

## Chapter 1041 In The Cruz Family

---

Ever since Marco left the Cruz family and showed up as the president of the Solar Company all of a sudden, the Cruz family no longer had a hand in his affairs. Since both Marco and Loraine had become rather influential people in Zodiac, the Cruz family could not try to coerce them using the same foul methods they had used in Vagow.

Melvin decided to try a softer approach. He would call Marco from time to time, acting like he wanted to repair their father-son relationship. He used Aria as the intermediary a lot. But here he was, tired of the soft and nice act, and demanded Marco return to the Cruz family.

Marco just sneered. Knowing what his father would say next, he hung up. Loraine gave him a worried look, but he smiled gently in return. "It'll be okay. He can't do anything to me now."

Loraine remained silent but gently took his hand in hers to comfort him. Marco felt his heart skip and he stared at her intensely. "Loraine. I honestly can't thank you enough for caring about me so much."

He hadn't forgotten the previous issues they'd had. Even though they were back together, he still felt guilty and feared she'd give up and abandon him. Marco's heart warmed at the thought that she still cared for him so much.

Flushed, Loraine averted her gaze and snorted, "Whatever... The Solar Group is the Universe Group's strategic partner. I... I'm just worried about the company..."

Marco chuckled lightly and rolled down the window a bit. They passed by the familiar green mountain, and after a while, the outline of the city finally became clear.

Marco sent Loraine home first. They stared intensely at each other for a couple of seconds before parting ways. He watched her closely as she walked away. Leaning against his car, Marco lit a cigarette and didn't leave until he saw the lights in Loraine's room come on.

A few minutes passed, and his phone buzzed. Thinking it was Loraine, he smiled lightly until he looked at his phone and realized it was a call from Melvin. His smile vanished as he answered, already irritated.

On the phone, Melvin sounded sullen. He clearly wasn't happy about earlier, but he had to suppress his anger. "Marco. No matter what you are thinking, you have to return to the Cruz family immediately!"

"I won't be returning. My decision became final when I left the room you locked me in." With that, he hung up.

Stunned, Melvin began to laugh hysterically, "Well, well! You are definitely my son, Marco. This sort of courage is commendable!"

Clifford, who was beside him, smiled obsequiously, "He's spent too long outside the family. Look how arrogant he is. He hung up on you."

Melvin narrowed his eyes, stroking his chin, a habit he was fond of whenever he was thinking. He glanced at the TV, which had been playing in the background. The news was on, with a reporter droning on about how the government was praising the public service event done by the president of the Universe Group, Loraine.

Businesspeople value profit, but they also value reputation, seeing as sometimes a good reputation is harder to get than

money.

He wasn't satisfied with Loraine before because he thought that her good reputation wasn't enough, and that she wouldn't be of use to the Cruz family. However, he'd watched her grow in Zodiac. His connections in the government let him know that she was in their good graces and quite respected. It seemed she was promising after all.

Melvin lowered his gaze. "It's normal that he'd hold a grudge against us for trying to keep him from being with Loraine. But I must give it to him. He has a good eye. Loraine is now one of the most respected women in Zodiac."

Clifford paused. "Melvin, you're really okay with the relationship between them? Loraine isn't a good person. Even if she has a good reputation, she still doesn't deserve our family name!"

Melvin waved him off. "Rest assured, I have my own plan."

He stared at Clifford sternly. "Besides, it's none of your business. Why don't you pay more attention to Aria since you have so much time?"

Clifford froze. With a quick nod, he left dejectedly. After walking out, Clifford sighed in relief and took out his phone to make a call. He spoke through gritted teeth as the other person picked up. "I've failed to persuade Melvin. What do we do now?"

After a brief moment of silence on Clifford's end, his face relaxed. "I see."



## Chapter 1042 Instigating Trouble

---

Just as Loraine had foreseen, once the Universe Group became widely recognized, the government found no grounds to halt their projects, and the obstacles that had once seemed insurmountable were now easily overcome.

