

Chapter 716 Paying The Tuition

Marco's words carried an alluring undertone, suggesting something beyond the literal.

The tuition he referred to clearly wasn't a matter of money.

Realizing his insinuation, Loraine's cheeks flushed a deep shade of crimson. Her fingers involuntarily tightened around the fabric of her white hospital gown.

Since their relationship had deepened, their interactions grew increasingly flirtatious, and Marco seemed to revel in this new dynamic.

Even after such a long time, Loraine still found herself unaccustomed to his playful advances. She would inevitably blush at every sly comment he made.

Perhaps it was her predictable reactions that spurred him on.

Caught in these thoughts, Loraine felt a twinge of self-consciousness, keen on avoiding his teasing. She retorted with a huff, "You've already decided to charge me for this tuition, haven't you?"

Marco just grinned, offering no denial.

Matching his challenge, Loraine pressed on, "But I've yet to determine what I'll give in exchange for this tuition. What is it you desire?"

With a gentle touch to her waist, Marco whispered, "Loraine, as a clever student, you must understand my desires."

Loraine found herself trembling uncontrollably, her legs turning into jelly.

His words only deepened her shyness.

Right now, she sensed herself transformed into a dedicated student seeking guidance for academic problems.

Well, it would be more like that if the teacher's hand wasn't resting on her waist.

Overcome with shyness, she remained silent. Yet, Marco did not press for a response. With a smile, he gently grasped her hand, guiding it to rest upon him, and patiently showed her the way.

Beneath her palm lay the undeniable strength and vigor of his muscles, causing Loraine's cheeks to burn a fierce red. She was at a loss for where to direct her gaze, her focus entirely consumed by the sensations beneath her fingertips.

Then, quite unexpectedly, her hand grazed something hot and firm beneath the fabric of his trousers. Startled, Loraine withdrew her hand swiftly.

But Marco was not one to let her go easily. Seizing her wrist, he murmured with quiet intensity, "Help me."

With a hard swallow, Loraine's heart raced.

Recalling their time in the orphanage, she remembered how Marco had lent her a hand. Back then, he remarked, "Next time, it'll be your turn to help me."

She hadn't imagined that next time would arrive so swiftly.

In the hushed stillness of the hospital at night, their labored breaths were the only sound. The forbidden thrill of a teacher-student relationship, amplified by the peculiar setting, made Loraine's head spin and her skin crawl with unease.

Guided by Marco, she touched him delicately, caressing his warmth with a gentle hand.

Suddenly, Marco sat up and pulled her into his embrace with a grunt. His voice, low and sexy, urged, "Quickly now."

A flush crept over Loraine's cheeks, her heart pounding. She bit her lip and hastened her movements, awkwardly trying to gratify her lover.

The temperature in the room rose with their mounting desire, leaving them gasping for air.

Marco's grip on Loraine tightened, his hand muscular and tense, a sheen of sweat on his brow like a wild beast.

Looking up at him through eyes brimming with emotion, Loraine smiled and asked, "Mr. Bryant, am I doing well?"

She playfully teased him with a flick of her little finger.

This sent a wave of exhilaration through him, his eyes reddening and his thoughts scattering. He was on the brink of having an orgasm.

But she intervened, prolonging the moment.

Embarrassment was new to Marco. He laughed breathlessly and kissed her fiercely. Through clenched teeth, he praised, "You're an excellent student! You've outdone yourself!"

Grinning, Loraine accelerated her pace, eventually making him come.

The entire ward was filled with the aroma of sperm.

Exhausted, Loraine collapsed into his arms, both savoring the quiet aftermath, words unnecessary.

Eventually, Marco's voice, rough with emotion, broke the silence. "Though Reynolds is gone, you must manage the fallout carefully."

He began to instruct, and though Loraine nestled against him, she listened intently.

"In the public eye, reputation is everything. Within the company, it's about aligning shareholders with benefits, securing their support. Control the narrative, both publicly and internally, and you'll overcome this challenge."

Looking down at her attentive face, a smile played on his lips as he kissed her forehead. "I managed it once. You're clever. Even without my advice, you'd navigate this just fine."

Humbly, Loraine responded, "Still, your guidance is invaluable."

As she spoke, she leaned in for a kiss, whispering, "Thank you."

