

## Chapter 948 Restricting Freedom

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Marco's mother was a sensitive topic in the family, hardly ever mentioned.

It was the first time Marco and his father had discussed her since Marco arrived in Zodiac.

At first, Melvin was angry, but he quickly composed himself.

He hoped mentioning Marco's mother would unsettle him, make him ask about what happened that year. But instead, Marco sneered and looked at him coldly.

"Do you really care about getting justice for my mother?"

If he did, why did he only bring her up when threatening Marco?

Marco hadn't come to the Cruz family to be pushed around.

But whatever had happened that year was so bad that even Melvin struggled to talk about it, and Marco hadn't found out much.

If Melvin thought he could control Marco with this, he was mistaken!

Melvin's face turned cold at Marco's words, a flicker of anger crossing his eyes. Then he snorted, "You know nothing!"

Marco sneered, "So I've misjudged you? You're actually deeply in love with her and determined to avenge her?"

This sarcasm seemed to strike a nerve with Melvin. He

slammed his hand on the table in anger, pointing at Marco as he shouted, "How dare you! Do you even realize who you're speaking to?"

Marco appeared to intentionally provoke Melvin, but he actually knew what to do. He smiled and carefully chose his words. With a calm tone, he said, "Dad, I learned from you. You seek vengeance for your beloved, so why can't I seek justice for mine?"

Melvin fell silent upon hearing this. It was clear that his son was more cunning than he had anticipated. Marco always managed to push his buttons and control the situation effortlessly.

However, Melvin refuses to be manipulated by Marco. Without any expression, he said, "You? Do you still see yourself as the all-powerful CEO of the Bryant Group back in Vagow? Zodiac is not Vagow! Don't forget, you're nothing now without the Cruz family! What means do you have to seek justice for your beloved?"

With a hint of disgust, Melvin added, "And don't you dare compare your shameless lover to your mother! Your mother comes from noble blood. You shouldn't insult her like that!"

Marco's expression darkened. He was about to argue back when Melvin slammed the door shut, leaving Marco no chance to speak.

In the past two days, the rumors had spread widely. Due to his connection with the Wilson family, Melvin was convinced that Loraine was behind the rumors. It was ridiculous.

Believing that his brilliant son had been influenced by a shallow woman and refused to change, Melvin felt even more repulsed by her lack of manners.

Watching Melvin leave, Marco snorted and dismissed the matter from his mind. He refocused on the investigation he

had assigned to his subordinate.

Soon, his subordinate provided him with the investigation results.

"Mr. Bryant, Clifford indeed revealed your whereabouts to Kaley. Moreover, his recent activities are suspicious. I'm afraid he might be up to something big."

Frowning slightly, Marco realized that Clifford must be unhappy with the unimportant task Melvin had given him last time. After a moment of thought, he decided to continue the investigation. But he found he couldn't send any messages!

Was this Melvin's doing? Isolating him from the outside world?

Marco snorted in frustration and pushed the door open, intending to leave. But when he opened the door, he found the old butler standing there, accompanied by two rows of bodyguards.

The old butler greeted him respectfully. "Mr. Bryant, Mr. Cruz has instructed me that you are not to leave. During this time, please stay at home and reflect. I believe that without outside interference, you will mature quickly."

Marco gripped his useless phone tightly and asked coldly, "Can you really stop me from leaving?"

He attempted to step out, but the old butler simply smiled kindly and stepped aside, closing his eyes.

The two lines of bodyguards moved forward together, their heads almost touching, creating an overwhelming sight. The living room was packed with people.

Seeing the overwhelming sight, Marco's expression darkened. No wonder Melvin led the Cruz family; he was truly ruthless!

With a cold glance at the butler, Marco whispered, "Let Melvin know I'll make him 'satisfied!'"

Meanwhile, Loraine anxiously awaited news from Marco.

The day before, Marco had informed her that he had caught the suspect and intended to interrogate him in person. He wanted to uncover the truth, giving Loraine a chance to seek revenge.

Trusting Marco, Loraine had been eagerly anticipating an update.

However, as the agreed time came and went, Marco had yet to contact her.

