

Chapter 707 Shareholders ' Meeting

"What do you mean?" Rico asked curiously.

Reynolds snorted, "She went to the countryside to have fun with her ex-husband who was kicked out of his family. Think about it, Rico. She brushed aside the company's affairs and went to the countryside to satisfy her own desires. Can you trust this company to someone like that?"

Rico was very surprised by this new revelation and he couldn't help but ask, "Are you sure about this? But then, the company hasn't faced any significant problems. And this seems to be Loraine's private issue. Shouldn't we just mind our own business?"

Reynolds scoffed impatiently, "If it didn't really affect us, I wouldn't bother to talk about it. But do you know what else she's been up to? She's been disregarding the company's interests and wasting money by investing in road construction in a remote village and even engaging in irrelevant charity work."

At this point, Rico's expression turned grim.

After all, the shareholders were only in it for the dividends. When Duran and Reynolds criticized Loraine's ambitious reforms and large-scale projects when she took office, he didn't join them at the time. That was because projects like the Smart City and CBD were clearly profit-generating ventures. Even someone like him could see that clearly.

But if what Reynolds had just said was true — that the

company's funds were being used to repair roads in rural areas – how much profit could that possibly bring? Breaking even would be considered a big success.

Seeing Rico's changing expression, Reynolds smirked in satisfaction and continued to berate and slander Loraine, "Can you believe it, Rico? A woman like her should focus on her traditional roles, like being a wife and a mother. Instead, she's recklessly squandering our money. Is that appropriate? And let me tell you this... she's very lucky to be born into the Torres family. If not for them, what would she be today? In her personal life, she isn't even as accomplished as my daughter!"

Though Rico disagreed with this last assertion, he couldn't deny the fact that the road construction project seemed ill-advised. So, he cautiously replied, "I must admit, building roads in the countryside does seem a bit impractical."

Reynolds nodded eagerly. He intended to move slowly and didn't pressure Rico to support him immediately. When it was time for him to leave, he emphasized again, "Rico, if you're still skeptical, just wait for the shareholders' meeting tomorrow. You'll see that you'll end up supporting me when you hear about what's going on."

Judging from the expression on Rico's face as they parted, Reynolds was fairly certain that he had made some progress in convincing him.

Apart from Rico, he had already convinced five other major shareholders to oust Loraine, and it seemed his victory was imminent and assured.

But he couldn't help but think about the only one who had stubbornly resisted his advances and flat out rejected him – Cayson!

Nevertheless, he would shock Cayson tomorrow. Cayson, the

ungrateful brat, would become filled with regret when Loraine would eventually bow down to him!

With these shareholders as his trump cards, Reynolds' actions became increasingly bold. He went to meet Loraine, displaying a casual demeanor as he took his seat across from her. "Loraine, let's discuss some matters, particularly concerning the convening of a shareholders' meeting tomorrow," he offered.

But Loraine gave him a disdainful look and asked, "What do you want?"

Reynolds sneered coldly and said with an air of righteousness, "You left the company without any reason for such a long time. You have no idea how many problems have come up in your absence and how much profit the shareholders have lost. Shouldn't you hold a shareholders' meeting to reflect on the situation and report to them?"

Loraine chuckled and replied, "I just returned and I don't even know what happened in my absence. But Mr. Watts, you seem to know about all the chaos and losses that occurred. It seems you are very well-informed."

Reynolds faltered when he heard this. His arrogance was now somewhat subdued. Nevertheless, he retorted through clenched teeth, "In any case, a shareholders' meeting is necessary!"

"I took a normal leave of absence and empowered Cayson to act as the interim president to manage the company. Is there a problem with that? Are the shareholders trying to take away my right to rest?" Loraine asked him.

Reynolds was caught off guard again. His initial aggressiveness had now been suppressed by this question. Still, he gritted his teeth and retorted indignantly, "How can an outsider like

Cayson manage the company? Are you not concerned about your own company? But I guess you're too busy with your ex-husband."

Lorraine's gaze turned icy the moment she heard his last sentence. "Is that so? Should I report my personal affairs to all the shareholders at the meeting?" she asked him in a cold tone.