Meanwhile, online discussions about her persisted. Having previously been known to aid in repairing rural roads, her involvement in a charity lunch raised few eyebrows. Instead, it bolstered her image as someone genuinely devoted to charitable causes, enhancing her already good reputation.

Learning of the Universe Group's newfound success, Kaley, who had hoped for Loraine's downfall, was shocked to see her popularity only increasing online.

This revelation left her more frustrated than ever, and she couldn't help but vent her feelings to Jaylah.

"Mom, even this didn't bring Loraine down. How will we ever see her fall on hard times?"

Jaylah was equally troubled, worried that if Loraine continued to rise, the Wilson family might take notice and uncover something alarming.

With a stern look, she gestured for Kaley to come closer and whispered a plan into her ear, ending with a spiteful, "Just do as I said. We'll make sure that bitch gets what she deserves!"

Energized by her mother's words, Kaley nodded vigorously and left the room to make a phone call.

As soon as she dialed, a man's cheerful voice greeted her from the other side. "Kaley, it's not often you call me. What brings this on?"

Kaley's voice was soft yet teasing as she said, "I just miss you so much."

On the other end of the line was Edwin, the Wilson family's eldest grandson.

He had always been protective of his younger cousin, Kaley. Now, picking up on the strain in her voice, he replied with a hint of concern, "Kaley, has someone been giving you trouble?"

Feigning shock, Kaley's act only deepened Edwin's suspicions. Pressed by his inquiries, she hesitantly confessed "the truth."

"It's really nothing major. But did you hear Uncle Vincent is back in town? I was working with his team previously, but an actress there targeted me..."

"What?" Edwin interrupted, his voice rising with anger. "Who had the audacity to mess with you like that? Didn't Vincent step in to help?"

Kaley's voice broke as she replied, her words muffled by tears, "Uncle Vincent... It seems he's quite close with her. He not only sided with her, but he also halved my scenes and handed my part over to her."

Edwin's brows knitted together tightly as he exclaimed, "Has Vincent lost his mind? That's outrageous! Don't worry, Kaley. I'll handle things here and be back home in a few days to sort this out!"

As Kaley listened, a tearful smile spread across her face. She whispered some comforting words to Edwin and then let him go back to his business.

After the call ended, a sly smile played on her lips.

Checking the time, she made her way to the living room, prepared a pot of tea, and gently knocked on the door of Joseph's study. "Come in," Joseph called.

Kaley entered, her eyes still tinged with red from crying, and offered the tea with a gentle smile. "Grandpa, the butler told me you've been in here for quite some time. Please, have some tea and rest a bit."

Joseph's laughter boomed through the room. "Ah, you're truly a blessing, my dear!"

He accepted the tea, tasting it leisurely, then looked at her with interest. "I've been wrapped up in my work and haven't seen much of you. How have you been holding up?"

Kaley kept her gaze down, her voice soft. "I'm alright, Grandpa. It's just that I haven't felt much like going out lately."

Joseph frowned and looked up. Seeing her teary eyes, his expression grew stern. "What happened?"

Kaley seemed hesitant, but after his persistent probing, she finally admitted, "Last time, my mom and I organized the family banquet, but we might have messed up due to our lack of experience. Uncle Vincent got really mad and yelled at both of us. It was so embarrassing with everyone watching, I just didn't want to face going out and being mocked..."

She lifted her gaze, her eyes shimmering with a sad smile. "Plus, I like staying home with you."

Joseph's expression darkened upon hearing this. He managed a strained smile and comforted Kaley. Once he persuaded her to leave the room, he summoned the butler and demanded, "What exactly happened at that banquet Kaley mentioned? What the hell did Vincent do?"

The butler responded with a bow, "Mr. Joseph Wilson, it wasn't Mr. Vincent Wilson's fault. Apparently, some troublemakers from the Universe Group stirred up a scandal at the event, and Mr. Vincent Wilson intervened to defend the company's female president."

Joseph's expression grew even more severe. "The Universe Group again?"

With a blank face, he snapped, "Get Francis on the phone. Tell him he needs to come back immediately. My precious granddaughter is being tormented right here, and he's abroad working on some pointless project. What's the use of that?"