Furthermore, even under normal circumstances, Marco would have sent her a message by now.

Frowning, Loraine couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. After hesitating for a moment, she dialed Marco's number, only to hear the line was busy.



## Chapter 949 The Questioning From Vincent

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Loraine sat by the window of the café. The room was bright, but her eyes still held a shadow of unease.

Stirring her coffee absentmindedly, she glanced at her phone screen, debating whether to call again.

What was going on? Marco never ignored her, no matter how busy he was.

Just as Loraine was about to redial Marco's number, she noticed a shadow looming over her.

Looking up, she saw Vincent's troubled expression. Suppressing his frustration, he asked gently, "Loraine, have I upset you? How could you treat me like that? I even reached out to my teacher for you!"

Loraine frowned, feeling even more confused by Vincent. She was already annoyed because she couldn't reach Marco, and now Vincent was questioning her out of the blue. Her expression darkened suddenly as she looked back at him coldly.

"Mr. Wilson, I don't understand what you're talking about, but I don't have time right now. Let's discuss it another day."

Vincent's expression twisted with pain. Perhaps he had been lying to himself, thinking Loraine was just upset that day on the set. But now, faced with her coldness, he had to accept the truth.

Loraine didn't consider him a friend at all!

At the same time, he thought Loraine's resistance was out of guilt.

Vincent sneered at himself bitterly, "Why do you have to do this? Loraine, don't you realize that I've always seen you as part of the younger generation, with no other intentions?"

While Loraine was still confused, Vincent went on, "I don't have those kinds of feelings for you. You're the same age as my niece! I understand you want to make a bigger impact and expose the mastermind, but do you think it's fair to use me like this?"

Loraine had been waiting for news about Marco since she left the company earlier. She hadn't had time to check the internet at all. Now, she was confused and wanted to ask Vincent what he meant. But Vincent lifted his head and looked at her, his eyes filled with sadness.

"How could you spread rumors about our relationship? Do you think you deserve Marco, who came to save you that day?"

Loraine was stunned for a moment and finally asked, "What nonsense are you talking about? Marco and I love each other very much. Why would I spread rumors about us? I don't have feelings for you."

Vincent's mouth twitched, disbelief written all over his face. "If it wasn't you, then who spread those rumors?"

Loraine understood what had happened. She glanced at her phone and opened the social app she hadn't used in a while. With a quick swipe, she found herself bombarded with scandals.

In her private messages, many sympathized with her and condemned Vincent as despicable. Fans of both her and Marco pitifully said, "Isn't Marco better? Vincent is ten years older than him."

Loraine touched her forehead, finally piecing everything together. She didn't expect Vincent to fall for such an obvious trick.

Remembering the day Vincent had blindly defended his niece without investigating, Loraine's expression turned cold. She looked up at Vincent, a glimmer of hope in her eyes.

"Have you checked if it's me who spread these rumors?"

Deep down, she valued Vincent. After all, she had never felt that kind of closeness with anyone else.

In her mind, Vincent was just a playful friend who had impulsively sought her help at the airport. She never saw Vincent as a superstar.

She didn't have many friends, and she didn't want to lose him. But if Vincent couldn't tell right from wrong, she would have to sadly bid farewell to their friendship.

Staring at her intently, Vincent pursed his lips and scoffed, "Is an investigation really necessary? Loraine, stop pretending. Can't I see through your act?"

Vincent's tone turned sarcastic. "I'm such a fool. I should have realized from the start that you approached me through my mentor for a reason. Wasn't it you who arranged for someone to take that photo in the restaurant? You even took a picture with me. You're so devious!"

Loraine was shocked. Although the photo causing such a fuss was taken secretly, she couldn't understand why Vincent was blaming her. It turned out he thought she had arranged it.

She felt a mix of emotions, but disappointment overshadowed everything.

Vincent went on, "That day, Marco promised to keep the news



from spreading, but it still leaked. Who would dare defy the Cruz family? Except you!"

Loraine had composed herself. The disappointment in her eyes for Vincent slowly turned into numbness and boredom.

It seemed she had made a mistake this time.

She sneered, "Maybe my acting isn't perfect, and I might need a lesson. But Mr. Wilson, you also need a lesson in how to treat people!"





