

Chapter 712 Government Recognition

The shareholders exchanged puzzled glances. Why would government representatives suddenly show up at their doorstep?

Cayson was the one who quickly stepped forward to address the leader of the visiting group. "May I ask what's going on?" he demanded.

The man smiled warmly and said, "We're here to present an award to Universe Group. We informed you about it yesterday, or didn't you know?"

Just then, Loraine broke into a faint smile and said to them, "I was just about to mention it to our shareholders. I didn't expect you to arrive so promptly. Thank you for your efforts."

The man waved it off, chuckling heartily. "No need to thank us; no need at all. It's our honor to present the award to you, Miss Loraine Torres!"

The shareholders were baffled. But Reynolds was in a much worse condition. Beads of sweat had already formed on his slightly bloated face as he asked in confusion, "What award? Loraine, what did you do to deserve an award?"

But no one answered him.

All of a sudden, the shareholders' meeting had transformed into an award ceremony. The boxes the group had brought contained framed plaques, each with the inscription

"Commendation by the State for Universe Group As An Advanced Enterprise."

The leader of the government representatives beamed with joy as he said, "Like I mentioned before, we are really honored to present these plaques to Miss Torres and Universe Group. That road in Woodshill had been a headache for the government and people for quite a long time. Initially, government had projected it would take a lot of manpower and resources to complete it, but Miss Torres' new proposal not only significantly optimized costs but also helped convince the villagers of what needed to be done. Miss Torres is truly a young and promising gem to the community and the nation at large!"

The shareholders of Universe Group listened in astonishment, exchanging surprised glances as they saw Loraine being honored by the government.

They found it incredible that these people from the government had come all this way just because of a rural road project.

Not long ago, most of them in the room had been debating on how long it would take for the benefits of the road construction to manifest and translate into actual profits. But none of them had expected that the answers would come so quickly!

Nevertheless, the representative continued, "There are many rural areas like Woodshill in the country that require development. The first step in urbanization is road construction. So, after the completion of the Woodshill road, we are planning to entrust other projects to Universe Group."

Loraine expressed her gratitude with a gentle smile and a respectful nod while still maintaining a poised and dignified demeanor. Even the most critical observers wouldn't be able to find any flaw in her behavior. Perhaps this was also one of the

reasons the government representatives couldn't stop praising her.

Eventually, the award presentation came to an end and they had to bid farewell to the government representatives. When they were all gone, the shareholders now turned their gazes towards Loraine, looking at the medal she held in her hands. It took them quite some time to overcome their surprise.

Suddenly, someone initiated a round of applause, and soon, the sound of applause filled the conference room.

Cayson smiled proudly and said with confidence, "With this recognition from the government, Universe Group's credibility will reach new heights. Lorrie was right. This is truly something that can't be bought with any amount of money."

All the others nodded in agreement and began to shower Loraine with praises.

Loraine accepted the commendations graciously. Then she calmly turned her cold gaze towards Reynolds, a mocking smile on her lips. "Do you still want to claim that I'm not qualified to be the president of the Group?" she asked him.

He had accused her of carrying out her whims at the expense of the company, but now, she was clutching an award presented to her by the government. He had also accused her of misappropriating funds, but it turned out that she hadn't touched the company's money at all. Instead, it was Reynolds himself who had embezzled funds from the projects assigned to him.

The shareholders had no trouble grasping the situation. They cast disdainful glances at Reynolds before turning their attention back to praising Loraine.

"Though the company has been doing well in recent years, it

has never really had any cooperation with the government, not to mention an award. But since the arrival of Miss Torres, we have been able to secure several major partnerships with the government and gotten an award too. Quite impressive!"

"Miss Torres has achieved what we old folks couldn't achieve. Her capabilities are truly awe-inspiring. We have to admit our limitations and acknowledge her foresight and incredible intelligence."

"Who else can lead the company forward if not Miss Torres? There's no better person that can occupy the position of president. None whatsoever."

The praises being heaped on Loraine felt like a series of slaps on Reynolds' face. His face was now bright red and he no longer had the confidence he had just displayed only half an hour ago.

The government award had left him without even a last-ditch excuse. He was already on shaky ground, and continuing to oppose Loraine would only make things much worse for himself.

