interference. If he persisted in disrupting their relationship, the outcome might be counterproductive.

However, accepting Marco readily was also off the table. How could he forget the hardships Loraine had endured in the past because of Marco?

After contemplating for a while, Rowan neither rebuked nor consented. He vaguely stated, "We'll

Chapter 496 I Really Liked Her +120 Points at most

never forget your kindness to the Torres family, but if Loraine gets hurt, our family won't let you off lightly."

Marco nodded in agreement, refraining from arguing.

Rowan snorted, his hardened expression softening a tad, although worry lingered in his eyes. He gestured for his assistant, Hubert, to disembark from the vehicle.

"Lorrie, I'll leave Hubert here to help you. If anything comes up, reach out to me. I need to head back to the hospital."

Loraine smiled and bid him goodbye.

As soon as Rowan's vehicle disappeared from view, Marco sidled up to Loraine, proposing thoughtfully, "How about calling it a day? I could drive you home for some rest."

"I can escort her back!" Hubert announced dutifully, his bright eyes darting between Loraine and Marco.

Loraine nudged Marco aside. "Hubert is here with me. You should head back now!"

Without a reason to linger, Marco had no choice but to depart.

That night, Loraine found sleep elusive.

She tossed and turned in bed, her mind awash with complex thoughts.

She kept replaying the moment Marco hesitated when she suggested he investigate Keely.

In his heart, how much space did Keely occupy, and what about her?

Loraine finally managed to drift off to sleep. But not long after, she was rudely awakened by her alarm clock.

Groggily, Loraine washed her face and rinsed her mouth. As she stepped out of her car at her company's building, a frightful sight instantly woke her up.

A throng of reporters had swarmed the entrance, their camera flashes illuminating her face.

Chapter 497 Responding To Plagiarism

"Miss Torres, could you confirm or deny that your architectural design plans are copied?"

"Could you address the online controversy?"

"Miss Torres, what's your take on Professor Zizka's remarks?"

Dazzled and disoriented, Lorraine had barely stepped out of her vehicle when she stumbled into the crowd of reporters. She remained bewildered for several moments before clarity returned.

The reporters, however, had little regard for her disorientation. They swarmed around her, with cameras about to poke her face.

Amidst the pushing, a reporter accidentally collided with another and fell straight towards Lorraine. In the chaos, the camera came crashing down towards her face.

Instinctively, Lorraine shut her eyes, extending her hand to shield herself from the imminent impact.

Yet, the anticipated pain never came. Instead, she felt herself being lifted off her feet, as if someone had scooped her up and twirled her around.

Startled, Lorraine opened her eyes and discovered herself in the protective embrace of Marco.

He blocked the camera with no regard for his own

Chapter 497 Responding To Miss Torres: +120 Points at most
wrist, shielding Loraine from its intrusion.

Casting a chilling look at the crowd, Marco's intense demeanor cowed the reporters into retreating a step.

However, the reporters, driven by their eagerness to uncover a major scoop, refused to put down their cameras despite being somewhat intimidated by Marco.

A bold reporter probed, "Miss Torres, we need your confirmation. Is it true that your design is a copy of someone else's work? Did you independently create your previous works, or did you employ a ghost designer?"

A throbbing ache seized Loraine's temples, and she felt her head spinning amidst the blinding flashlights.

Unrelenting, the reporters continued their offensive, cornering the duo.

"Are you the plagiarist that Professor Zizka mentioned? Did you audaciously submit plagiarized work for Professor Zizka's review?"

Guarding Loraine, Marco began to back away. His voice low and stern, he warned, "That's enough! This is Universe Group's premises. Leave immediately, or I will have security evict you!"

Undeterred by Marco's threat and bolstered by their numbers, the journalists fired back, "Mr. Bryant, are you privy to Miss Torres' plagiarism? Can you share anything with us?"

"Absolutely not. Leave!" Marco said firmly, his tone cold and resolute.

But this only served to fuel their excitement.

"Mr. Bryant, why do you defend Miss Torres amid plagiarism allegations? Is it an attempt to win her over? Are you planning to reunite with her?"