## Chapter 950 I'm Replacing Her

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Vincent's expression darkened suddenly, and a mix of anger and shame washed over him.

After all, he was the young Wilson heir and an international superstar. Wasn't it common courtesy to treat him with respect?

Yet, Loraine had not only failed to respect him but had also criticized his behavior outright!

Despite his usually friendly demeanor, arrogance lurked beneath. He stared at Loraine with a cold, blank expression and said, "Loraine, I never thought you would be like this."

Loraine raised her eyebrows, amused. What did he think she was like? She hadn't pretended to be anyone else around Vincent. Just because he had a certain image of her in his mind, did that mean she had to conform to it?

She started to regret her decision to act in the play. Had she approached this as a businesswoman, she might have avoided this mess.

As she mulled over her regret, Vincent issued a threat. "Loraine, if you want to continue in this play, you owe me an apology!"

The irony was that Loraine was helping Vincent with the play.

She nearly laughed out loud, finding it absurd that Vincent was so worked up he was spouting nonsense.

She was persistent. Having promised to help him, she approached filming with dedication, though she wasn't about to be pushed around.

With a slight smile, Loraine said, "Mr. Wilson, are you joking? Filming isn't how I make my living. As for my role, I've shot all the scenes except the final one. It looks like we won't be shooting that last scene either. That's fine. I don't need to."

Vincent's expression stiffened. He had personally invited Loraine, yet he wasn't ready to back down. With a stern look, he replied bitterly, "If that's your decision, don't count on me to put you in touch with my teacher!"

Loraine's smile vanished. She gazed at Vincent, her eyes filled with disappointment, and said, "I think if your teacher knew about this, he'd regret ever having you as a student."

Realizing further discussion was pointless, she stood and said casually, "I'll find a way to reach Maia Watts myself. Thanks for your help earlier, though. I need to go now."

A breeze carrying the scent of perfume brushed Vincent's face as Loraine walked away calmly, neither overly humble nor aggressive.

Vincent, however, was too upset to appreciate her composure. His face flushed with rage. He hadn't expected Loraine to stand her ground so firmly and even challenge him.

Who did she get her fiery spirit from? He was furious.

He slammed his hand on the table, grabbed his phone, and dialed his assistant Malcolm. "Contact Azriel right away and tell him to delete all the scenes featuring Loraine! I'm replacing her," he demanded, his voice thick with anger.

Malcolm, well aware of Vincent's volatile temper and impulsive nature, hesitated. "Vincent, you just replaced an actress. Why



another change so soon? You mentioned Miss Torres was a perfect fit, and she's been doing well, hasn't she?"

Vincent shot back, his anger unabated. "I was mistaken! Can you believe she tried to use me for publicity? I've never stood for that. And she could nearly be my daughter, given the age gap! How disgraceful! No matter how talented she is, I refuse to work with her. Character trumps talent every time!"

Malcolm reluctantly agreed. He offered a few comforting words to Vincent and then said thoughtfully, "But it seems like what Miss Torres did wasn't meant to curry favor with you. Vincent, could you be mistaken?"

Vincent was taken aback, replaying the events that occurred after he met Loraine.

Aside from the rumors, Loraine hadn't stepped out of line. She was always dignified and restrained. Spreading rumors wasn't her style.

Vincent paused, remembering the circumstances in which they were threatened by Marco of the Cruz family. Only he and Loraine had dared to leak the news.

He was sure he hadn't expose it. So, who else but Loraine could it be?

Vincent found it hard to accept this idea. Reflecting on their interactions, he felt Loraine might have been trying to get his attention initially.

When she realized her efforts were futile, she stopped playing games and started using other tactics.

Despite trying to convince himself of this theory to feel better, Vincent's thoughts only grew clearer. The disappointment and disdain in Loraine's eyes haunted him.



His hands shook and his vision blurred as discomfort washed over him.

After ending the call with Malcolm, Vincent sat in silence for a moment before picking up the phone again. His voice was raspy as he instructed, "Find out who posted the news online."



