

Chapter 506 Cut Off Financial Resources

Taken aback, Liza peered at Laura and Marina for a while. Then she turned her eyes back to Marco, her voice a quiver of bewilderment. "Marco, what in the world are you saying?"

She had only moments before vouched that the two women hadn't stirred any ruckus. Had they truly wreaked havoc under her watch?

Yet her question was met with only silence.

Laura's cheeks flushed with panic, wanting to deny the accusation, but Marina let the truth slip. "Marco, how'd you figure it out?"

Laura's eyes dimmed, she felt lightheaded.

Marco's lips curled into a scornful smirk, choosing not to respond to their queries.

"All I can imagine is you two creating such a mess. I'm not surprised by what you did. How many times is this? Despite my frequent warnings, you never seem to learn. Do you see me as a pushover? I suppose I can't keep funding your mistakes!"

Laura and Marina stared, their eyes wide with shock.

With a grit of her teeth, Marina plucked up the courage to retort, "Why aren't you giving me my allowance? I am the rightful Bryant heiress, and you're nothing but a bastard!"

The thought of being without an allowance seemed more daunting to Marina than her fear of Marco. What self-respecting woman from a rich family would lead such a pitiful existence?

The subject of his illegitimacy stung Marco, leaving him momentarily speechless, his face clouded with anger.

Liza, snapping back to her senses, commanded, "Shut up, Marina! Regardless, Marco is the CEO of Bryant Group. You've no right to spew such rubbish!"

Marina retreated, but her defiant expression held. She sought refuge behind Laura, eyes misty with unshed tears.

Laura, moved by Marina's struggle, wrapped her in a comforting embrace, her face mirroring Marina's anger.

Witnessing their difficult situation, Marco's lips curled into another disdainful smirk.

"Remember, you've already squandered the Bryant Group's fortune once. The money you're spending now is what I've earned back. It's not yours to claim. That gives me the right to shut off your finances!"

The two women blanched, turning pleading eyes towards Liza.

Desperate to placate Marco, Liza tried to convince him to spare Laura and Marina, saying repeatedly, "Punishment is deserved for their wrongdoings! Marco, let's forget about bastards and all that, you're the leader of our family..."

Marco's face furrowed at her words. Suddenly, a noise echoed from the outside, as though someone had struck the door frame.

Their attention snapped towards the source of the sound, yet they found no one at the entrance.

Marco's frown deepened as he approached the trembling door, his expression darkening. "Who was here just now?"

Marina's expression shifted to something odd, which didn't escape Marco's sharp gaze.

"Marina, you had a visitor?"

Marina, still seething over Marco's decision to cut off her allowance, refused to respond.

With a derisive sneer, Marco beckoned a servant for questioning.

Laura's eyes flickered with panic. Knowing she couldn't hide the truth from Marco any longer, she chose to come clean.

"Marco, it must've been Keely. She visited us before, and we couldn't turn her away... As for the rumors, she told us to spread them. She claimed that she would help us convince you to forgive us. Marina and I believed her..."

Laura's voice wavered, painting a picture of their desperation for Marco's forgiveness, which led them to trust the wrong person. They only wished to reconcile with him.

Upon hearing Keely's name, Liza seethed. Keely's influence was the reason they lost Loraine, their potential millionaire daughter-in-law.

"You are still associating with that damn Keely? Isn't she the root of all the chaos in our family?"

Marina, undeterred by Liza's words, replied, "Grandma, Keely is now Professor Zizka's favored student. She's changed. We only stay connected hoping she can help the Bryant Group secure the White Cloud Airport project!"

Hearing this, Liza gasped. "Is that true?"

Marina nodded confidently. Knowing that Liza wasn't up-to-date with online news, Marina added, "Grandma, Loraine has been accused of plagiarism, which has put her at odds with Professor Zizka. He even publicly refused to develop the White Cloud Airport with Loraine, preferring to work with the Bryant Group instead."