Marco, visibly moved, took her hand and murmured back, "Shall we go again?"

And so, the night stretched on, restless.



Chapter 717 Jefferson's Revenge

Elsewhere, shortly after Cayson broadcasted Marco's mishap, Jefferson got wind of the news.

Marco, the one who had dismantled the Bryant Group, was in the hospital, injured.

Jefferson's loathing for Marco ran deep ever since he destroyed what was once a titan of industry. The Bryant Group had declined to such an extent that they were forced to cut their workforce in half. Those who remained spent their days listlessly tapping at their keyboards, devoid of any drive.

As Jefferson stalked by with his entourage, the employees sprang into a facade of busyness, but Jefferson paid them no mind.

Inside his office, Jefferson, seething, swept the papers from his desk to the floor, clenched his teeth, and spat out a curse, "That bastard. Marco dares to linger in Vagow after all he's done? He's toppled the Bryant Group, plunging shareholders into ruin. If I were him, I'd take my own life!"

Jefferson's resentment stemmed from his investment in the Bryant Group's shares. A hefty sum was paid for a large stake when he was poised to rake in profits. Yet the presidency had slipped from his grasp, snatched up by Liza, fueling his rage.

His plans to amass wealth were dashed when the stock prices plummeted, wreaking havoc on his finances and severing the company's financial lifelines.

Marco was the only reason behind it all. Without him, the rapid downfall of the Bryant Group wouldn't have occurred.

In a fury, Jefferson commanded, "Dispatch some men to the hospital. That bastard needs to be taught a lesson! I want him to suffer double the anguish I've endured."

His underling scurried off to carry out the order, but returned shortly with an embarrassed look on his face.

"Boss, it appears Marco has company in the hospital. Loraine's with him. Should we proceed?"

The news set Jefferson ablaze with anger. "Do it? Are you mad? Can you stand the wrath of the Torres family?"

His underling recoiled, silenced by Jefferson's anger. "That's precisely why Marco dares return to Vagow. He was under Loraine's wing!" he fumed.

The memory of the exorbitant price Loraine had demanded for a mere 1% of her shares stoked his murderous desire towards both Loraine and Marco.

Amidst this turmoil, another subordinate arrived, interrupting with urgent news, "Boss, the police have made their move on Universe Group!"

Jefferson was taken aback and quickly inquired, "What's going on?"

"Word has it that a Universe Group shareholder is embroiled in a scandal, and it's been caught on video!"

The man presented the recording to Jefferson. In the footage, he noted a police car stationed outside the Universe Group headquarters, with a middle-aged man being escorted to the

vehicle while spewing curses.

The video depicted only a few of Universe Group's top executives witnessing the scene, including Cayson, the most influential among them, while Loraine was noticeably absent.

An idea suddenly struck Jefferson. This was his opportunity to confront Loraine.

The issues with Bryant Group had been a constant headache for him, yet Loraine hadn't been seen publicly in ages.

Lately, it had been Cayson stepping up to handle Universe Group's predicaments, leaving everyone guessing at Loraine's whereabouts.

It was Loraine herself who had presented him with this opening.

A self-satisfied smile crossed Jefferson's face as he summoned a subordinate and whispered instructions.

Shortly thereafter, the video was circulating on Twitter, sparking a trending topic.

The original footage had had limited exposure, seen by few. This edited version blurred out Reynolds's features, labeling him a top Universe Group executive under police escort.

Once the subject shifted to Universe Group, it garnered immense public interest.

The internet was abuzz with speculation, fueled by media outlets Jefferson had enlisted to sway public sentiment.

"A top executive at Universe Group is caught in corruption. Where's Loraine, the president, in all this?"

"Terrifying. Loraine's been out of sight for so long. Is she



+120 Points at most
neglecting her responsibilities at such a critical time? Universe
Group's downfall is imminent!"

Supporters of Loraine rallied to her defense amid this commentary, yet even they were in the dark about her recent activities, merely conjecturing that she must be preoccupied.

The debate grew as bystanders, stirred by paid provocateurs, swelled the ranks of the concerned.

"Loraine is the president. Shouldn't the company's crisis take precedence over everything else? Face it. She's unfit for presidency. Her narrow vision has been costly for Universe Group!"