## Chapter 951 Role Replacement

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Loraine didn't take her frustration with Vincent to heart. It was unfortunate to lose a friend, but Vincent had overstepped her boundaries with his words and actions.

What troubled her was that Marco hadn't replied for a long time. This was unprecedented in their relationship!

Despite trying to stay positive, Loraine couldn't shake off her anxiety.

After pondering for a bit, she texted her team, requesting that they investigate if anything had occurred with the Cruz family.

Just then, her phone rang. Her heart leaped, hoping it was Marco. She quickly opened her messaging application.

However, her face fell, and she sighed in disappointment as she saw the sender of the message.

The message was from Aziel. After a string of flattering words, he gently mentioned that there might be a role replacement.

Reading the message, Loraine instantly remembered what Vincent had said the day before. She couldn't help but smirk, thinking it was immature.

She casually replied to Aziel, but as she left the chat, she realized she couldn't accept the blame. She wouldn't tolerate being wrongfully accused!

She then revisited the news online, meticulously analyzing and

organizing the information.

The scandal was indeed sly, but given that she and Vincent were involved, it naturally attracted more attention.

However, Vincent had naively accepted the false narrative!

Glancing at the sneaky photo in the news, Loraine scoffed and hurriedly searched through her photo album to find the picture she took with Jennie last time. She wanted to clear things up publicly.

"Please note that I had dinner with my friend and Vincent. While the people who spread the rumors might not excel at photography, they specialize in twisting the truth. With such malicious intent, they ought to learn proper manners first."

The group photo she uploaded was much clearer. It clearly showed that she was seated next to Jennie, maintaining a distance from Vincent that was appropriate for just friends.

A person who knew Jennie immediately commented, "That's Fowler Group's daughter. She's probably a fan of Vincent, right? Isn't this merely a fan meeting her idol? The person who spread the rumors has stooped too low. There were three people at the table, but they only focused on Loraine and Vincent to stir up scandal!"

Loraine quickly followed up with another post, saying, "I have no plans to pursue a career in acting, and I regard Mr. Cohen as nothing more than an excellent actor. Thank you for your attention, but these groundless rumors shouldn't monopolize public interest. I will address them promptly, so please don't worry."

By labeling the rumors as "groundless," she reinforced the resolve of her supporters, who had doubted the scandal from the start. Inspired, they began to defend her against detractors who had accused Loraine of seeking publicity.

"Do anti-fans see how mistaken they are? They even suggest that Loraine's silence indicates guilt. This is Loraine's typical approach. If others weren't bothering her, she wouldn't even pay attention to this stuff!"

Lorraine's supporters felt validated. As they fought back, they also spread the word about Loraine to others, saying, "We're not making this up! Loraine is a successful businesswoman, praised by the government. She hasn't even used this as a marketing opportunity. Would she stoop to seeking attention by playing the victim and stirring up gossip?"

The mood online was shifting gradually. Even though Vincent remained silent, some continued to feed on the rumors, yet many were now revisiting Loraine's past deeds.

While the Internet buzzed with activity, the vibe within the play production team felt a bit downcast and gloomy.

With Vincent's well-established acting skills and his influential family background, the director had little choice but to comply when Vincent pushed for a cast change. After scrambling to bring in Loraine as a last-minute save, they now faced the challenge of finding another replacement quickly.

After a lengthy pause, Vincent proposed. "Kaley has experience in school musicals. Maybe we should give her a chance."

Aziel, at this point, was less concerned with casting perfection and more with completing the shoot.

However, when Kaley joined the team and rehearsed a few scenes, Aziel's disappointment was palpable.

After seeing Loraine's performance, he became more critical. As a newcomer, Kaley couldn't match Loraine in either expression or demeanor, and she didn't meet Aziel's expectations.

Aziel had his reservations but kept quiet, wary of the Wilson family's influence. Privately, he still believed Loraine was the better choice for the role.

Vincent, too, was observing Kaley's efforts, feeling conflicted.

In terms of acting, his niece was definitely not as good as Loraine.

Yet, whenever he thought of Loraine, his expression would chill. No matter her talent, he believed her poor behavior negated any merit.

Just as he was trying to divert his thoughts from Loraine, Malcolm approached with a phone, displaying Loraine's statement of clarification.