Liza pondered, weighing the potential gains and losses.

If the Bryant Group could take over this big project alone...

Noticing Liza's contemplation, Laura added quickly, "Yes, mom, our contact with Keely was solely to rectify our errors..."

Before Laura could finish, Marco interjected with a cold reproach, "Fool, Keely is a plagiarist. If she hadn't stolen Loraine's design, do you think Professor Zizka would've favored her? Have you forgotten her previous blunder concerning the renovation of the old house?"

His harsh words left Laura and Marina dumbstruck.

Frowning, Liza queried, "What's this about plagiarism between Loraine and Keely?"

Without further ado, Marco shared the video of the recent press conference with Liza.

Seeing the video, Liza's expression hardened. She cast a



frosty glance at Laura and Marina. Sensing their impending reckoning, Marco decided to leave.

On departing the Bryants' house, Marco messaged Carl, "How can anyone be oblivious to the fact that Keely plagiarized Loraine's design? Tell public relations to spread the news. I won't let Loraine be unjustly accused again!"



Chapter 507 She Had To Endure It

Simultaneously, a figure dashed from the elite residential enclave, the domain of the Bryant family. Frantically flagging down a passing car, the figure climbed in.

After rattling off an address to the driver, Keely finally allowed herself a moment to exhale, her gaze catching her reflection in the rearview mirror.

Her hair was tousled, her complexion ashen. She bore an uncanny resemblance to a specter.

The disturbing news she had just heard kept her heart pounding in her chest, refusing to settle.

Before long, the taxi pulled into a housing complex. Only after the driver nudged her twice did Keely snap back to reality. She paid the fare and stumbled out of the vehicle in a daze.

As she entered her home, bathed in a soothing yellow light, she felt a hint of relaxation. But that respite was short-lived as a shrill voice pierced the tranquility.

"Keely, what's happening online? Didn't you promise everything would go smoothly? Why has public sentiment turned?"

Jane Powell's approach was a harbinger of an impending headache for Keely. She responded, "Aunt Jane, please don't question me now. I will figure out a solution..."

The woman Keely was referring to was a well-groomed, forty-something individual, adorned in pricy attire.

Jane looked at Keely with blatant scorn.

"Are you going to fix it? And how, may I ask? Don't get me wrong, Keely, but you're living off my hospitality. I am not running a charity..."

Keely's hands balled into fists as a lump formed in her throat.

Her family, the Haywoods, had few relatives. Jane was one of her closest kin.

Following the demise of her parents and the tragic accident of her fiancé, Jorge, Keely was forced to seek refuge with the Powell family, bringing her family's fortune with her. As a result, Marco began to feel some sympathy and concern for her.

Initially, the Powell family treated Keely with kindness, but after her uncle Elmo and cousin Barr ended up behind bars because of her, Jane's attitude took a drastic turn for the worse.

When Keely was subsequently incarcerated overseas, the Powell family severed all ties with her.

Upon her triumphant return as Leopold's student, the Powell family reached out to Keely once again, hoping to leverage her connection to Leopold to secure a piece of the airport renovation project.

But Keely's time of triumph was short, and her reputation soon took another hit.

Although Keely was in turmoil, Jane seemed even more perturbed.

Jane's frown deepened as she pressed, "Keely, you must make amends with Professor Zizka quickly. I've spread the word that you're his favorite student, sure to foster project collaboration with the Powell family. I can't just backtrack now!"

Keely looked at Jane, opening her mouth to articulate an explanation, her irritation growing.

"No worries. Even if Professor Zizka turns out to be a dud, I've still got Marco. I will win his heart," Keely assured Jane, as much as herself.

She had initially planned to enlist Marina's help in appealing to Marco to prevent her scandal from blowing out of proportion. But what she hadn't anticipated was stumbling upon a bombshell outside the Bryant residence.

Marco was the Bryant family's secret love child.