Caught off guard, Marco held his tongue, glancing down at Loraine.

Loraine gently extricated herself from Marco's grasp and stood upright. Her icy gaze landed on the reporter who had been the most vocal.

"You seem familiar. You're the one who pursued us in the parking garage, aren't you? Quite courageous of you."

The reporter in question, a bespectacled man with a cropped haircut, had been bellowing in the crowd. But when singled out, he visibly paled and receded two steps.

"I... I have no idea what you're referring to. I merely seek answers on behalf of the public!"

Smirking, Loraine snatched the microphone from his hand. The resulting feedback from the microphone ushered in a moment of silence, settling the chaotic scene.

Stunned, the reporters stared at Loraine as the frenzy finally subsided.

Clearing her throat, Loraine began to address the crowd in a composed and deliberate manner. "I chose not to respond to your queries earlier because they were baseless and absurd. Since you are seeking an answer, I can responsibly provide one.

I did not plagiarize. I have serious doubts about Professor Zizka's allegations and will not hesitate to

Chapter 497 Responding To Rumors +120 Points at most

take legal action against anyone who defames me. As for your questions, I will address them individually later. However, I kindly request that you refrain from obstructing the entrance to the Universe Group, as it may disrupt public order. Otherwise, I will have no choice but to sue you."

The reporters exchanged glances. A hesitant voice finally broke the silence. "When will this be?"

Loraine smiled. "In a week. I will publicly address both the online rumors and Professor Zizka's accusations."

Despite their disappointment at not procuring immediate answers, the reporters, respecting the clout of the Universe Group and the Bryant Group, reluctantly withdrew.

Casually tossing the microphone back to the reporter, Loraine strode into the building without a backward glance.

Marco was right on her heels.

The elevator ride to the CEO's office was silent.

Absorbed in her thoughts, Loraine furrowed her brow, her gaze fixed on the floor.

Watching her intently, Marco finally asked, "Loraine, what's troubling you?"

With a look of confusion, Loraine questioned, "How did the reporters show up so promptly? Who tipped them off?"

Chapter 498 Call White Black

While it wasn't unusual for the press to be in the loop, Loraine found their timely knowledge peculiar.

It was similar to the way news about the identity of the plagiarist had just strangely and synchronously appeared on the web.

Marco perceived her unease and tightened his features into a solemn nod. "Fear not, Loraine. I have already sent someone to investigate the matter. An answer will be with you shortly."

In the midst of their exchange, the elevator dinged, signaling their arrival at the CEO's office floor. After a moment of quiet, Loraine let out a scornful laugh. "Marco, be careful with the promises you make. Broken pledges are something I can't stand, especially from men."


He had vowed to handle Marina and Laura and get back to her, yet...

Haunted by the past, Marco's voice hitched. Then, steadying his gaze on Loraine, he reassured, "I won't let you down. Give me one more shot."

Avoiding his eyes, Loraine changed the subject. "Anyway, what brings you here today? Any specific reason?"

Marco, with a purposeful expression, presented a pile of files. "Here's everything on Keely that you asked for, including her activities overseas."

Taken aback, Loraine hadn't anticipated Marco's swift

Chapter 498 Call White Black  +120 Points at most
investigation into Keely and his provision of the results.

Could it be that she held a higher place in his heart than Keely?

"Understood..."

Upon her acceptance of the files, Marco responded, his voice deep with sincerity, "Loraine, if you're eyeing the White Cloud Airport project, I'm here to support you. No worries about Leopold..."

Was he suggesting foul play to secure the project for her?

Taken by surprise, Loraine was torn between amusement and shock. "Mr. Bryant, if Mr. Moore and the others caught wind of this, they'd be in a pickle."

His eyes softened at the sight of her smile.

"Loraine, I mean it. I'm prepared to go to any lengths for you, if you wish it so."

"Thank you for the offer," Loraine cut him off and stated firmly, "But I prefer to fight my own battles. Besides, I am not the one who does the wrong things. I won't exploit any underhanded strategies to land the project."