## Chapter 1043 A Threatening Message

---

In the lofty confines of a skyscraper, a middle-aged man stood before a floor-to-ceiling window, the epitome of sophistication in his tailored suit and immaculate grooming.

Time had bestowed upon him a mature and dignified air. Glancing at his watch, he answered a call with practiced ease. "I understand. Leave these matters to me. Focus on learning the ropes from the directors," he advised calmly.

Though the caller seemed reluctant to end the conversation, the man hung up without hesitation.

Moments later, another call interrupted the silence. Upon seeing the caller ID, a hint of reverence crossed the man's composed features. "Dad." He greeted respectfully as he answered.

On the other end, Joseph's voice crackled with anger. "Francis, your niece is being bullied. What do you intend to do about it?"

Francis sighed, rubbing his forehead wearily, "Dad, Edwin just informed me of the situation. But you know how he tends to overreact. I was actually about to ask you for the full story."

With disdain evident in his voice, Joseph recounted the details of Kaley's ordeal at the hands of the female president of the Universe Group. His tone grew grave as he continued, "You've been away for too long. Now that I'm aging, these outsiders think the Wilson family is an easy target. It's time for you to come back home."



"Understood, Dad. I'll make the arrangements immediately," Francis replied respectfully.

Word of Francis's imminent return quickly spread, reaching Kaley through Edwin and the family butler.

Overjoyed at the news, Kaley knew that her persistence had finally paid off.

With Francis's return, how much longer could Loraine's Universe Group possibly endure?

Even with the backing of the Solar Company, Loraine stood no chance against Francis's Star Group.

Kaley couldn't help but smirk as she opened a bottle of wine in celebration. "Not only will I bring down the Universe Group, but I'll also bankrupt the Solar Company! Marco, you have no idea what's coming. When you're at rock bottom, you'll be begging to marry into the Wilson family!"

Meanwhile, within the Universe Group's branch office, a female employee at the front desk seethed with anger as she read news articles praising Loraine.

Suddenly, a sharp knock on her desk interrupted her thoughts. Looking up, she was met with the disdainful gaze of the human resources department director. Seeing her distracted by her phone during work hours, his expression turned even more contemptuous. "Victoria, gather your belongings. You're fired!"

Victoria's complexion drained of color as she absorbed the news of her termination.

In the days leading up to this moment, her enigmatic boss had repeatedly instructed her to cozy up to Marco. Despite her best efforts, Marco only ever seemed to have eyes for Loraine, leaving Victoria frustrated.

Her blatant attempts at closeness had not gone unnoticed, eventually catching the attention of Loraine's assistant, who had curtly informed her that her services would no longer be required after the day's tasks were completed.

Speculation buzzed among her colleagues that Victoria had been terminated for attempting to seduce the president's boyfriend.

She knew how hard she had worked to secure her position at the Universe Group, and the thought of being dismissed before making any meaningful impact filled her with dread. Above all, she feared the wrath of her mysterious boss, whose expectations loomed over her like a malevolent shadow.

Victoria dreaded the prospect of disappointing him more than anything, even more than facing the consequences of angering Loraine.

Knowing she had no alternative, Victoria's trembling fingers composed a message and sent it off: "Marco, meet me tonight, alone. Or I'll expose your secrets to the world!"

The phone in Marco's hand buzzed with a new notification. Glancing at the message, he simply deleted it without a second thought, a hint of indifference playing across his features as he resumed his meal at the restaurant.

Marco's only concern lay in the possibility of Loraine uncovering his past secrets. However, having already confessed everything to her, he felt a sense of relief, knowing that there were no more skeletons in his closet.

Sitting across from him, Loraine detected his momentary distraction and inquired, "Is something bothering you?"

Marco shook his head, offering a reassuring smile. "Nothing important. Just a spam message," he said casually.

Loraine, content with his response, flashed a playful grin and suggested, "Then perhaps you should punish yourself with a drink for allowing distractions during our meal." Raising her wine glass enticingly, she awaited his response.

Marco chuckled, clinking his glass against hers in good humor.