Jane, oblivious to the thoughts racing in Keely's head, noticed her preoccupied expression. With a smirk, she drawled, "Just remember, you owe the Powell family, Keely. We're not the prosperous family we once were, especially with your uncle and cousin serving time because of you. If you can't bring any benefit to us, I see no reason to support a free loader..."

Keely ground her teeth, forcing a smile to her lips. "You're right, Aunt Jane. I will give it my all."

Keely's face still held a facade of compliance, but inside, she seethed with rage. If not for the Haywood family's support, who knew where the Powell family would be today,

possibly languishing in some impoverished rural area.

But for now, the Powell family was her only lifeline. She needed their resources and their network, and for that, she had to endure.

Having placated Jane, Keely retreated to her room.

Left alone, she let her anger get the better of her, hurling her phone across the room.

After the outburst, she shuddered violently, but soon stooped to retrieve the shattered device. As she traced the cracks, she bit her lip until the metallic taste of blood flooded her mouth.

All these years, she had struggled and schemed, aiming to be Marco's wife, to have a better life. But why had it all amounted to nothing?

The jagged edges of the broken phone dug into her palm, drawing blood. Unfazed, Keely let out a maniacal laugh.

"So, Marco's a bastard, big deal. At the end of the day, he's still the heir to the Bryant Group..."

She was resolved to become Mrs. Bryant, to hold a status that would make others revere her and dance to her tune.

She vowed to never again endure the humiliation and manipulation she had faced today.

Engrossed in her own world, Keely was brought back to reality by a knock on her door. Jane's piercing voice rang out, "Keely, get out here. The internet's flooded with news about your plagiarism and lies. What's going on?"

Chapter 508 The Last Chance

Keely was taken aback. She reached for her phone, her fingers shaking as she clicked it open. A chill swept over her.

Every social media platform was abuzz with her scandal.

The news of her plagiarizing Loraine's work and deceiving Leopold was trending everywhere. Influential accounts and news outlets published posts simultaneously, criticizing her.

Her inbox was filled with hate messages and obscenities, and some users even dredged up past incidents from her life.

"Keely claimed Loraine stole her man, playing the victim card, when in fact, she was the home-wrecker! She's the reason Loraine and Marco got divorced!"

"Who isn't aware of Keely's antics? She's been involved in illegal activities... Just remember when her uncle and cousin went to jail for bribery, she herself was behind bars for some offense. Can't believe she has the audacity to show her face in public."

"Oh, it's her! I feel sick having felt sorry for her!"

As she skimmed through the barrage of vitriol, Keely felt a wave of panic rise.

These were things that were supposed to fade with time, but now they were brought back into the spotlight, obliterating any chance of redemption.

She was sure that someone had poured money into boosting these views to ensure her downfall, but there was nothing she could do about it. Now without any money or influence, she was at the mercy of the Powell family. It would be a miracle if Jane didn't use this to further demean her, let alone come to her aid.

She could lay low, but how long could she hide?

Especially in her current predicament, she may not even have a safe haven.

She shut her eyes in desperation.

The door was flung open and Jane burst in, thrusting her phone in Keely's face. "Keely, what the hell is this mess? Who have you managed to infuriate? Now, even those high-society ladies who rarely browse the internet are aware of your deeds. They're all questioning me. You're a disgrace! Not only are you of no use to the Powell family, but you've also tarnished the Haywood name!" Jane continued her tirade, "Why did you come back? You should have just stayed away or better yet, perished abroad!"

Jane's harsh words echoed in Keely's ears. Gritting her teeth, Keely could only huddle on the floor and take it in silence.

The Powell family was her last refuge. Now with her reputation in tatters, if she left the Powell family, she'd be utterly alone, relegated to a life on the streets.

The bitterness in her heart was overwhelming, yet she managed to suppress the cold fury in her eyes. She crawled

towards Jane, pleading, "Aunt Jane, please, don't be angry. Even without Professor Zizka, I have Marco! When I'm with Marco, I promise to repay the Powell family!"

