

Chapter 1046 A Clear Conscience

The reporters were taken aback by Marco's revelation, clearly not expecting such a turn of events. One of them spoke up, seeking clarification. "What exactly do you mean by this?"

With a sneer, Marco looked down and then glanced at Carl, who seemed to understand his signal.

Carl bowed slightly and presented a set of documents to the reporters.

Each document was photographed under bright flashes, revealing details such as Liza's death certificate, receipts for the cemetery plot and burial expenses, and other relevant paperwork.

In a low voice, Marco explained, "After Liza's passing, attempts to contact Marina and Laura were unsuccessful. It was Loraine and I who took care of her funeral arrangements. Where was Marina during this critical time?"

The crowd erupted into a frenzy, shocked by Marco's evidence. The documents confirmed that he had been truthful about his words.

Marina, who had accused Marco of ingratitude, now appeared to have neglected her own grandmother's passing and was exploiting the situation for personal gain.

Amidst the rising murmurs, a voice cut through the crowd. "You led the Bryant Group to bankruptcy. How could a young woman like Marina be expected to handle Liza's burial? It was



your responsibility, considering she raised you. Blaming Marina now is a pathetic excuse to deflect blame from yourself!"

The crowd murmured in agreement, chastising Marco for attempting to shift blame onto Marina. "It's only natural that Marina was unable to handle the burial," they asserted. "You can't hold that against her."

The reporter pressed further. "Regardless of the burial, how do you justify the attack on Marina's face? She is a privileged young woman from a wealthy family!"

Those who had seen the video nodded in solemn agreement, their eyes fixed on Marco with a mixture of fear and disdain.

Marco, however, remained resolute. "I did not harm Marina, and she was not injured," he insisted.

A reporter quickly countered, "Do you think we're fools? We've seen the video. Her face was severely damaged. How can you expect us to believe otherwise?"

Marco chose not to engage in an argument. Instead, he subtly signaled to Carl, who was stationed at the control panel. Carl understood the cue and played a segment of surveillance footage for the reporters.

As they watched, their expressions shifted from skepticism to astonishment, realizing that the woman in the video was not the same Marina they had seen before.

At that moment, Loraine approached Marco and stated, "The woman in the video is indeed Marina, but she underwent plastic surgery and now goes by the name Victoria. She recently joined the Universe Group's Zodiac branch but was fired due to her misconduct prior to the video's release."

Loraine's reputation and recent accolades from authorities added credibility to her words. Furthermore, the information





she provided was easily verifiable, eliminating any need for deceit.

Her revelation left the reporters speechless, followed by a buzz of shocked whispers.

The public opinion, previously swayed by Marina's accusations, had now shifted dramatically.

Since Marina had undergone plastic surgery, her claims against Marco lacked credibility. Regarding her claim of Marco being ungrateful, the downfall of the Bryant family was a result of their own actions. Marco's handling of Liza's burial and funeral demonstrated his kindness and righteousness, leaving little room for criticism.

Online viewers of the press conference were also shocked, with the live chat buzzing with discussions.

Remaining composed, Marco addressed the reporters once more as their discussion settled. "The accusations from Marina are baseless rumors that easily fall apart under scrutiny. I didn't feel the need to explain."

He paused briefly before raising his voice. "However, I called this press conference today because her actions have not only damaged my reputation but also that of Loraine. I want to clarify to the public that while I am pursuing a relationship with Loraine, I do not condone any insults directed at her because of me."

As Marco observed Loraine's surprised expression, he softened his demeanor, offering a gentle smile. "Loraine is a kind and compassionate person. Despite any past grievances with the Bryant family, she urged me to handle Liza's funeral and stood by me during challenging times," he explained.

Loraine, caught off guard by Marco's unexpected public declaration, blushed and looked away, feeling both flustered



and touched.

Marco had never discussed this publicly before; why was he suddenly declaring his feelings for her?

With a light chuckle, Marco wrapped his arm around Loraine's shoulders, facing the camera with a determined expression. "Therefore, if anyone wants to criticize me, feel free, but Loraine is innocent. I won't tolerate any slander against her!"

His words ignited a frenzy of reactions, both online and offline.

Meanwhile, at the Cruz family's house, Clifford frowned at the screen. "Marco shouldn't have said that," he remarked.

