

Chapter 1007 A Guess

Loraine didn't care about Kaley's hatred of her. She was actually delighted to see Aria at the banquet tonight.

Ever since Aria returned to Zodiac, they had lost contact. Loraine suspected that Clifford might be limiting Aria's freedom, which worried her a bit.

When Marco came back to the Cruz family, Loraine had asked him about Aria. He told her that Clifford was keeping his daughter isolated for her recovery, and was so protective that Marco hadn't even been able to see her.

Loraine and Aria found a quiet spot at the event and caught up for a while. The awkwardness from their long separation melted away during their conversation, and Aria seemed more attached to her, showing pure joy on her face.

Loraine held her wrist and noticed that Aria wasn't as skinny as before; her wrist had filled out, making it comfortable to hold. She said softly, "It looks like you've recovered well; you seem much healthier."

But Aria, reminded of something Nina had said, subconsciously touched her belly, her expression turning a bit sour. Then she said shyly, "I've been staying home since I came back to Zodiac. My father only let me out tonight because this banquet is important."

This annual banquet hosted by the Wilson family was not just a networking event for the various clans, but also an opportunity for the younger generation to make connections and build relationships. In the past, Aria couldn't attend because she was seriously ill, but now that she was better, she

represented the Cruz family.

Lorraine nodded and assured her, "Don't worry about what others say. The most important thing is your recovery."

Aria nodded back. After a moment, she blinked her bright eyes, grabbed Lorraine's hand, and whispered, "Lorrie, can I ask you something? Do you know where my cousin is?"

Aria wasn't used to referring to him as her cousin yet, but Lorraine knew exactly who she meant.

But why was Aria asking her about Marco's whereabouts?

Lorraine raised her eyebrows but didn't immediately reply.

Aria, feeling a bit embarrassed, licked her slightly dry lips and said, "Actually, my cousin has run away from home."

A mischievous smile appeared in Lorraine's eyes. She found the phrase "run away from home" quite amusing, especially when it applied to Marco, so she asked with a hint of amusement, "Really?"

Aria, still naive, didn't catch the lack of surprise in Lorraine's expression or the playful tone in her voice. She just continued with a sad expression, "Actually, it's my father who sent me to ask you because we can't find him anywhere."

She scrunched up her nose and leaned closer to Lorraine, saying, "But my cousin left because he was basically under house arrest!"

Clearly disapproving of her family's ways, Aria said angrily, "I fully support my cousin. If my father hadn't locked me up, I would have escaped through the window myself. The more he tries to control us, the less I want to listen!"

Her tone shifted to one of deep concern, saying, "Well, to be

honest, I don't want my family to find him. I understand why he fled; my uncle pressured him into marrying a woman from another noble family. I also heard my uncle saying bad things about you. He said you were after the Cruz family's wealth!"

Aria was clearly upset, but Loraine felt touched by her concern. In truth, Aria wasn't aware of much of the darker side of the Cruz family, yet she genuinely cared for her cousin, Marco, despite their lack of interaction.

With a sorrowful look, Aria continued, "Lorrie, I believe you're not like that. Though there's not much I can do, I'm here to help you! But I can't find Marco right now..."

At that moment, Loraine gently rubbed her head and interrupted her, "Do you think you need to worry about him? Don't worry. He's capable of taking care of himself."

Moreover, Loraine suspected that Aria would likely see her runaway cousin soon.

Aria nodded, visibly anxious, and it was clear she had been fretting quite a bit. Trying to sound mature, she said, "Then I won't worry about him anymore. But if there's anything you need in Zodiac, just let me know!"

Loraine was slightly moved and nodded. Just then, she noticed Aria's slightly swollen belly and a thought struck her, causing her fingertips to freeze.

A suspicion crossed her mind, but she immediately dismissed it.

It was probably too coincidental. Perhaps it was just a side effect of Aria's medication, or maybe because she hadn't exercised for a while.

With a mix of surprise and skepticism in her gaze, Loraine ultimately kept her thoughts to herself. Instead, she gently

patted Aria's back and reassured her earnestly. "I'll remember your offer, but if you run into any trouble you can't handle, make sure you tell me, okay?"

Aria nodded trustingly in her embrace. Just as she was about to speak, a calm and clear male voice interrupted, "Lorrie, it's time for us to go."