Meanwhile, amidst the chilly wind, Victoria wrapped herself in layers of clothing, her phone remaining ominously silent. A sneer curled her lips as she stared at the deserted street.

With determination in her eyes, she shed her outer garments and muttered under her breath, "This is the consequence of Marco's actions. Let's start recording the video."



## Chapter 1044 She Came Back

The next day, a video titled "The Outcast Of The Bryant Family Was Bullied?" shot up to the top of the most searched topics. Almost instantly, it garnered a lot of views and so many people began to express their opinions.

Most netizens easily forgot things they had seen online, but there were still a good number of people who remembered a lot about the Bryant family, because someone who was once the pride of the family was now in the public eye under a completely different identity.

The intrigues of the Bryant family were so compelling that those who still remembered them were not likely to forget any time soon. Just when everyone felt that the family was gone forever, an abandoned member had suddenly appeared from nowhere.

In the video, there was a woman who seemed to be in a very bad condition. Her face was injured, but from her features, sharp-eyed netizens were still able to recognize her. This woman was none other than Marina!

Looking so terrible, she sobbed miserably in front of the camera as she narrated her plight. She mentioned Marco's name multiple times throughout the video. But much of her words were inaudible.

Even if we, the Bryant family, didn't make any contribution, it must be said that we have done nothing against the law. Now, my grandma is dead, and my mom was also killed by Marco! But even after all this, he still won't let me go..."

She glared at the camera with hatred and misery in her eyes,

and went on, "Even if they did something wrong to you, have you forgotten that they are the ones who brought you up?! I saw you as my brother for so many years. How can you treat me like this, Marco?"

With her injured face and her angry voice, as well as the involvement of Marco, the video quickly went viral online.

It was only natural that as long as people saw how Marina's face looked, they would sympathize with her. It was normal for people to stand with the underdog against the bigger party.

For this reason, netizens scolded Marco for his alleged cruelty and ruthlessness.

"What a bastard he is! Was his disowning of the Bryant family a ploy in order for him to gain sympathy from the public? I guess his aim was to get into the Cruz family!"

"Well, the more I think of it, the more I think her claims may be correct. I used to sympathize with Marco back then. But a ruthless, profit-obsessed businessman really doesn't deserve our sympathy! By the way, was Loraine on his side when he was doing all that acting back then? I won't be surprised if she was. They're a 'perfect' couple. Both of them are bastards!"

Now that Loraine was being dragged into the anti-Marco frenzy, Loraine's fans were very unhappy, and they began to call on her to break up with Marco in order to distance herself down him.

When Loraine finally left the conference room, Remy informed her about the issue trending online.

Loraine frowned in surprise when she was shown the video of the miserable-looking Marina. After thinking for a while, she went in search of Marco.

Meanwhile, Marco had just finished watching the video. With an expressionless look on his face, he pondered for a moment



before ordering his men to investigate the whole thing.

He never expected that the long gone Bryant family would ever resurrect. When he saw Marina's miserable-looking face in the video, he couldn't help but recall a curse that was launched at him: "You monster, you'll bring misfortune to everyone around you!"

His fists were clenched, his face pale, and his chest heaving as he thought of the current situation.

Apparently, the curse had come true. The person closest to him, Loraine, had been the undeserved victim.

He grabbed the phone, as if trying to grasp a lifesaver, and quickly dialed the first number on the screen.

The call was connected almost immediately, but the other phone was ringing somewhere nearby.

Just then, Loraine pushed open the door and walked in with a gentle and comforting smile on her face.

Marco forced a smile to his face and quickly went to embrace her.

Loraine patted him on the back, and after a while, he calmed down and clumsily told her about his meeting with Laura.

Though his words sounded a little confusing, Loraine understood what he meant. He was clearly worried that she would get into trouble because of him.

So she hugged him and said comfortingly, "She was wrong. My meeting you was the luckiest thing ever."

She reminded him about what they had gone through together and how important he was to her. In the end, she said to him, "The past is the past. The most important thing is that we are

still together. Hopefully, we will always be together and live happily ever after."

Marco looked at her and kissed her in his excitement.