Pausing, Marco bowed his head and let out a sigh, "My apologies. I didn't fully consider it."

Loraine's heart fluttered. Recalling his earlier defense against the reporters, her eyes fell upon his wrist.

Thankfully, his encounter with the camera hadn't left any serious damage, no signs of it now.

Feeling her gaze, he waved his hand in a friendly gesture, as if to assure her.

"Don't worry. I'm okay."

Feigning sternness, Loraine cleared her throat. "It wasn't concern. You've been tied up with work all day. Now that you delivered the files, shouldn't you head back now? Need me to arrange a driver for you?"

Hiding a chuckle, Marco didn't call her out. His affectionate gaze lingered on her before he gently replied, "Alright, I'll be off then. Remember, Loraine, you can call me anytime you need something."

Embarrassed, Loraine shut the door, taking a few moments to regain her composure.

At the same time, in the Bryant family's villa.

Lounging in the living room, Marina flaunted her phone. "Mom, I've set reporters onto Loraine at the Universe Group entrance. These reporters can spin anything. Once the scandalous stories about Loraine hit the internet, let's see her next move!"

Elegantly sipping her tea, Laura advised with a smile, "Marina, hold your horses with the celebrations. Once Loraine falls from grace, we can enjoy our victory."

Rolling her eyes, Marina nodded.

Yet, she was the kind of person who could hardly keep a secret. The desire to boast about her accomplishments was more tormenting than any restrictions imposed on her.

It wasn't long before Marina brushed off the caution and rang Keely to brag.

Reacting to the news, Keely feigned concern. "Marina, is this really a good idea? What if Marco finds out? Won't he be furious?"

Marina retorted, "Keely, do you know why you can't stand against Loraine? You're too soft! Why worry? Leopold accused Loraine of plagiarism. How could he be wrong? All I'm doing is exposing the true face of this wicked woman!"

Keely replied in a hushed tone, "I understand your intentions, but considering Marco's affection for Loraine, I fear he might be upset."

A thought suddenly struck Marina.

Keely had found favor with Leopold and was still in love with Marco. More importantly, Keely was oblivious to the fact that Marco wasn't her biological brother.

If she could leverage this opportunity to earn the goodwill of Keely and establish a connection with the globally renowned Leopold, perhaps her reputation could be redeemed.

With this thought, Marina's lips curled into a smile. "I understand how much my brother means to you. Don't worry. I'll speak highly of you to him!"

"Really? Thank you, Marina."

Concealing her disdain behind a fabricated smile, Keely flattered Marina. Once the call ended, her smile twisted into a smirk.

Although Marina and Laura were dim-witted, they were somewhat useful.


She felt a surge of satisfaction and opened up her social media. As expected, the internet was ablaze with harsh words for Loraine.

This time, Loraine was cornered!

Contentedly, Keely logged into her account and joined the chorus against Loraine, masking her glee with false outrage.

"I'm Leopold's student and I have something to tell you. My teacher was invited to Vagow for the White Cloud Airport project. He never expected to cross paths with Loraine. With her influential family backing, she disrespected the industry veteran and even went on the offensive. My teacher was so enraged that his blood pressure soared. If any harm befalls my teacher, Loraine won't be spared!"



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Chapter 499 Playing Fragile And Innocent

In her role as a student of Leopold, Keely rose to his defense, sparking fiery debates.

"When did Keely become the student of Professor Zizka?"

"Hold on a second. Is Professor Zizka alleging something about Loraine and Keely? Did Loraine steal Keely's work?"

After the shock, the netizens rallied around Keely, expressing their empathy. Concurrently, their condemnation of Loraine intensified.

"This is outrageous! I find it difficult to comprehend that Loraine could behave in such a manner. She abuses her influence, intimidates those who are less powerful, and now, she even has the audacity to disrespect the respected industry figure!"

"Wasn't Loraine always like this? It's laughable how she leverages her wealth to manipulate online trends and promote herself. I'm glad I never fell for it."

As Keely perused the comments, she smirked. Then, her phone rang.

Her eyes lit up when she saw the caller ID. Excitement filled her voice as she answered the call.