Chapter 1008 Cruel Means

Aria lifted her head and saw a handsome man approaching with a smile, nodding politely at her as if he knew who she was.

Then, he immediately positioned himself next to Loraine, as though anticipating something.

Aria was sensitive about this because, since her childhood, her relatives had occasionally visited her, feigning concern by her sickbed.

As a result, she felt a tinge of displeasure when she saw the smile on Cayson's face. She cast a suspicious glance at him and then turned her attention to Loraine.

Loraine gestured for Aria to stand up straight and made the introduction. "Aria, this is Cayson Benton, a friend of mine."

Despite maintaining his smile, a flicker of disappointment flashed through Cayson's eyes as soon as he heard the word "friend."

Aria was an unsophisticated girl, but she was not naive. Having already accepted Loraine as her cousin's girlfriend, she felt the need to side with her cousin even though he had run away from home.

Just as Loraine was about to leave, Aria reached out and grabbed her hand firmly, saying, "Lorrie, I think my cousin is a better match for you."

Upon hearing Aria's words, Cayson froze. His smile immediately faded as he stared blankly at her.

Loraine never would've guessed that Aria would say something like that. As she contemplated how to diffuse the awkward situation, Aria continued, "Lorrie, the dress you're wearing doesn't even match his. He looks like your attendant, not your male companion."

Cayson's expression darkened. Despite his typically calm demeanor, he couldn't help but feel a surge of anger. "What are you talking about?" he exclaimed.

Aria stuck out her tongue with a slightly hostile expression but refrained from arguing with Cayson.

With a snort, Cayson turned around to leave with Loraine. Noticing that she wasn't wearing her silk scarf, he took out another and said gently, "You're so kind to be helping others, regardless of whether or not it's worthwhile."

Maintaining an appropriate distance, Cayson gently tied the silk scarf around Loraine's neck and attached a silk rose to it.

The silk rose was nestled beneath her collar, emitting a subtle fragrance. Loraine assumed it was the scent of the silk rose and smiled, thanking Cayson.

Cayson cast his gaze down, his eyes reflecting a mixture of emotions. "I've reached out to several partners of the branch company, and they all want to see you. Let's go," he said.

Loraine nodded and left with him without any hesitation.

Aria, who had been observing them, noticed a coldness in Cayson's eyes as he lifted his gaze.

She felt a chill run down her spine. Her intuition told her that this man was up to no good.

As Loraine walked with Cayson, she noticed that the fragrance seemed to grow stronger with time.

She reached up and gently touched the silk rose on her collar, inquiring, "Cayson, it is beautiful and smells wonderful. How was it made?"

Cayson paused for a moment and swiftly snapped back into action, as usual. In a gentle tone, he explained, "It is an artificial rose, so I sprayed some perfume on it. How do you feel?"

After a few moments of contemplation, Loraine replied, "I think... it's wonderful. Thank you."

Cayson smiled warmly and said, "It's the least I can do for you."

He stepped closer to Loraine and observed no reaction from her.

Loraine felt like she'd been too distant from him. After all, they were good friends.

Casting a glance at him, she suddenly felt as though the light was dim, and that the air in the banquet hall had grown hot and dry.

Standing beside her, Cayson glanced at her from time to time. With his height advantage, he easily caught sight of her cleavage.

"Although this dress suits you very well, it seems a bit too revealing. If your grandfather were to find out that I arranged for such a dress, he might be upset with me," Cayson said in a hoarse voice.

His tone carried the warmth of a brother speaking to his sister. Loraine couldn't help but recall scenes from her childhood and was unexpectedly moved by his concern.

Moreover, the faint fragrance seemed to induce a foggy sensation in her brain.

Cayson drew nearer to her, lowering his head to tighten the scarf for her. In a soft tone, he said, "Don't give your scarf to anyone else, Lorrie."

Sensing that he was standing too close to her, Loraine instinctively took a step back. As she did so, the fragrance wafting beneath her nose suddenly intensified.

With a knowing smile on his face, Cayson said, "Lorrie, I'm going to meet another client. Why don't you speak with them first? It could be beneficial for the growth of the Universe Group." He paused briefly, then continued in a hushed tone, "If anything happens, don't forget to call me. I'll be there for you."