All his uneasiness had been removed by her hug and kiss. After what seemed like a long time, they finally broke their embrace. But even though Marco had calmed down considerably, he was still holding her in his arms.

When she saw that his mood had improved, she asked him, "Why did Marina suddenly appear from nowhere?"

After Laura was sent to prison, there was no news about Marina. They all thought that she had either gone abroad with the money, or had died in destitution.

No one expected that she would come out to cause further trouble.

But a thought suddenly occurred to Marco, and he immediately expressed it. "I think... Victoria is Marina."

10



## Chapter 1045 Victoria Is Marina

---

Lorraine was taken aback. "Victoria?"

Her memory of Marina was as a haughty, assertive girl, while Victoria had always appeared meek and distressed, a figure of sympathy.

Despite suspecting Victoria might have had cosmetic surgery, Lorraine had never connected her to Marina.

In a stern voice, Marco said, "I know her eyes well, and the threatening message I received yesterday, demanding a meeting or she'd reveal my secrets, definitely came from her."

He scoffed and added, "She's learned a few tricks, like disguising her surgery with makeup to appear as if her face was injured."

Reflecting on it, Marco felt his initial impressions of Victoria were correct.

Despite her attempts to conceal it, the hostility in her eyes was evident.

Lorraine trusted his assessment and asked with a frown, "So, what's our move? It's tricky to clear up such murky accusations publicly."

Even after her statement, Marco was unruffled. "She might try to leverage the Bryant family against me, but I've settled all my debts with them. What do I have to fear?"

He had not only settled his obligations but had also managed funeral arrangements for Liza. No matter how Marina tried to manipulate facts, he was clear of guilt.

Loraine sighed, feeling empathy for Marco's plight with the troublesome Bryant family.

However, they weren't going to let Marina spread lies unchecked.

Knowing Marina was now destitute and powerless made it simpler to track her down.

Shortly after, Marco's man reported back. It seemed that they had located Marina's current residence.

He sent over a video that captured Victoria leading a man into a rental, then seeing him off shortly after.

In the footage, Victoria's makeup mimicked scratches, confirming their suspicions.

It was true that Victoria was Marina!

Impressed by Marco's sharp eye, Loraine was about to inquire about his next steps when he took her hand and looked at her earnestly.

"Would you join me at a press conference?" He proposed.

Seeing his assured demeanor, Loraine smiled and agreed, "Absolutely."

Marco's affectionate smile reflected his gratitude for having Loraine by his side.

After a day filled with public speculation, he broke the silence not by retreating or issuing legal threats as many had anticipated, but by boldly scheduling a press conference.

This move caught many off guard because the usual response from public figures to scandals often involved either outright denial or silent dismissal.

Marco's decision to confront the issue head-on made people reconsider the veracity of the rumors.

The press conference quickly became the focal point of intense public interest, drawing the gaze of the entire Zodiac.

Meanwhile, in a modestly furnished rental room, Marina, with the faux scars washed off, revealing a face transformed by plastic surgery, spoke emotionlessly to herself. "Marco, I'm waiting for your downfall."

Across town, the wind swept through both humble dwellings and opulent villas, touching faces marked by a spectrum of emotions.

In the Cruz household, Melvin watched the news with a furrowed brow, visibly concerned. Clifford offered words of comfort, albeit secretly hoping for Marco to fail.

Elsewhere, Kaley watched the press conference with envy burning in her chest as she observed Loraine standing beside Marco.

The atmosphere at the press conference was charged with tension and hostility. Reporters bombarded Marco with pointed questions, each one sharp and accusatory.

"Mr. Bryant, how do you respond to being labeled as ungrateful?"

"Does it weigh on your conscience, being so harsh towards the Bryant family who took you in? With Miss Bryant left in such a pitiable state, how can you remain so indifferent?"

Amidst a forest of microphones, Marco maintained his composure and replied, "Marina accuses me of ingratitude, but

I have to ask, where was this so-called devoted granddaughter when Liza Bryant died alone and abandoned in a hospital?"



Our ads aim to provide better support for authors.