The chorus of doubters swelled, forecasting Universe Group's demise and casting doubts on Loraine's leadership.

Before long, a trending topic emerged with the headline, "Is Loraine's Management Putting Universe Group at Risk?"



Chapter 718 The Reversal Of Public Opinion

As the incident unfolded, Loraine found herself immersed in her company duties.

The chaos Reynolds had stirred up consumed all her attention. She remained oblivious until the public relations manager brought it to light.

Each visit to her office brought the manager a heavy heart, knowing he often carried unwelcome updates.

Loraine listened to his latest report in silence, offering no immediate reaction.

The manager ventured to ask, "Miss Torres, what's our next step?"

Loraine was momentarily lost in thought, reflecting on Marco's astute prediction from the night before. His accuracy had struck her as amusing, eliciting an unexpected chuckle from her.

Worry had been her shadow, stalking her thoughts on how to bolster the company's public image, yet, as if by magic, someone had lightened her burden.

Her smile, devoid of words, unsettled the manager.

His failure to present good news or a solid plan of action might be seen as a lack of competence.

Tormented by this thought, he hastily proposed, "Miss Torres, we've drafted several strategies. If you have no objections, I'll proceed with their execution."

"There's no rush," Loraine countered with an easy grin, brushing off the online turmoil. "The internet's clamor is harmless."

He tried to interject, but she reassured him with composure, "Trust me, I know my strategy. It's almost time to put it into motion."

What time?

The manager, puzzled by her cryptic hint and her dismissal, could only wonder what she meant.

Meanwhile, the digital world buzzed with skepticism and criticism against Loraine and her company.

"It's been quite a while, yet there's been no word from Universe Group, and Loraine hasn't stepped forward to address it. Could there be an actual issue?"

"Could Universe Group be on the brink of a downfall? Has Loraine disappeared? Considering even a top executive is in custody, I advise those who hold Universe Group stocks to sell them promptly, to avoid potential losses!"

As the online community buzzed with discussion, the official media unveiled a list of honorees recognized as exceptional enterprises across the nation.

Initially, this announcement sparked little interest, but it ignited a flurry of attention when the Universe Group was revealed to be a top honoree, with a photograph of Loraine brandishing a medal included in the coverage.

Accompanying the image, an article lauded Loraine's admirable efforts, detailing her involvement in the construction of roads for isolated villages. The article praised, "Loraine, an exemplar of the enterprising youth, personally ventured into the rural heartlands to oversee the roads' establishment. Her altruism, undeterred by personal gain or loss, and her dedication to societal welfare, are indeed commendable."

The release of this story caused a sensation online.

It clarified the mystery of Loraine's recent absence. She had been in the countryside overseeing the road's construction.

Accused and unfairly criticized, Loraine had actually been engaged in benevolent deeds.

Furthermore, upon reading the article that hailed Loraine's resolute pursuit of justice as a president, their perception took an unexpected turn. "When she learned of illegal activities involving a senior executive at Universe Group, Loraine didn't shield him; instead, she presented evidence and called for corrective action. Her example should serve as a source of inspiration!"

Remorseful, the netizens flocked to defend Loraine on the post that had previously been used to defame her.

"She's unfit for presidency? Come on, take a closer look! Loraine embodies exceptional leadership!"

"How rare is it for a company to report its own corruption? Her calm demeanor only confirms her innocence."

"Indeed! Corruption has nothing to do with her. Loraine is the epitome of integrity and honesty."

The tide of public opinion turned swiftly, with many expressing



newfound admiration. "Building roads to connect remote villages isn't lucrative, yet Loraine took on the task. It shows her genuine concern for others over profit. I'm now a devoted fan of the Universe Group and will support it wholeheartedly!"

Those who had spread false rumors found themselves the target of ridicule.

"Ready to be criticized now? Before, you were quick to judge Loraine as having a narrow vision. Perhaps the narrow perspective is yours, after all."

Such taunting led to the silencing of these accounts, and support for Loraine swelled on the internet.

Meanwhile, Jefferson realized his plot had backfired. His investment in the smear campaign against Loraine only served to rally more support for her. In a fit of rage, he slammed his documents to the floor and vowed venomously, "Loraine, if you persist in this battle, don't blame me for not holding back!"