Reynolds swallowed hard, hoping to save face by playing down the situation. With a forced smile on his face, he conceded, "Indeed, I'm getting older, and my ideas might not be as bright as they once were. Since the government officials have come here, I have no objections to the road project. I wholeheartedly support those road constructions!"

But unfortunately for him, Loraine wasn't interested in letting things slide so easily. In a stern tone, she gave a sharp order, "Security! Arrest this criminal who poses a threat to the interests of this corporation!"

The guards that were stationed outside promptly entered the room and easily apprehended the frail Reynolds who didn't even

try to put up a fight. In a triumphant tone, Loraine jeered at him, "You can't use age to sweep things under the rug, Reynolds. Were you trying to wriggle out of the embezzlement charges? Maybe you should take the time to do some reflection in prison!"

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Chapter 713 Facing The Consequences

Reynolds squirmed within the firm hold of the security staff, his cheeks turning a shade redder with fury upon hearing Loraine's remarks.

"Loraine, I've given up already. What else do you want? Don't push it!"

Loraine's laugh was icy and resolute. "You were the one who just proclaimed that anyone threatening Universe Group should face the rules, weren't you? Why am I suddenly the bad guy here?"

Struggling for words, Reynolds found his bravado diminished by the damning evidence. "I may have screwed up, but I've still contributed to the Group! You can't do this to me!"

Some of the shareholders Reynolds had earlier bought off tried to step in. "Miss Torres, can we not resolve this by making Reynolds pay back the stolen money? Sending an old man to jail is excessive."

To Loraine's surprise, among those speaking out was one of the longtime shareholders, Rico Balder, who usually leaned in her favor and held a substantial position within the company. Though not as senior as Reynolds, Rico carried a certain authority. "Miss Torres, you have our respect, but such severity could dishearten our older colleagues!" he asserted.

Unperturbed, Loraine replied, "Reynolds broke the law. I'm merely upholding justice. I've presented the evidence. If you want to help him, go ahead and hire a top-notch lawyer."

Rico's face tightened at her words. Loraine added with a sly grin, "Moreover, Reynolds isn't just guilty of embezzlement. I've found instances of tax evasion as well. I think we all understand what that means."

Reynolds' face turned ashen. He had believed his indiscretions hidden, yet Loraine had exposed them completely.

His hopes of evading the consequences vanished. He cast desperate glances at the few shareholders he'd swayed, even resorting to silent threats.

Noticing this, those shareholders rued their ill-fated decisions, internally lamenting their bad luck, yet they had no option but to remain loyal to him.

However, not all shareholders hesitated to speak their minds. One of them declared firmly, "Miss Torres, he stole from the company, from all of us! Throw him in jail! He was accusing you of being unjust just a minute ago. Act according to the law."

Gritting his teeth, Rico felt cornered into the role of mediator. "You make a valid point, but let's remember this is a company issue. If jail is the answer, we could handle it discreetly. No need to make a spectacle by involving the police. It could tarnish Universe Group's reputation."

Loraine chuckled. "So, Mr. Balder suggests we discreetly put him behind bars and throw some money at the problem to fix everything?"

Rico felt a pang of regret for accepting Reynolds' bribes the previous day. He knew he should've been more cautious.

Nonetheless, he had to protect his own interests, even if that meant opposing Loraine. He knew he had to press on.

He gathered his composure, taking on the air of a wise elder counseling the young. "That's not what I meant. I get where you're coming from, and many would agree with your method. Yet, involving the police to arrest Reynolds seems overkill. We could handle him privately. Reynolds is a senior member here. Publicly shaming him won't look good. You wouldn't want people saying you're disposing of your grandfather's old allies as soon as you take charge, would you?"

Loraine's eyes narrowed as they swept over the room, pausing on the mute shareholders. It appeared that many at least partially agreed with Rico.

Her lips curled into a disdainful smile. "My mind is made up. No appeals will change that. Those considering stepping in should first assess their own integrity and preparedness for scrutiny. Otherwise, they're simply inviting an investigation, which I openly welcome."

The room went quiet. Nobody came to Reynolds' defense anymore. They all retreated, sealing their lips.

Satisfied, Loraine's voice took on a gentler tone. "If Reynolds has the audacity for such deeds, he should bear the consequences. I believe in fair rewards and penalties, and won't complicate things for the innocent."

This time, even Rico stayed silent, offering only a strained laugh as he backed away.

Loraine gestured to the police, signaling them to escort Reynolds out.