Jane regarded Keely with a skeptical gaze, showing no signs of softening. She scoffed, "You're in this mess and Professor Zizka has publicly severed his mentorship with you. Why hasn't Marco stepped in to help? Is he really going to associate with you? Stop feeding me lies!"

Keely responded, "Marco allowing me to return means he still harbors feelings for me."

Hearing this, Jane paused, her gaze falling on Keely's phone. A smirk spread across her face. "Keely, it's not that I distrust you, but you need to give me a reason to believe you. I'll give you one last chance. Call Marco now. If he answers your call, I'll believe you."

Keely's face went ashen. She had called Marco countless times and sent numerous messages, all to no avail. She suspected he had blocked her.

Yet under Jane's insistence, Keely had no choice but to dial Marco's number.

Predictably, the call was disconnected before it even connected.

Keely looked distraught. She quickly said, "I got this number abroad. I think Marco has blocked all foreign calls! Aunt Jane, I'll personally go see him some other day..."

"No, use my phone to call him!" Jane wasn't letting Keely off so easily. She thrust her phone at Keely, suspicion writ large on her face. "Keely, are you lying to me about being blacklisted?"

Keely quickly shook her head and hastily composed a text message on Jane's phone.

"Marco, this is Keely. I have something important to discuss. Could you please pick up the phone?"

Keely was nearly pleading, praying internally as she trembled and dialed the number once more.

This time, the call connected, but was disconnected after just two rings.

Keely's face paled, and the bitterness in her heart reached new heights.

She couldn't help but wonder if Marco could really be that heartless.

Jane sneered, reaching out to snatch her phone back. She commented mockingly, "I can't believe I thought there might be a chance you'd end up with him. Keely, you can pack up and leave the Powell house in the next two days. It's best you lay low for a while..."

Suddenly, Keely pushed Jane away, her eyes wild as she furiously sent another message. With a fierce expression, she asserted, "He will reply. He's just busy and hasn't seen it!"

As time ticked by, even Keely was finding it hard to convince herself. She collapsed to the floor, utterly dejected.

Then, the phone vibrated. Marco's reply flashed on the screen. Keely's eyes sparkled, clutching the phone with sheer joy, tears streaming down her face as she laughed. "I knew it! I knew he'd reply. There's still hope!"

Keely opened the message with bated breath, her face freezing suddenly.



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Chapter 509 Don't Come Back Again

After leaving the Bryant family's villa, Marco swiftly drove back to the company.

Despite the prospect of severe punishment for Laura and Marina, they were unlikely to surrender easily and might persist in causing further trouble.

Liza would merely berate them and plead with him to pardon them for the family's good name, harboring hopes that he would return to the villa.

Marco was utterly fed up with these petty issues!

His so-called family was nothing but an energy drain. Yet, compared to the chill of his own apartment, immersing himself in work seemed more appealing.

As Marco settled into his office chair, Carl came knocking and entered.

"Mr. Bryant, the internet's public sentiment has been steered as per your instructions."

On hearing this, a slight sense of relief washed over Marco's icy gaze. He gave a nod of acknowledgment, took a moment, and then retrieved his phone to call Loraine.

Once the call connected, he carefully curated his tone. "Loraine, I had someone clear your name online. You're no longer suspected of plagiarism."

Marco's careful choice of words left Carl taken aback, his eyebrows raising and lips twitching in surprise.

How had his typically stoic boss transformed into this vulnerable figure at the mere mention of Loraine?

Loraine, on the other side of the line, seemed equally surprised and hesitated before saying, "So, thank you?"

Attempting to mask his happiness, Marco proposed gently, "Are you free later? Perhaps we could celebrate the resolution of this ordeal?"

Such gentle words were foreign from Marco's lips.

Upon hearing Marco's gentle tone, Carl instinctively touched the goosebumps on his arms and couldn't help but tremble.