Reynolds felt somewhat uneasy under her gaze, but he couldn't control his frustration, so he raised his voice at her again, "Marco has been dismissed by Bryant Group! Right now, he's not only useless to Universe Group, he's also tarnishing the company's reputation. Your blatant disregard for the company's interests by going to be with him requires an explanation!"

In her heart, Lorraine couldn't help but sneer, but outwardly, she wore a plain expression on her face. "Alright then, let's have the meeting," she agreed.

Reynolds was taken aback by her sudden agreement, but he didn't think too much about it. After all, the shareholders' meeting would be highly advantageous for him.

Now that he felt he was in a good position, he declared arrogantly, "Prepare yourself very well! Tomorrow, you won't be able to smile anymore!"

Lorraine's lips turned up in a faint curve, but her gaze remained cold. Without a word, she gestured for him to leave, and Reynolds didn't hesitate to walk out arrogantly.

Hardly had he left when Lorraine's phone suddenly rang. She answered the call and listened for a few moments. Then her expression changed. When she finally ended the call, there was a smile on her face.

Immediately, she called her assistant into the office and

ordered her, "Arrange for a shareholders' meeting tomorrow. But let the shareholders know that I have something to attend to, so I will be a little late."



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Chapter 708 Destabilization

The next day, shareholders gathered in the conference room of Universe Group to attend the shareholders' meeting.

Reynolds looked smug like a rooster that had just won a fight. He glanced at the empty seat meant for the chairman and raised his voice, "Today is the shareholders' meeting. As the president of Universe Group, shouldn't Loraine be present?"

Cayson frowned and retorted angrily, "The meeting hasn't started yet, Mr. Watts."

But Reynolds shot back with a sneer, "As the president of Universe Group, shouldn't she arrive early? Besides, I notified her in advance."

His tone indicated that he was superior to Loraine. When the shareholders noticed it, they didn't say anything. They just looked at one another in silence.

Just then, Loraine's assistant entered the room and explained to everyone present, "The president has an unexpected matter to attend to. She'll be a little late. So, please be patient, everyone."

But this only annoyed Reynolds and he exclaimed loudly, "An unexpected matter? Could it be that she's scared of being held accountable and is now avoiding the meeting due to guilt?"

The room was now filled with whispered discussions among shareholders. It was indeed unusual for Loraine to be late. In fact, she was well known for her punctuality.

And by the way, this shareholders' meeting today was far from ordinary.

The shareholders who were privy to inside information exchanged subtle glances, their expressions revealing their understanding of the situation.

Eventually, Cayson decided to intervene. He cleared his throat which served to quiet the room. Then he looked at Reynolds with a stern expression and told him bluntly, "Mr. Watts, please show some respect and refrain from making baseless comments about the president."

Reynolds nonchalantly leaned back in his chair and retorted, "Cayson, do you know what Lorraine has been up to? If you know why she's busy, then we won't need to wonder or guess because you'll simply tell us."

Cayson's face stiffened, his embarrassment quite obvious. His fists were clenched under the table as he struggled to control himself.

He knew Lorraine wouldn't contact him unless it was necessary. And, of course, she would never tell him what exactly she was doing.

But Cayson guessed that she was probably taking care of Marco.

The man was currently in the hospital, and when Lorraine came to the company the previous day, she seemed almost absent-minded and in a hurry to return to the hospital to be with Marco.

Cayson couldn't help but feel a slight resentment towards Lorraine.

With the current complexities within the company, couldn't she just put that man aside for a while? Wouldn't being late for such a critical shareholders' meeting further destabilize the already dicey situation?

But despite his inner dissatisfaction, Cayson spoke up in defense of Loraine, "Since Loraine was the one who notified us in advance about this meeting, it's certain that she will attend it. There's no need for you to slander her like this."

"Since Loraine has decided to be late, why should I speak softly about it?" Reynolds sneered. "If she acted appropriately, my words wouldn't sound like they were an affront to her. Perhaps she's just afraid of being held accountable. And by the way, this is not the first time Loraine has suddenly disappeared, leaving the company unattended. For what reason did she suddenly leave a few days ago?"