Melvin raised an eyebrow, expressing disapproval. "Is there an issue here? I must say, he has some courage. I'm also surprised by Loraine's decision to stand by Marco in the face of rumors and slander."

Glancing at Clifford, who appeared to have something to say, Melvin continued coldly, "At the very least, Marco didn't bring shame to the Cruz family. That's sufficient."

Clifford's complexion paled as if Melvin had uncovered his thoughts. He chose not to say anything further.



Chapter 1047 Renewed Turmoil

In the online broadcast, Marco and Loraine shared a tender moment, holding hands and locking eyes, much to the delight of their fans who flooded the comment section with excitement.

Meanwhile, Kaley seethed with anger, watching the scene unfold. She was so enraged that she nearly smashed her tablet, but her fury was interrupted by a ringtone. Glancing at her screen, Kaley's expression brightened as she saw the caller's ID.

It was Francis who confirmed that he had returned to the country.

Overjoyed, Kaley eagerly offered to pick him up at the airport. However, her joy quickly turned to a sneer as she looked back at Loraine on the press conference screen. "Enjoy your moment while you can. Your smile won't last," she muttered to herself.

At the same time, in a dimly lit rental room, Marina's face drained of color as she watched the surveillance video Marco had shown. She knew that her fate was sealed. Feeling a sense of despair, she muttered, "How could there be a security camera?"

Before she could dwell on it further, Marco's cold voice came through the phone. "We will address Marina's actions seriously and will not tolerate any damage to our reputation."

As Marina listened to Marco's stern words, fear gripped her. She trembled, anxious about how Marco would handle the

situation.

Biting her lip, she nervously scanned the room, muttering to herself, "At most, they'll just take me away. But with the boss here, he can't harm me..."

It was then that she snapped out of her thoughts, frantically grabbing her phone to dial the only number that could save her now.

However, her actions were interrupted by a knock at the door. In her haste, she not only failed to switch to the call but also inadvertently turned up the volume to the maximum, exposing a clear dialogue.

A reporter's voice could be heard asking, "What measures are you taking? Will you be leveraging the influence of the Cruz family?"

Marco's response was laced with amusement and perhaps a hint of disdain, either for the Cruz family or for Marina. "I am a law-abiding citizen. How could I resort to such tactics? I have faith in the government, so naturally, I have contacted the police."

Marina was unfazed. The door had already been broken down, and armed police officers stormed in, surrounding her.

Marco, suspecting that Marina had assistance in Zodiac, reminded the police to be vigilant for any accomplices.

Unbeknownst to Marco, Marina was nothing more than a pawn to the mysterious boss, not even worthy of being a sacrificial piece.

As the police closed in, Marina knew it was all over. She sank to the floor, resigned, as the police escorted her away.

The phone that had fallen during the chaos continued to



broadcast everything from the press conference.

Amidst the crowd's admiration, the press conference concluded successfully, with Marco and Loraine standing side by side under the bright lights, taking a bow.

As they left the stage, Loraine's face flushed with embarrassment. She glanced at Marco and shyly bit her lip, whispering, "Why did you confess your love so suddenly? There were so many people..."

Marco gazed down at Loraine, his expression unapologetic. "I've always loved you so much that I wish the whole world knew. It just came out in the moment, and I couldn't hold it back," he admitted frankly.

Loraine couldn't help blushing at the thought of how her relatives and friends would tease her about it.

Suddenly, Marco's tone shifted to seriousness. "Loraine, I should have told you earlier, but I can't stand anyone speaking ill of you," he declared earnestly.

His determined look caused a flutter in Loraine's heart. Their eyes locked, and the atmosphere became intimate.

Just then, Carl interrupted, "Mr. Bryant, Marina has been caught. Do you need to take any further action?"

Loraine's face flushed red as she quickly looked away. Marco's expression remained unchanged, save for a subtle curl of his lips. He turned to Carl. "Take care of it. Ensure she learns her lesson," he instructed, his voice unwavering.

Carl nodded, his gaze lingering suggestively before he excused himself.

Marco opened the car door for Loraine, who blushed as she got in. As Marco joined her in the car, he noticed her ears turning



red and couldn't help but smile. He was about to tease her when Carl returned, looking flustered.

"Mr. Bryant, there's been a car accident involving the police car transporting Marina. Several officers were injured, and Marina is missing!" Carl reported urgently.