He felt as though he should give the two some privacy. Maybe he should wait outside the office.

There was a rustling sound from Loraine's end, like she was standing up from a chair. Her voice became clearer a moment later.

"I'm tied up with a meeting. I need to finalize the White Cloud Airport renovation plan. Maybe we could reschedule?"

Marco paused, clearly taken aback. Though a tinge of disappointment clouded his eyes, he maintained a professional demeanor. "Of course, work comes first. Loraine, I'm certain the airport project will be a grand success!"

Loraine gave an audible nod and quickly ended the call.

Marco was left staring at his phone, his gaze full of longing.

On looking up, he found Carl on the verge of speaking but he held his tongue.

Marco quickly reverted to his typical aloofness. "What's wrong?"

Carl simply shook his head, chuckled, and said, "I have a feeling that you and Miss Torres will be rekindling things very soon!"

The fact that Marco was actively pursuing Loraine indicated a position of desperation. If there was no progress between them, Carl would feel anxious on their behalf.

Carl's observation brought a faint smile to Marco's face. Just as he was about to respond, his phone buzzed with a new message from an unknown number.

The instant Marco saw the sender's name, Keely, his expression turned grim. He recalled having blocked Keely's number before, yet here she was, reaching out through a different one.

Marco ignored the message, deleting it with the intention of returning to his work.

But in the next moment, his phone began to ring.

Marco's pleasant mood was shattered by the incoming call. He coldly disconnected the call and was just about to block this new number when a series of messages flooded in.

"Marco, it's Keely. Why aren't you answering my call? Please, hear me out."

"Marco, I realize my mistake. I'm terrified of losing you. I only did what I did to win back your affection."

"Yes, I'm envious of Loraine. You used to treat me so well, but everything changed after she entered your life. Now, you only care about her! I wanted to prove I'm better, I wanted to regain your attention. That's why I did those wrong things. Can you forgive me?"

Marco frowned, quickly scanning through the flurry of messages. He had no intention of responding.

However, the next message made him pause.

"Do you remember what you promised Jorge? You vowed to look after me. Jorge was my only support in this world. He sacrificed his life for you. Now that he's no longer with us, will you abandon me too?"

Marco's lips twitched, his breath turning icy.

After Jorge's demise, he had done his best to care for Keely, even at the expense of his relationship with Loraine.

The debt he owed to Jorge was immense.

A debt he knew he could never fully repay.

Keely seemed to understand this all too well. She knew that the mention of Jorge would make Marco incapable of turning his back on her. Her behavior was becoming increasingly audacious.

But Marco was not going to let her manipulate him further. He owed Jorge, not Keely. It was time to put an end to this charade.

With thinly veiled irritation, Marco typed a response, "What do you want?" Before he could hit send, another message from Keely popped up.

"Marco, I don't ask for much. Jorge's death anniversary is coming up. Can we visit his grave together? It'll show him that you've been taking care of me."

Marco's face darkened even more. He quickly deleted his drafted response and wrote a new one.

"Fine. We'll visit him together. Afterwards, you should leave the country and never return."



Chapter 510 His Worry

In the Powell family's villa, Keely read Marco's reply, feeling the heavy weight of disappointment.

Jane cast a worried glance her way, reaching for Keely's phone. Startled, Keely quickly hid the device behind her, mustering a convincing grin.

"He agreed to meet me. Relax, Aunt Jane. I'll figure out how to get him to stay once we meet!"

Keely's leverage on Marco, owing to his promise to Jorge, was losing its hold as Marco grew more distant. Keely was well aware that overusing this ploy would render it ineffective.

However, she used it again, bargaining for a chance to meet Marco, not for any other favors.

She was certain that if she asked Marco for a substantial monetary gift or a comfortable life overseas, he wouldn't decline.

Yet, she refused to quit. Having left in disarray once, she wouldn't let Loraine win again and slink away in despair.