"Finally, you reached out, Marco!" Her tone softened, and she whined a little. "You had blocked my number. I thought you were done with me."

The voice at the other end was silent for a moment, and then Marco's frosty voice echoed in the air.

"You have to stop, Keely. If you continue to harm Loraine, you'll have me to deal with."

Fear replaced Keely's smile. She bit the edge of her tongue to contain her anxiety, her voice trembling with tears. "Why are you suspecting me, Marco? I haven't done anything."

"Aren't your online posts fueling the fire?" Marco retorted coldly.

Realization dawned upon Keely. So, it was about the internet debate. She sighed in relief and explained, "I'm now a student of Professor Zizka. Is it wrong to worry about him? Yes, I made mistakes in the past, but I've paid for them. Professor Zizka offered me a fresh start. He's not just my teacher, but a lifesaver. Loraine's actions upset him deeply. How can I stay indifferent?"

Marco remained quiet for a moment, and then spoke impassively. "It was Professor Zizka who first cast aspersions on Loraine, wasn't it? And, didn't you assure me you'd intervene? Why didn't he reach out to Loraine directly, instead of casting doubts publicly?"

Keely's heart fluttered, but she also felt a tinge of luck.

It seemed that Marco was just concerned about the internet post. He wasn't aware of her other deeds.

With this reassurance, Keely gathered her composure and continued in a sorrowful voice, "Marco, I understand your concern for Loraine, but Professor Zizka's health is fragile. I dare not confront him. And, I never anticipated his public outburst. His anger is

Chapter 499 Playing Fragile / inc 🎁 +120 Points at most
genuine. He nearly fainted due to his high blood pressure just a moment ago..."

Keely's voice wavered.

"I've already lost Jorge. I can't afford to lose another person dear to me. Can you understand that, Marco? I was so infuriated that I posted those comments online. If they bother you, I can delete them."

Marco paused at her words, but replied calmly, "If Professor Zizka's health is compromised, he should seek medical treatment instead of stirring up controversy. I'll bear the medical expenses. And anyone who accuses Loraine of plagiarism will have to face me."

Keely gasped and clenched her jaw. Jealousy twisted her face.

Why did Marco care so much for Loraine?

In the past, any mention of Jorge's death would halt Marco's harsh words. But this time, he was different.

Drawing in a deep breath, Keely mustered the courage to question Marco, "Professor Zizka's credibility in the industry is undeniable. If he accuses Loraine of plagiarism, he must have a valid reason. Why do you trust Loraine over my teacher, Marco?"

Without missing a beat, Marco answered, "Because I'm certain that Loraine would never plagiarize. I can vouch for her!"

Keely was left speechless, her heart seething with anger and jealousy. Why did Loraine enjoy such unfaltering trust from Marco?

In an attempt to regain control, Keely changed her

approach and adopted a softer tone. "Marco, honestly, I don't know if Loraine plagiarized or not. That's Professor Zizka's opinion. As his student, I'll naturally support him."

Marco stayed silent. Keely let out a quiet sob. "After all, I have been to prison before. Even though Professor Zizka was really nice to me, my time away was tough. I can't even express how much I missed you every single day I was gone."

Keely's voice quivered with sadness as she continued, "I've put so much effort into my design, hoping that Professor Zizka would notice and bring me back to the country to be with you. Marco..."

She paused, expecting Marco's comfort. She was certain no man could ignore her pleas.

But Marco wasn't moved.

He didn't hear the answers he sought. Not wanting to hear Keely's lament anymore, he ended the call abruptly.

Keely was putting all her effort into her acting, completely immersed in the moment. The abrupt sound of the phone hanging up startled Keely, leaving her in a state of utter disbelief.

In a state of panic, Keely hastily dialed back, fearing that the call had been unintentionally disconnected. However, her apprehension grew when she discovered that her number had been blocked once again, preventing her from reaching Marco.

Shock washed over Keely as she stared at her phone. In a fit of rage, she flung her water glass off the table, grinding her teeth as she cursed, "Loraine! You are the cause of all this. I'll make you pay!"