The more Reynolds talked about Loraine's behaviour, the more aggressive his tone became. Eventually, he slammed his fist on the table in feigned frustration and anger. "The moment she left, the company fell into chaos! She even transferred the lead responsibility for several projects that were originally under my supervision to other managers! With such a significant lapse in judgement, shouldn't she be held accountable?"

Several of the shareholders exchanged glances, nodding in agreement with his statement. "I think Mr. Watts is right, Mr. Benton," one of them urged his friend. "We know you have a close relationship with Miss Torres, but you can't always be biased like this. You have to open your eyes to facts."

"Exactly, Mr. Watts is a longtime member of the company. Even if Miss Torres is the president, she shouldn't be taking projects away from him," another shareholder asserted.

These outspoken individuals had already planned with Reynolds

beforehand, and now, they were playing their role by weaving a web of confusion and trying to muddy the situation in the room.

"Lorraine must have had her reasons for her actions," Cayson spoke up. "Why are you stirring up trouble for no reason?"

He turned to Reynolds and said accusingly, "Mr. Watts, you've been targeting Lorraine because she's considerably younger, and you're always deliberately making things difficult for her. And let's not forget, your close ally, Duran, was directly implicated and arrested for jeopardizing the company's interests!"

The moment he said this, the shareholders couldn't help but recall Duran's incident, and the room quieted down a bit. Cayson quickly seized the opportunity and spoke further. "Lorraine's decision to take projects from under your supervision was made for the good of the company. Who knows what other incidents might arise under your management?"

This direct accusation made Reynolds' expression turn sour instantly. He already harboured a deep resentment for Cayson and this only made it worse. In a fit of rage, he pointed at Cayson and shouted, "Cayson, you're nothing but a loyal dog to Lorraine! Always defending her!"

Cayson's expression darkened in displeasure and he retorted immediately, "I am the acting CEO of Universe Group! My parents also worked for this Group. Whenever Lorraine is absent, I have full authority to manage the corporation. Reynolds, even though you are a longtime member, you don't have the right to speak to me in this manner! I support Lorraine's decision to transfer projects from under your supervision."

"Very well, it seems the decline of the Torres family is real," Reynolds said through gritted teeth. "Ever since Lorraine became the president, Universe Group is no longer as great as

it once was. It has become nothing short of a one-woman show!"

But he'd hardly finished the sentence when a cold, mocking laughter echoed from the entrance. "Reynolds, why do you think I didn't give you the lead on those projects? Do you really have no idea?" Loraine said with a sneer.

Chapter 709 Confrontation During The Meeting

Reynolds looked up and saw Loraine standing at the entrance of the conference room exuding a powerful aura of authority and dominance. Her cold and intense glare seemed to penetrate his very soul.

He swallowed instinctively and his face turned pale.

In that moment, it was as if he had seen Aldo standing right in front of him.

Who could have thought that despite Loraine's youthful appearance, she could have the same commanding presence that Aldo had in his prime?

Nevertheless, Reynolds quickly regained his composure and he made sure to look somber, trying his best to mask his astonishment.

He reminded himself that no matter how much she looked like her grandfather, it was nothing more than a mere physical resemblance. Besides, even if it was Aldo himself standing before him, there was no reason for him to be scared.

Reynolds felt very confident. He believed his preparations for this occasion were impeccable, and even when Duran's incident happened, he'd dealt with it without leaving any loose ends.

His arguments were perfect and thought-provoking, so why should he be afraid?

With this conviction in his mind, Reynolds spoke out confidently. "Isn't it because you're envious of my seniority at the company and worried that the projects under my supervision will affect your position? That's the reason why you've been trying hard to sideline me!"

"I'm envious of you?" Loraine asked in surprise, her lips curling into an amused smile. "After I took over as president of Universe Group, my first project was the smart city project which I did with the government. After that, we partnered with Bryant Group to work on the CBD project. Tell me, haven't these ventures all been profitable for Universe Group?"

As her words hit home, Reynolds found himself lost for words. Other shareholders who had been prepared to voice their grievances also fell into an awkward silence.

Though they were reluctant to admit it, the truth was very glaring – old timers like Reynolds were being outperformed by Loraine, a young woman who had achieved feats that they couldn't boast of.

Loraine's gaze swept over the room, her eyes hard as steel, before finally settling on Reynolds. "What have you achieved that would make me envious of you?" she asked him pointedly.