In the Bryant Group CEO's office, Marco immediately added the number to his block list after sending Keely the message.

Carl caught a fleeting glance at the message. From Marco's reaction, he surmised it must be Keely.

Observing Marco's relationship with Loraine unfold, Carl realized Marco's lack of understanding in love affairs.

Though Carl wasn't fond of Marco flaunting his romantic life, he preferred it over the stoic and distant Marco of the past. He couldn't fathom how unhinged Marco might become if he couldn't win Loraine over.

For the sake of Marco's love life and his own bonus, Carl gently reminded Marco, "Mr. Bryant, if you plan to see Miss Haywood, shouldn't you inform Miss Torres?"

Caught off guard, Marco's immediate instinct was to agree.

His relationship with Loraine had suffered multiple misunderstandings due to his poor communication skills. If Loraine discovered from a third party that he'd met Keely, more confusion might ensue.

Yet, as he reached for the phone, hesitation took hold.

He and Loraine were in a good place now, reaching a level of closeness where his advances were welcomed. What if mentioning Keely unexpectedly triggered some unanticipated reaction?

Besides, it involved his late best friend, Jorge. He wanted to discuss it with Loraine in person when the time was right.

With these thoughts, Marco decided against sharing this matter with Loraine.

Pondering, he stated, "Once we've paid our respects to Jorge, I'll send Keely overseas directly. After everything is resolved, I'll clarify everything to Loraine, ensuring she remains untroubled."

Elsewhere, Loraine found herself engrossed in her phone call log with Marco.

She meant to browse through her messages but unintentionally tapped on the call history. A chuckle escaped her as she recalled how Marco would ring her up just to brag and arrange meet-ups.

Suddenly, Jolie's teasing voice echoed in Loraine's ears. "Miss Torres, what's got you smiling so broadly? Did your sweetheart ring you up?"

Flustered, Loraine shot Jolie a stern look before settling back into her chair. "Stop making things up!"

Jolie winked slyly, responding, "Aha! It's Mr. Bryant, isn't it?"

Upon hearing Jolie's insinuation, the others in the office exchanged amused glances, causing Loraine to erupt into a coughing fit.

In an attempt to redirect the conversation, Loraine forced a serious tone and said, "Alright everyone, let's get back on track. We were discussing the design plan for the White Cloud Airport..."

As the Universe Group's female CEO, Loraine didn't necessarily have to be present at these project meetings. She could simply hand the design blueprints to the team and let them deliberate.

However, Loraine was meticulous and preferred hands-on involvement. Initially, the team members were apprehensive about brainstorming with her, but they soon discovered that she was not only good-humored and easy-going, but she also enjoyed a good laugh with them.

Now, the team admired and respected Loraine, even daring to tease her occasionally.

This left Loraine wondering whether this situation was advantageous or not.

Nevertheless, when business discussions began, everyone switched to their professional, meticulous selves. The meeting soon hit a high note, with team members contributing valuable inputs.

Seizing an opportune moment, Jolie suggested, "Miss Torres, the Bryant Group's AI possesses a vast database. Collaborating with them could potentially perfect our design and save considerable time."

Another team member added, "However, the Bryant Group's AI hasn't been released yet. Would they let us utilize such a precious resource?"

Jolie directed a playful gaze at Loraine. "Given the long-standing and solid collaboration between the Universe Group and the Bryant Group, I'm sure Mr. Bryant will agree. What do you think, Miss Torres?"

Caught off guard, Loraine turned a shade of crimson, unable to make a decision. Embarrassed, she hastily adjourned the meeting.

But Jolie had a point. The airport project wasn't solely the Universe Group's responsibility. After some deliberation, Loraine shot Marco a message and intended to inform Klein and Leopold about scheduling a meeting for further discussions.

Marco, who had been eager to spend more time with her, instantly agreed.

"Okay, see you then."

Loraine was taken aback by his response. This was a business matter. Why did Marco behave as if they were planning a romantic outing?