Chapter 719 Threats From Shareholders

Government endorsement and Loraine's discreet conduct earned her widespread approval online. This shift in public opinion caused the controversy to wane, and the Universe Group's stock not only stabilized but began to rise.

The individual most unsettled by these events was not Jefferson. It was Rico, a longstanding shareholder of the Universe Group.

Rico's sense of impending doom intensified following Reynolds's arrest. Indeed, over the next couple of days, Loraine reassured the worried shareholders and deftly maneuvered against those who had supported Reynolds. She maintained a mask of affability, all the while subtly undermining their influence.

Within two days, Rico watched in dismay as three of his projects slipped through his fingers.

Initially, he contemplated tactics to tarnish Loraine's reputation when the online controversy erupted. However, with the situation under control, inaction was no longer an option for him, so he arranged to meet with her.

Greeted with a smile, Loraine faced the five middle-aged men in her office, all showing signs of age with their graying hair. They lamented their hardships upon arrival, only to fall silent shortly after, their disheartened appearances masking their malevolent motives.

Rico stepped forward, taking the lead. Despite his reservations, fully aware of Loraine's competence and cunning, he chose not to confront her.

Instead, he bowed his head in a gesture of flattery. "Miss Torres, your decisions are incredibly clever and forward-thinking. Without your actions, Reynolds's debacle could have been far more damaging!"

Loraine regarded him with indifference and suspicion. She sensed that these individuals were not here to sing her praises.

As expected, Rico's expression turned grave, and he voiced his concern, "However, Miss Torres, what shall we do about the financial damage from Reynolds' corruption? It may take a while for the authorities to ascertain the extent of the funds he's pocketed. If he fails to return the money, how should we handle the shortfall?"

Had Rico not previously defended Reynolds, Loraine might have thought his worries genuine.

She met his statement with a scoff, choosing not to respond. Undeterred, Rico clenched his jaw and persisted earnestly, "Miss Torres, all of us shareholders hope you will step forward to cover the losses with your funds. It's in the best interest of the company."

Loraine offered a slight, mocking smile. "Do you mean to say all the shareholders?"

Rico shed a pair of crocodile tears as he pleaded, "Miss Torres, I'm acting in the company's best interest! Without the funds, the project's progress will stall further, leading to greater losses. I understand that such minor losses don't concern you, but we cannot afford to watch our investments dwindle, forcing us to liquidate our shares!"

There, he revealed his true intent. His charade of poverty was nothing more than a veiled threat involving their stocks.

The Bryant Group debacle was a case in point, and Rico was betting that Loraine would not take the news of their share sell-off lightly. Feigning sadness, he added, "Miss Torres, we'd rather not resort to this, but we're left with no alternative."

The others who had accompanied him affirmed his sentiment with nods, their bald heads gleaming. Loraine masked her inner derision.

Standing just outside the door, Cayson was about to deliver something to Loraine when Rico's words reached his ears. In a surge of anger, he burst through the door and confronted Rico, "Mr. Balder! Are you intimidating Miss Torres?"

Rico cast a quick glance at him and replied with a facade of respect, "Mr. Benton, you've misunderstood me. I'm simply stating facts."

Cayson's blood boiled, yet his decorum restrained him from uttering any harsh words. Through gritted teeth, he managed to say, "The fault isn't with Lorrie. She owes you nothing to compensate for any loss. Have you forgotten the profits she's secured for Universe Group? Your ingratitude towards her is shameful."

Rico's expression turned mournful as he responded, "Mr. Benton, I proposed this in the best interest of the company. The project delay does stem from a financial shortfall. I'm just being straightforward and honest."

As he spoke, he dropped to his knees before Loraine, his body shaking. "Miss Torres, I realize you hold a grudge against me for defending Reynolds previously. But I was deceived by him. My actions are solely in the interest of Universe Group! What



good is a reputation if it doesn't translate into earnings? Even charity requires financial backing."

Cayson seethed, ready to lash out, but Loraine signaled for him to hold back, her gaze steady on Rico.

Rico's anxiety peaked as she calmly declared, "Mr. Balder, should these concerns be your only worry, then rest easy. I shall provide all shareholders with a full explanation in a week."



Chapter 720 Cayson's Persistence

Rico's intent was to coerce Loraine into accepting accountability. Having succeeded, he ceased his annoyances.