Reynolds' face turned red from anger and frustration. Unable to formulate a valid retort, he lashed out at her, "Loraine, is this how you talk to a longtime member of the company? You're not only late to the shareholders' meeting, but you're also being confrontational and discourteous!"

Loraine feigned surprise and said, "Oh. Okay then. Let's focus on the matter at hand. You're the one who called this shareholders' meeting, so naturally, you should be chairing it, right? Please stick to the issues at hand and don't waste our time."

The shareholders who were not on Reynolds' side had thought that the shareholders' meeting was going to be chaired by Loraine. They had felt dissatisfied with her because of what Reynolds had said about her deliberately keeping them waiting.

But now that they'd learned that Reynolds was the one who had called the meeting, they all turned their gazes on him in displeasure.

"Very well, as you wish!" Reynolds growled through gritted teeth.

Then he turned his gaze toward the shareholders, his facial expression full of indignation. "Ladies and gentlemen, the purpose of this meeting is to expose Loraine's behavior as president of Universe Group. She has disregarded the interests of this corporation and acted recklessly for personal gain, and even squandered company funds!"

His words ignited a firestorm among the shareholders, who immediately began to question the veracity of his claims. This helped Reynolds regain his lost confidence and he glanced at Loraine with a smug smirk on his face.

But the confidence with which Loraine calmly met his gaze made him feel an unexplainable sense of unease.

Nevertheless, he couldn't back down now. So, clearing his throat, he continued, "The recent financial trends of the company are there for all to see. It's well known that Universe Group has been financially stable for many years. But since Loraine took over, there have been instances of projects facing financial shortages. Where has all the money gone? Of course, it's been embezzled by Loraine for her own personal use! She's using our money to build her own reputation! She's even gone so far as to spend company funds on constructing roads in the middle of nowhere. Do you all think such a move is in any way related to your interests?"

Loraine smirked coldly, though she was surprised that Reynolds had dug up so much information, including the road construction project.

She never really tried to keep it secret though, since the company's construction team was the one she used in the project.

But the shareholders had known nothing about it, and now, they were looking to her for answers. "Miss Torres, is this true?" one of them asked her.

But before she could respond, Reynolds cut in, "You can easily verify the authenticity of my claim about the road construction. But ask yourselves, what benefit do the shareholders gain from Universe Group's involvement in such projects? Clearly, the company is facing financial shortages in its own projects, and yet, Loraine is spending money constructing roads that are of no relevance to us!"

The emotions of the shareholders were now fully ignited, but Reynolds continued nonetheless, "Loraine, I acknowledge your talents in architectural design, but unfortunately, those abilities aren't enough for the effective management of a Group as large as this."

Throughout this exchange, Loraine had remained silent, allowing Reynolds to believe that he had rattled her. He kept pushing aggressively, eager to corner her, while Cayson watched on, feeling inclined to come to her aid. But a sharp glance from Loraine kept him quiet.

When Reynolds' tirade finally began to wane, Loraine addressed him with a touch of disappointment in her tone, "Reynolds, I was hoping to hear more disrespectful and shameless words from you. Is this all you've got?"

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Reynolds was taken aback, but Loraine continued, "Are you sure you want me to explain myself to everyone?"

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Chapter 710 Counterattack

The fact that Loraine looked so unfazed was quite scary for Reynolds. When he finally regained some composure, his face turned crimson with anger at Loraine's accusation that he had been disrespectful and shameless. He pointed at her, seething. "I'm speaking the truth! You must provide an explanation to the shareholders! Otherwise, how do you expect them to bear the loss?"

Except for the few shareholders who had been previously swayed by Reynolds, the rest of them exhibited a somewhat indifferent reaction, mostly maintaining a neutral stance.

After all, though Reynolds' statement sounded true, Loraine seemed very calm and unfazed by the accusations.

They had witnessed multiple instances of Loraine counterattacking her opponents in the past, so they were wary of taking sides prematurely in order to avoid any potential embarrassment.

Meanwhile, Loraine, though being the target of Reynolds' accusations, chuckled coldly before strolling over to the chairman's seat. Then she surveyed the room and began to address everyone. "The decision to repair the road was indeed a personal choice of mine."