As he was pulled out of the building, he caused quite the ruckus. Onlookers couldn't resist watching, some even recording the drama on their phones.

Captured on video, the disheveled man continued his tirade of curses, vainly trying to cover his face from the camera's lens. His futile attempts only emphasized his inner regret, revealing his desire to hide his identity from the curious eyes of the crowd.

Chapter 714 Cayson's Queries

After Reynolds was escorted out, the roomful of shareholders descended into an awkward hush, fearful of saying anything more.

In contrast to a prior situation involving Duran, where fortune seemed to be on Loraine's side, this time it was evident that luck played no role. The one brave enough to oppose Loraine had just been led out in handcuffs.

Whether they were shareholders in Reynolds' pocket or those harboring ulterior motives, nobody dared break the silence now. The air in the conference room felt thick, almost suffocating.

Loraine was amused by their hesitance. She was a master of control, skillfully using a blend of strictness and leniency. She could tolerate them for the time being, as long as they didn't cross a particular boundary.

Rico, sensing Loraine's scrutiny, felt discomfort crawl over him. He lamented letting Reynolds sway his judgment.

Once an ally of Loraine, he now understood he had lost her trust irrevocably.

Savoring the tension on their faces for a moment, Loraine finally chose to relieve the anxious shareholders. Rising to her feet, she smiled and announced, "We've covered all the topics on the agenda. This meeting is over."

The room collectively exhaled, as though reprieved. A few even patted their sweat-soaked backs. Moments after Loraine exited, sighs of relief filled the room, backs still damp with sweat.

Just as Loraine stepped out, Cayson quickly followed her.

Hearing footsteps, she turned to find him coming closer.

Cayson pressed his lips together and bowed his head, saying apologetically, "Lorrie, I'm sorry. I've been running the company for years and yet I didn't catch Reynolds' embezzlement soon enough. My oversight put you at risk."

Loraine offered a comforting smile. "Cayson, I'm alright. If there's an apology to be made, it should come from me. I left the company abruptly, creating an opening for others. Thankfully, you were there to mitigate the damage."

At her words, Cayson's lips twitched into a faint smile, sensing the connection they once had. Just as he was about to speak, Loraine's attention shifted to her phone. "Cayson, something's come up. I need to go."

His smile dimmed as he impulsively reached to hold her hand.

Loraine quickly pulled away, leaving him staring at his empty palm.

He looked at her, anguish filling his eyes. "Lorrie, I wanted a mere moment with you. Do you have to leave so quickly?"

Feeling a twinge of guilt, Loraine clarified, "Cayson, you know I'm not comfortable with physical touch."

Pausing, Loraine chose to stay. She stopped walking, giving him room to talk.

Taking a moment to collect himself, Cayson cleared his throat, offering a self-deprecating smile. "Lorrie, all I wanted was a brief conversation. Why the rush? Heading to the hospital?"

Loraine paused briefly before giving a nod.

She'd been away from Marco for quite a while due to the long meeting, and that concerned her.

Cayson was taken by surprise when she admitted it so directly. His face went blank, and his lips quivered. After a moment of swallowing his disappointment, he added, a hint of bitterness in his smile, "Did you think about how to resolve the ongoing issues after sorting out Reynolds today?"

Slightly relieved, he thought his query was timely enough to perhaps hold her attention a bit longer.

But Loraine shot back, "I've got it covered. Don't worry about it."

A knot tightened in Cayson's throat as he struggled to keep his emotions in check. "Lorrie, can't we go back to how things were? I want to share these challenges with you. I wish I could..."

His voice faltered, causing Loraine to experience a twinge of unease.

If she could have her way, she would turn back time to when their relationship was simple, back when she saw him as a brotherly figure.

But times had changed. Cayson had crossed boundaries that couldn't be uncrossed.

"Thanks for handling the company's matters during my absence, Cayson. Now that I'm back, you should consider taking some time off. Maybe travel a bit."

Maybe with a broader perspective, Cayson would see that there were other people better suited for him than her.

Not wanting to dwell on the point, Loraine swiftly turned and walked away without waiting for his reaction.

As for Cayson, he was insightful enough to get her message eventually.

Left in a state of astonishment, his hand hung in the air as if to halt her exit, grasping only emptiness.

He clenched his fist, his typically calm face twisting briefly in a mix of frustration and sorrow.