Chapter 1048 The Disappearing Of Marina

In a black car, Marina knelt on the soft carpet, trembling and disheveled. Ashes fell on her body as someone stubbed out a cigarette on her, treating her as if she were an ashtray.

Marina gritted her teeth, eyes wide with shock, but she didn't dare cry out in pain.

A deep voice cut through the silence of the car. "It seems I overestimated you. I thought you could at least make a dent in Marco, but not only did he emerge unscathed, he actually benefited from this," the man said, his tone disappointed. "Because I used you, I now have to clean up this mess. What should I do with you?"

The man's black-clad bodyguard chimed in, "Boss, what should we do with this woman now?"

The man reclined in his seat, his face hidden behind large sunglasses. After a moment of contemplation, he replied, "I'm a businessman who values profit. We can't afford losses. Take her to the old place. I need to recoup my investment."

Upon hearing the mention of "the old place," Marina lifted her head, her hair disheveled, and her face filled with fear. She shook her head frantically and stuttered, "Boss, I-I'm still valuable. Please don't give up on me..."

Driven by desperation, Marina quickly gathered her thoughts and pleaded, "I've made Jaden side with me. Just give me more time! I can bring Loraine down, I swear!"

The boss sneered, "How many times will you use Jaden as an excuse? Do you really think I can't manipulate him without your help?"

Realizing the man's dissatisfaction with her lack of transparency regarding her dealings with Jaden, Marina hastily recounted their conversations, including Jaden's requests and her original plans.

As she spoke, the man's expression softened, and he gently pinched her chin. "It's a shame you're still not clever despite all I've taught you. You're worthless now."

He withdrew his hand, wiping it in disgust, and instructed his bodyguard, "Drag her out."

Marina screamed in horror, but her cries went unanswered. The car halted outside an alley, drawing only indifferent glances from passersby.

No one was coming to her rescue.

Tears streamed down her face as she pleaded desperately, "I'm Marco's sister. I can still be of use!"

A hand, smelling of makeup, patted her face. It belonged to the procuress who had taken her in.

The middle-aged woman smiled and chided, "Silly girl, do you still think you're part of the Bryant family? The Bryants are bankrupt, and Marco is now the young master of the Cruz family. He won't care about you."

The other women gathered around, their faces cold and mocking. "She still wants the boss to spare her? Doesn't she know her place? Despite her shameless clinging, she's now back to being a prostitute."

Marina's heart sank. She had barely grasped the hope of

revenge, only to be thrust back into this hellish existence.

Refusing to give up, she clutched the procuress's hand, pleading, "Please, plead with the boss on my behalf. I can still be useful, I swear..."

Before she could finish, the procuress's smile vanished, replaced by a harsh slap that left a bloody gash on Marina's face, courtesy of her sharp manicured nails.

Pinching Marina's cheek, the procuress narrowed her eyes and spoke icily. "I slapped you to let you face reality. Stop daydreaming."

Marina lay on the ground, tears and blood streaking her face, her body weakening. Yet, a fierce determination burned in her eyes.

But the procuress, accustomed to women who refused to accept their fates, remained cold and unmoved. She lit a cigarette, leaned against the wall, and winked at the other women.

Without hesitation, those who harbored resentment towards Marina for her relationship with the boss stepped forward and delivered harsh blows to her abdomen.

Marina lay on the ground, barely breathing, her body battered.

As the procuress finished her cigarette, she raised Marina's chin with false compassion, exhaling smoke as she feigned gentleness. "Good girl, tell me, are you Marina or Victoria?"

With blood filling her throat, Marina's eyes dimmed.

She knew the ritual all too well; in this hellish place, one had to surrender their identity. With her spirit broken and her past life forgotten, she would have to live forever under this new name, devoid of hope.

With darkness clouding her vision and her voice barely a whisper, she conceded, "I am Victoria."

The procuress's satisfaction was evident as she gracefully left in her high heels, leaving Victoria ignored on the ground. It was only in the dead of night that an elderly woman took her in, offering half a glass of water.

Before her wounds could heal, Victoria was forced to cater to the guests.

In the squalid alley, the men reeked of cigarettes and alcohol, were old and repulsive, or were perverse individuals who took pleasure in tormenting women.

Each humiliation felt like a new death, a gradual erosion of her body and soul. In her moments of despair, Victoria couldn't help but wonder what life would have been like if she and Laura hadn't opposed Marco in the past.