The moment she said this, the smug smile returned to Reynolds' face, and the shareholders started discussing the matter in whispers amongst themselves.

Reynolds wanted to seize the opportunity to make a sarcastic remark, but Loraine calmly continued, "However, I decided to

treat this project as a formal issue. I personally oversee it, and I have a detailed plan for all the associated expenses."

The room gradually quieted down, captivated by Loraine's composed voice. She took another brief pause before elaborating, "Furthermore, I've optimized the costs to ensure that both quality and quantity are optimal. The costs are not as exorbitant as you might think. In the long run, this project will bring substantial benefits to Universe Group that will extend far beyond what we can buy with the money."

Reynolds could now see that she was taking control of the exchange, so he hurriedly interjected, "Why are you painting such a rosy picture of a rural village? What benefits could such projects possibly provide? You're merely using this as an excuse to indulge in your selfish whims!"

But Loraine looked at him and said with a calm expression, "Mr. Watts, are you aware of how much money our company spends on charitable causes each year? How much money have we been squandering on lavish but superficial charity galas that don't have any real effect? But my project in the village, be it road construction or renovation of orphanages, it serves charitable acts and also enhances the reputation of Universe Group. The positive impact this project generates in terms of public welfare cannot be quantified in monetary terms."

After her statement, the room became completely silent. The shareholders of Universe Group were not fools. They certainly understood the explanation she had just given and they could see how sensible it was.

In fact, several of them began to praise her. "Miss Torres, this plan of yours is truly impressive. Looking at the long-term benefits, it's undeniable that they are indeed highly invaluable!"

Already, Reynolds could see signs of some of the shareholders

shifting allegiance from his side to Loraine's, and he began to grow frantic. "Do you all really believe these empty words of hers?" he sneered, desperate to get them to agree with him again. "Anyone can paint rosy pictures like this. Tell me, when will we start seeing the benefits of this project? What if it happens that there's nothing to show for it in the end? Then all of that money would have been squandered!"

No one could predict the future, and no one wanted to gamble their immediate gains on the intangible rewards they hoped to get from taking care of the public. So, once more, the shareholders wavered after listening to Reynolds.

Sensing this, Cayson cast a worried glance at Loraine, fearing that she might be unable to handle the situation.

But Loraine remained composed. She turned to Reynolds and asked in a serious tone, "Mr. Watts, there's something I'd like to confirm. Are you saying that anyone within the company who uses funds from Universe Group for their personal interests should be deemed unpardonable and forced to step down from their position?"

At first, Reynolds didn't understand her abrupt question, but he felt that she was probably seeking an escape route.

But he was determined not to give her an out.

So, he exclaimed firmly, "Of course! No matter who it is, anyone who jeopardizes the company's interests should never be pardoned! Including you!"

Loraine smiled contentedly and replied, "Well, since Mr. Watts has confirmed that this principle should be applied to everyone, then I can rest assured."

She then turned to the shareholders and asked, "Did everyone hear that?"

Even though they were perplexed as to where she could be heading, they all nodded. But her confidence made Reynolds feel very uneasy. He wondered what exactly she was up to now.

Nevertheless, Loraine turned back to him and continued, "Mr. Watts, your intention was to report me to the shareholders, which is perfect. But I've recently discovered something myself. Since we're all gathered here, why not just discuss it together?"

Everyone's attention was now drawn to the projector which had just flickered on, showing a set of financial details. It was even clearer and more comprehensive than the one Reynolds had presented earlier. The destination of every transaction was meticulously displayed, leaving no room for doubt.

And most importantly, the recipient's name was clearly visible. It was Reynolds Watts!

Chapter 711 Obstinate Reynolds

As Reynolds laid eyes on the financial details, his initial expression was one of shock, but it changed rapidly to anger and disbelief.

He had orchestrated all of these actions while Loraine was away from the Group. So, how on earth had she managed to uncover it? This was nothing short of a disaster for him!

Reynolds couldn't bring himself to believe that his cautious disposition throughout his life had failed to come to his aid in his old age. The issue was that due to Aldo's absence, he had underrated Loraine so much over the years that he had become reckless and careless. It was this carelessness that had enabled Loraine to catch him so perfectly!