After reading it, Vincent was shocked, and then his face flushed red.





## Chapter 952 Vincent's Inability To See The Truth

Lorraine's explanation made sense, especially when she mentioned "learning proper manners." It reminded Vincent of similar advice she had once given him.

He figured she might have a point, and she didn't really have to resort to tricks for attention.

Yet his pride prevented him from acknowledging his mistake.

Instead, he placed all the blame on Lorraine. With a straight face, he stubbornly asked, "What tricks is she playing? Does she think I'll fall for that?"

Malcolm's mouth twitched, baffled by Vincent's inability to see the truth despite their many public relations disasters. He couldn't stand it any longer.

"Vincent, I actually agree that Lorraine is innocent. She doesn't need to do this for attention," Malcolm stated.

Vincent's lips quivered with frustration, feeling misunderstood. "Do I look like someone who accuses others without cause? I have my reasons!"

He then shared his thoughts with Malcolm and added coldly, "At that time, she was the only one brave enough to leak this information!"

Malcolm hesitated, then looked towards Kaley, who was filming nearby. He softly said, "Vincent, you know the Wilson family isn't intimidated by the Cruz family. There was another Wilson

family member there, too."

Vincent's gaze followed Malcolm's to Kaley, catching her sweet smile.

"What are you implying?" Vincent asked, clearly unhappy.

Malcolm took a deep breath, knowing Vincent's temperament well. "Have you considered that someone who despises Miss Torres did this to create a rift between you two, despite the Cruz family's threats?"

"Kaley wouldn't do such a thing," Vincent responded, his brow furrowed.

He had known Kaley since she was young and trusted her more than Loraine, whom he hardly knew.

With this in mind, Vincent massaged his forehead and declared firmly, "Even if someone is out to hurt Loraine, I'm sure it's not Kaley. And wasn't she accusing unfairly of the Wilson family without evidence? Our Wilson family doesn't abuse our power."

Malcolm smiled awkwardly and murmured, "But didn't you adjust Miss Torres's role? You were the one who urged her to accept it initially."

Malcolm hinted that if Vincent hadn't used the Wilson family's power, the director wouldn't have hushed up about it.

Vincent scowled, looking troubled, but remained silent. His expression was complex as if a realization had just dawned on him.

Malcolm teased, "Haven't you realized that after Kaley came to you, you believed Miss Torres was the culprit? You didn't seek the truth either. Miss Torres really is innocent, isn't she?"

Hearing that, Vincent was momentarily taken aback. He

glanced at Kaley again. This time, she didn't immediately catch his gaze. He observed a fleeting expression of impatience and disgust on her face as she interacted with a supporting actor, which he managed to catch.

Suddenly, it hit him that when Kaley showed up that day, she steered him into thinking it was Loraine who did it.

Vincent hadn't been around much in recent years, and his memory of Kaley was of a carefree, innocent young girl. Now, he suddenly felt as if he didn't know her at all.

At that moment, his phone vibrated. Vincent looked down to see a response from the investigator he had tasked with looking into the trending issue.

Vincent's face grew stern after reading the message. He stood up and made his way towards the director.

Meanwhile, Kaley was getting ready to perform a singing scene on stage.

A hint of displeasure flickered in her eyes because, during filming, she also sensed that other crew members viewed her with less respect, thinking she wasn't as good as Loraine!

Kaley was seething internally, cursing their lack of discernment. She thought Loraine had merely been fortunate to leverage her position as a female CEO. How could they compare her to Loraine?

She was resolute in her ambition to surpass Loraine, and this singing scene was her opportunity.

She figured, despite Loraine being the Shepherd's lead singer, she wasn't really a professional. But Kaley, with her professional training, was bound to impress them!

A look of pride washed over Kaley's face under the spotlight.

She closed her eyes, losing herself in the performance.

Just as she was hitting the high point of her song, the director abruptly shouted, "Cut!"

Kaley's expression turned to one of irritation. She frowned at the director, about to inquire about the interruption, when he announced, "Miss Wilson, thank you for your efforts. You won't need to shoot the next scenes. We're going to stick with the original version."