Perhaps she would still be the indulged daughter of the Bryant family, carelessly spending the money Marco had earned.

But it was too late for such thoughts...



Chapter 1049 Everything Was Calm

Zodiac was so vast that its corridors were packed with powerful figures. The influential bowed low, yet could never glimpse the depths of darkness below.

Marina seemed to vanish without a trace after disappearing, and Marco's team repeatedly failed in their search. It was as if she had slipped off the face of the earth.

Upon hearing the news, Loraine and Marco agreed that the group helping Marina infiltrate Zodiac and carry out her revenge had likely rescued her.

Marco promptly instructed his men to investigate this force, but feared their thoroughness would leave little behind.

Though their understanding of this group remained unclear, it was evident this group posed a serious threat.

Loraine worried, not about open enemies, but the elusive danger lurking in the shadows, knowing how exhausting it was to remain constantly vigilant.

Marco embraced her and said, "Don't worry. Whatever happens, we'll face it together."

Loraine felt a touch reassured and nodded, as he shifted the conversation to work to help ease her concerns.

"How is the Universe Group doing? Is the government still opposing it?" he asked.

Loraine replied, "No, the projects are underway and progressing well, but..."

Marco leaned in slightly, curious. Loraine smiled and added, "But I heard a plot of land in Zodiac is up for auction soon. I'd like to acquire it for a project."

The Universe Group's foundation was firmly rooted in Vagow, and her successful projects were completed there too.

Despite her good reputation and paving the way for the Universe Group in Zodiac, she still needed strong results to secure a solid footing and grow further.

Marco gave her a reassuring smile. "Go for it. I trust your skills."

Loraine relaxed into his embrace and sighed.

Even though their time together was sweet, both had their own commitments. Eventually, Loraine bid farewell and left. Marco then summoned Carl, instructing him to keep an eye on any land near Zodiac.

On the other side, outside the airport.

A sleek sports car collected someone from the airport, rolling away slowly. Inside, a cheerful young man with a bright smile exclaimed, "I can't wait to see my lovely cousin again. I've missed her!"

The older, mature man beside him cast a sideways glance and said sternly, "You're an adult now. Why are you still so reckless? I sent you abroad to break your attachment to Kaley. You're a grown man; stop hovering around your cousin all the time."

Edwin grumbled, "If you hadn't stopped me, I would have visited Kaley the moment I got back! And she didn't even tell me she was being bullied. I had to find out myself!"

Francis frowned slightly. As the eldest son, he understood his family better than anyone and had a broad perspective.

He didn't have much affection for his so-called sister or her daughter, but he still played the part for Joseph's sake.

When he heard his son's words, he wondered why Kaley hadn't disclosed the issue until pressed for details. If that was the case, how did Joseph find out and why did he insist that Francis come back to address the matter so aggressively?

Despite these thoughts, Francis maintained a neutral expression and calmly asked, "What happened? Make it clear."

Edwin gave an exaggerated account, embellished by Kaley, portraying the Universe Group and its president as unforgivable villains.

Francis's expression remained unchanged. Though he disliked how Kaley always hung around Edwin, hindering his development, she was still family and shouldn't be mistreated like this.

After considering it for a moment, Francis said, "I know what to do. If you want to avenge Kaley, I'll give you that chance."

Edwin was both surprised and delighted as he listened to Francis continue, "In a few days, there's a bidding opportunity for a piece of land. The Universe Group is on the list. Secure it, and don't disappoint me."

A shrewd and astute businessman, Francis saw this as an opportunity to sharpen his son's skills while securing benefits for the Wilson family. He would help Kaley avenge her grievances, but only if it would also strengthen Edwin.

Edwin eagerly nodded, his face brightening with a confident smile. "I'll definitely win. No one who bullies my cousin will get away with it!"

Chapter 1050 Bidding

The eldest son and grandson of the Wilson family came back home in a low-key manner, so they naturally did not attract the attention of the outside world.

A few days later, the bidding for lands in the old city was held as scheduled. Loraine carefully chose a dress that matched the occasion. Once she arrived at the designated location, she went straight to the seat for the Universe Group elegantly.

As she passed by people, the attention of all people present was drawn to her.

Everyone looked at her in amazement, and some of them even lowered their heads and whispered to each other.

"Is she the president of the Universe Group?"

"Why is the president so young? She is also very beautiful. Is she a mere eye candy?"

"I think she is just a puppet. There must be another president working behind her!"