But Loraine wasn't even looking at his now pale face. Instead, she kept her focus on the shareholders and succinctly stated, "Reynolds mentioned earlier that there were funding shortages in various projects within Universe Group. As you can see, the reason for these shortages is perfectly evident in this financial report. And without exception, all the missing funds ended up in Reynolds' pockets! He thought he had covered his tracks perfectly, but instead, it's riddled with telltale signs. Now, who do you think has been using the Group's funds to enrich himself at your expense? It's all laid bare now, isn't it?"

With the concrete details presented to them, even if there was anyone who wanted to speak up for Reynolds, there was just no way they could articulate such a defense.

Moreover, considering that their own interests were what had been so heavily sabotaged, no shareholder in the room was inclined to defend Reynolds.

One of them even expressed his anger towards him right there and then. "This old bastard dared to tell us that he has compromising information about Miss Torres, and meanwhile, he's been pocketing so much money in her absence. Such a shameless man!"

Instantly, the domino effect took hold. After one shareholder started to blast him, the rest followed suit, pointing directly at Reynolds' face and describing him as an utterly despicable being.

Reynolds' face turned ashen in fury and he clapped back at them through gritted teeth, "Can any of you really claim that you're squeaky clean? How dare you point fingers at me?"

He pointed at one shareholder. The shareholder stuttered in apprehension before finally shutting up. Then Reynolds pointed at another... and another and yet another. By now, the rowdy conference room that was just seconds ago filled with furious men suddenly fell silent as though someone had pressed a mute button.

Reynolds smirked triumphantly and sneered at all of them, "Yes, I was greedy. So what? I'd say you, Loraine, embezzled even more of the Group's funds!"

This was the first time in her life that Loraine had witnessed someone so audaciously admitting to their greed. She replied with a cold smile, "You're still accusing me of embezzlement? Do you have any evidence?"

If Reynolds had any evidence against her, he wouldn't have resorted to sneaky tactics like trying to buy off shareholders

behind the scenes.

But now that he was already on the losing side, he didn't give a damn anymore. "You need evidence?" he sneered at Loraine. "Can't everyone here see it for themselves? Some time ago, you purchased some shares of Bryant Group! Wasn't it for your useless ex-husband expelled from the Bryant family?"

Loraine's purchase of Bryant Group's shares had been a low-key affair, so the shareholders were unaware of it. Moreover, with Bryant Group currently facing turbulence and its stock plummeting, weren't those shares now a complete waste of money?

Even Cayson was surprised to hear this new piece of information and his expression turned grim.

Naturally, he always stood firmly on Loraine's side, but this claim of Reynolds' that Loraine had bought shares for Marco made him wonder why Loraine had to go to such lengths for her ex-husband.

Unable to contain his dissatisfaction, Cayson turned to her and inquired, "Lorrie, what's the deal with Bryant Group's shares?"

Loraine cast a cold glance at Reynolds, and then calmly stated, "There's nothing much to it. Buying Bryant Group's shares was a personal decision of mine. The money I used was from my own personal account, not the company's account."

"Even so..."

But Cayson wasn't allowed to finish his sentence. Loraine glanced at him with a smile and added, "I sold those shares long before the stock price plummeted. I made a profit, not a loss. Don't let this old coot get into your head."

After listening to this explanation, Cayson realized that he had

almost been misled by Reynolds. He was forced to keep quiet and lower his head in shame.

Meanwhile, Loraine turned her attention back to the shareholders and addressed them with a faint smile on her face, "To be honest, I can't even spend all the pocket money my family gives me. Why would I need to use company funds for my personal use? I'm certainly not someone who is cash strapped."

Reynolds grew even more infuriated by this explanation and he snapped at her, "Loraine, don't get too cocky. Keep in mind that your rural development project is bound to collapse sooner or later! Your limited perspective won't bring substantial benefits to Universe Group. You're just lining your own pockets and you don't deserve to be the president of Universe Group!"

While he was still shouting, there was a knock on the door.

Everyone turned their attention to the entrance in surprise, but Loraine remained composed and said, "Come in."

The door swung open and a group of people entered the conference room carrying boxes. When the shareholders saw the uniforms the people wore, they were astonished.

The people were from the government!