He rose, feigning tears as he wiped them away. "Given your word, we, the elders, will trust you. Our hopes are that you'll fulfill your promise."

Loraine offered a smile and signaled for them to exit.

Once the room cleared, Cayson secured the door and approached Loraine with concern.

"You shouldn't have shouldered this burden, Lorrie. It's no minor issue!"

Loraine exhaled deeply and said, "Cayson, I know what I'm doing."

Cayson's brows knitted with worry, he couldn't help but express his fear, "Without settling the financial losses, Rico will rally the shareholders to dump their stocks, unsettling all the employees."

He continued with unease, "Should that happen, our rivals won't miss the chance to cause trouble for Universe Group. Regardless of our outstanding reputation, saving the company will be out of reach."

Loraine had turned the tide with a government accolade, earning Cayson's admiration.

Yet, having steered Universe Group towards stability for years, he preferred predictability over surprises.

He had once conceded to Loraine's aggressive growth plans, diverging from his own. But now, he found it increasingly difficult to align with her methods.

Had Loraine changed, or had it been him?

Lost in her thoughts, Loraine overlooked his turmoil, her mind on Marco's words.

The impact of Marco's teaching was evident today.

Once the turmoil outside had calmed, Loraine's priority shifted to reassuring the invested shareholders.

She pondered this with a smile creeping onto her face, appreciating that Marco's insights aligned perfectly with her own strategy.

Though the funding shortage had halted several initiatives, they had made significant headway on the smart city endeavor.

Furthermore, the Universe Group had recently garnered government accolades, a development sure to draw in additional partnerships.

The smart city project's allure was evident, offering more immediate rewards than the paused ventures, thus promising stability among the shareholders.

This assurance banished her fears.

With a knowing smile, Loraine reassured Cayson, "No need to worry. I have a way to appease the shareholders."

Cayson's surprise was palpable. "Lorrie, what's your approach?"

If you share it, I can back you up."

"Thanks for the offer. But there's no rush. You'll be in the loop within a week," Loraine responded, a hint of mystery in her voice.

Their conversation was interrupted by the ring of a phone. Loraine glanced at the caller ID, her smile genuine, signaling important news.

"Cayson, I must handle another matter. Excuse me," she said, rising from her seat.

Cayson, catching a glimpse of her expression, ventured a guess tinged with disappointment, "Lorrie, are you off to the hospital again?"

Taken aback slightly, Loraine offered no denial.

Cayson's face was a puzzle of unreadable emotions, and seeing this, she furrowed her brows. Despite her efforts to create distance between them, Cayson persisted.

Decisiveness was a trait she normally wore like armor. She declared plainly, "Yes, today the doctor will remove Marco's cast. I intend to be there for him."

Cayson's heart sank with her firm response. He stared at her, his voice laced with bitterness. "Lorrie, don't be fooled. Marco's at a point where he's got nothing and depends on you, which is why he seems so kind. He's not worthy of your care."

Loraine felt the urge to defend Marco, but Cayson cut off any attempt. He insisted, "If you're concerned, I can arrange for someone to look after him. You're already stretched thin running the company, Lorrie. I wish you would..."

"Cayson, I appreciate your concern and so would Marco. But



your offer is unnecessary. I didn't seek help because I choose to do this myself."

With that declaration, Loraine left no room for hope in Cayson's heart and exited the office without looking back.

Cayson watched her go, his hands balling into fists.

He was convinced that Loraine was intentionally keeping her distance from him.

And for what? For Marco, that bastard?

Cayson was seething, yet he couldn't bring himself to resent Loraine.

He knew her to be compassionate and believed that Marco must have manipulated her sympathy, especially now that his fortunes had reversed.

He scorned Marco, once the esteemed president of the Bryant Group, now resorting to sly, desperate tactics to garner Loraine's pity.

With contempt, Cayson thought less and less of Marco, who not only failed to alleviate Loraine's burdens but often added to them, even requiring her presence for something as simple as a cast removal.

But he was different. He chose to stand by Loraine in silence, thinking first to reassure the shareholders and secure a significant project for her in these tough times.

Cayson was adamant. He was the one truly suited for Loraine. In time, he was certain she would see Marco for the useless coward he was.