Their voices were not low enough to make those words secret. Some of them were deliberately saying them out loud so that Loraine could hear them well.

Despite their scheming attempt, the expression on Loraine's face didn't change. She sat down in her seat calmly as if she hadn't heard anything.

In fact, she couldn't care less about such trivial discussion from others, let alone arguing with them.

The seat for the Universe Group was placed in the very front. Since the auction hadn't begun yet, she lowered her head to read the bid, ignoring others.

While everyone was still stealing glances at her and whispering from time to time, a young and handsome man appeared at the door. His appearance shocked majority of the people present, and some of them even wanted to greet him and talk with him.

The young man was none other than Edwin. He found the seat for the Universe Group and walked straight over, ignoring others.

In the past few days, he had been learning a lot about his so-called "enemy" from Kaley, and now he was going to closely see the one who dared to bully his beloved cousin!

He stopped right at the edge of the seat for the Universe Group. As he stood still, Loraine just happened to raise her head and looked into his eyes. As soon as Edwin saw her face, his body went stiff and his mouth was wide open.

Loraine just raised her head subconsciously because she felt the presence of someone coming in her direction. She looked at the person and saw that it was someone she didn't know, so she lowered her head again without giving a single thought.

Meanwhile, Edwin was still in a daze, looking at her quietly. Only after a while, he closed his opened mouth and felt regretful for his stunned reaction.

It was not the first time that he had seen a beautiful woman. Even if he had never seen such a beauty like her, he shouldn't have been so stunned. What a shame!

However, it was not only the beauty of Loraine that amazed him. Loraine gave him an inexplicable vibe of familiarity at the same time, which made him want to get close to her.

Realizing his feelings, he shook his head immediately and took the idea out of his mind. He despised himself from the bottom of his heart. How could he be so softhearted just because she was beautiful? Kaley was bullied by this woman!

Maybe she was a cruel woman!

After making full mental preparation, Edwin quickly calmed down and showcased his manners, acting like a typical gentleman at social activities. He politely walked forward, sat down beside Loraine, and greeted her with a smile. "Hello, beautiful lady."

Loraine raised her head and replied politely, "Hello."

Edwin blinked with a fascinating smile. "My friends call me Jesse. Can I have your name?"

If it were somewhere else, Loraine would definitely leave her seat without looking back, especially when she met such a man who accosted her.

But at that moment, the bidding was about to start, so she couldn't leave. She also couldn't afford to offend someone at the auction. So, she had no choice but to be polite and perfunctory.

She answered every question of Edwin without saying more than one word.

Normal people should be able to sense that she didn't want to talk and then be sensible to shut up, but Edwin did not give up and continued to talk.

Even though the man seemed like a playboy, Loraine couldn't help but realize that his questions were all trying to get some information from her.

Her expression became colder, and she ignored his obvious

nonsense. However, Edwin had got some information that he wanted to know. Noticing her resistance, he raised his eyebrows and left.

Seeing him leave, Loraine looked at him thoughtfully. Without thinking too much, she lowered her head and drew a few key points on the bidding document.

Soon, the auction began. Loraine looked calm and was very confident in her strategies. From her analysis, the Universe Group would undoubtedly be the winner, and she had confidence in her ability.

Soon, the first piece of land she wanted was auctioned. Loraine calmly offered the price. At the beginning, there were still people following the bidding, but as she steadily increased the price, the voices of bidding became less.

However, there was someone who always followed her price, as if they were deliberately going against her. Even the amount offered was only 10% higher than her offer.

This kind of thing was not rare at the auction. Loraine pressed her lips. She was not sure whether it was just a coincidence or they were the opponent of the Universe Group. When the price of the land exceeded her budget, she gave up calmly.

However, adding to her annoyance, the same situation happened to the next few pieces of land as well, which made Loraine realize that someone was indeed targeting her.

Loraine was a little unhappy, but she still kept her composure and looked at the auction block.

Eventually, there was only one piece of land left. This time, she thought she would most definitely get it.

At the beginning of the bidding, she called out the base price of her budget. Such a bold bidding made the crowd burst into an

uproar.

However, the voice that had been following her price from the beginning to the end sounded lazily among the crowd. The person offered a price 10% higher than hers.

With an expressionless face, Loraine followed the voice and saw a handsome face who was grinning at her.

It was the annoying man who called himself Jesse!