How had Marco, despite his downfall, managed to outshine him?

Was it Marco's sweet talk that had lured Loraine away? Cayson couldn't allow Marco to bring Loraine to ruin. Otherwise, complications and criticisms, similar to today's incident with Reynolds, would only escalate.

Cayson's face turned grim as he stepped back into his office. Summoning a trusted assistant, he hesitated briefly before ordering, "Leak the information that Marco Bryant is back in Vagow and has been admitted to the hospital with serious injuries."

Given Marco's past, there would certainly be those keen on making life harder for him.

Chapter 715 Price For Knowledge

Inside the hospital's ward, Marco was on a call with Sullivan.

Sullivan feigned annoyance, saying, "Marco, you're stealing my ninth-gen robot away from me yet again."

Without showing emotion, Marco replied, "Didn't you just dispatch some research and development staff? I'm thinking of relocating Solar Company's focus to our country. You can return as well."

Clearly touched but hesitant, Sullivan murmured, "We'll see."

Marco stayed silent, though he felt certain about the outcome. Once the shift occurred, Sullivan would undeniably return as the lead researcher.

Glancing at his watch, Marco anticipated Loraine's arrival. Softly, he said, "The decision is yours, Sullivan."

Meanwhile, after exiting Universe Group, Loraine had picked up some food and driven straight to the hospital.

As Marco prepared to end his call, Loraine entered the room, hearing the name Sullivan.

So, Marco had been talking to Sullivan?

She arched an eyebrow but dismissed the thought, bringing in a lunch box.

As he hung up, Marco noticed her entrance and greeted her warmly, "You're back!"

His tender words lightened the atmosphere of the white ward.

Loraine returned the smile and began unpacking the food as she sat on the bed's edge. She asked, "How are you feeling today?"

In response, Marco gestured at his wounded leg, seeking solace. "Much better. I'll be up and about soon."

Loraine, aware of his tendency to act tougher than he was, chided, "Don't be overconfident. You don't have any urgent matters now. Rest until the doctor clears you, understand?"

Giving her a look of mock innocence, Marco blinked. "I'll do as my girlfriend says."

Her cheeks flushed at his words, and she looked away, shifting the conversation. "I overheard the name Sullivan. Were you chatting with Dr. Palmer?"

Unaware that Marco was avoiding her gaze, Loraine remained oblivious.

Soon after, Marco took her hand and earnestly said, "Sullivan reached out because he heard about my situation from you."

Assuming they'd been in contact, Loraine simply nodded. "We owe Dr. Palmer one again. We should thank him when we get the chance."

Marco nodded in agreement. After a moment, he discreetly cleared the table. Flashing his radiant eyes at Loraine, he softly said, "I'm feeling better, but I've missed you all day."

Although she was accustomed to his endearing words,

Lorraine's heart skipped a beat. Clearing her throat, she inquired, "And?"

"A day without you feels like three seasons apart. It doesn't help my recovery, you know. Don't you think you owe me a little something?"

The idea of 'owing' seemed like a secret code between them.

Blushing, Lorraine lowered her head and pecked him on the cheek.

Just as she tried to pull away, Marco effortlessly held her close, showering her face with hungry kisses, as if trying to etch her face into memory.

The feeling of his lips on hers made Lorraine go weak, and she nestled into his embrace.

His chest radiated warmth, a sensation she didn't want to part from. In a slightly raspy voice, she shared her day's events at the company.

She'd been racing between work and the hospital since hearing from Cayson. She looked drained. Marco always made sure she rested well without pestering her with questions.

Now that the issue was resolved, Lorraine took it upon herself to share, partly because she was concerned about Rico's resistance.

Marco's eyes turned darker. He bent down, kissing the top of her head, and softly reassured her, "Don't stress. I've been through something like this before." Pausing, his lips curled into a sly smile. "Curious about what I did in the past?"

Wrapped in his arms and contemplating the unresolved issue concerning Reynolds, Lorraine nodded without thinking.

"Absolutely!"

She felt his experiences could offer her valuable insights.

Marco's grin grew wider. He gently cradled the nape of her neck, urging her to meet his gaze, before leaning in for an intimate kiss.

Instead of pulling away, he let his lips linger on hers. His sultry voice reverberated in her ears, laced with allure and temptation.

"If you want my knowledge, there's a price. Loraine, how do you plan to pay for it?"