

Chapter 963 Cooling-off Period

Marco didn't stop Loraine; he simply stood there watching the car drive away, not turning back to the Solar Company until the car was out of sight.

At that moment, with his eyes glassy, he resembled a ghost wandering aimlessly.

When he got back to his office, he didn't seem to notice Carl standing there, tense and uneasy. Marco sat down, his face void of emotion, and began tapping his slender fingertips on the table, each tap sounding ominous.

Carl, overwhelmed, was on the verge of collapsing as tears welled up. With a shaky voice, he said, "Mr. Bryant..."

Marco looked up, his eyes icy, but his voice surprisingly calm and oddly gentle.

"Carl, what happened with the arrangements? Why did she arrive early?"

Carl, tears streaming down his face, replied sorrowfully, "Boss, let me explain... I was told she'd be here in the afternoon. I admit, I should've handled it personally..."

Marco cut him off with a frown and a sigh. "I assumed I didn't need to message Loraine since we were supposed to meet this afternoon. That was a mistake."

It was too late for regrets now.

In their relationship, Loraine's biggest gripe was that he lied to her. She was probably so furious today that she ended things.

Suddenly, Marco remembered the pained look on her face he had glimpsed earlier.

What had happened to Loraine in the past two days he was not by her side?

Marco hesitated. Loraine was furious, and discovering that he had looked into her affairs might only make things worse.

Marco faced a tough choice. He turned to Carl and said, "I'm giving you a chance to figure out what's going on. If you got the time wrong, then you're out!"

He trusted Carl not to deceive him, and Carl knew better than to try. Now that Carl had confirmed Loraine should have arrived in the afternoon, it was clear he wasn't at fault.

Carl nodded and left the office to start his investigation.

It was supposed to be a simple task. He had asked the assistant to purchase a cell phone and send a message to Loraine. Carl went straight to the assistant to get some answers.

Despite his questions, the assistant kept insisting he had just mixed up the times.

Carl frowned, puzzled by the disappearance of the reply message.

He paused, reflecting on the situation. He decided not to stir up trouble that could disrupt the company's harmony. When he returned, he shared the original response with Marco and promised to smooth things over. "I'll talk to Miss Torres. She's reasonable. She won't hold this against you!"

Marco was taken aback, realizing their breakup had been triggered by such a trivial misunderstanding. After a lengthy silence, he murmured, "Let it be. If she needs some space, I'll respect that. If I confront her now, it might just upset her more."

This mess, frankly, was due to Melvin's impulsive decision that had thrown off Marco's plans.

In Zodiac, without power, words meant little, even as Melvin's only son.

Now, his immediate goal was to establish a strong position independent of external pressures.

Thinking of Loraine's injury, a determined look crossed his face. "Find some capable fighters. Have them guard Loraine discreetly!"

Carl nodded and hurried off.

Marco sat in silence before pulling out his phone to text Loraine, only to find that his messages were blocked.

A wry smile appeared on his face. His new number had been blacklisted shortly after Loraine saved it.

Marco sighed as he glanced at the cooperation plan beside him, but his eyes soon sparkled with renewed energy.

He was excited about personally overseeing the project with Universe Group. It meant he could see Loraine again!

When Loraine returned to Universe Group, she dove into her work, trying to distract herself from thoughts of Marco.

One day, while immersed in a task, an email from Solar Company appeared on her screen.

At the mention of "Solar Company," Loraine's eyes flickered.

Despite her reluctance to be reminded of Marco, she wouldn't let personal feelings interfere with her work. After a moment's hesitation, she opened the email.

As she read, Loraine noticed the email was exceptionally well-written.

She admired Marco's leadership, acknowledging that his team was highly professional.

However, her smile faded, and she quickly composed herself, reading on with an impassive expression.

She scrolled down to the end of the email and noticed an attachment. Assuming it was just work-related, she downloaded it nonchalantly. To her surprise, it was a voice message which started playing unexpectedly.

Marco's deep, appealing voice filled the room. "I was wrong. Don't be angry, okay?"

Chapter 964 Dining With Cayson

Loraine was taken aback for a moment. The voice message had already ended, but Marco's voice seemed to still echo in her ears.

She stared at the computer screen, her expression showing a mix of feelings.

She could easily picture Marco's face as he spoke those words. Memories of him at the Bryant Group surfaced, how he used to meet her under the guise of work.

A slight sweetness started to rise in her heart, but was quickly replaced by a wave of bitterness.

She knew Marco was trying to make amends and win her favor, but she found it hard to forgive him just like that.

Yet, she ended up saving the voice message.

Suddenly, she released the mouse as if it were hot, her face displaying a whirlwind of emotions. Her mood was even more complicated.

Luckily, she was alone in the office; nobody could see the turmoil on her face or sense her mood.

Loraine pressed her lips together, her face settling back into its usual detached coolness. Even though Marco couldn't see her, she sat up straight and responded firmly, "Please, no more additions to the work progress report emails!"

After sending the email, Loraine relaxed a bit. She couldn't resist listening to the saved voice message again.

Marco's familiar voice echoed through the room, a voice she'd often heard at nights. His tone varied, sometimes flirtatious, sometimes soothing as he helped her sort out her problems.

Remembering those times, Loraine felt a softness in her heart and her expression softened. But spotting the words "Solar Company" on her screen snapped her back to reality, reminding her of Marco's dishonesty.

Her previous willingness to forgive had only led to more deceit. This time, she was determined not to be swayed by emotions.

Closing her eyes, Loraine pushed thoughts of Marco aside. When she opened them, her resolve was clear, and she dove back into her work.

Just then, there was a knock on her office door. Looking up, she saw Cayson enter.

Holding a cup of honey water, he offered it to her with a caring look and said gently, "Lorrie, you've been at it for hours. It's not good for your health to work so much. Why don't we go out for a walk and grab something to eat?"

Before Loraine could decline, Cayson hurriedly continued, "Your grandfather, when I joined Zodiac, made me promise to look after you well. If you're rundown, he'll have my head next time I see him. You don't want me to report back that you're skipping meals and losing sleep, do you?"

Hearing Cayson mention her grandfather, Loraine couldn't help but smile. "You're making it sound like a bigger deal than it is," she said.

Cayson gave her a warm smile, resisting the urge to glance at the papers scattered across the table. Instead, he looked at her

with kindness. "So, what would you like to eat?"

Loraine knew she couldn't skip this meal, so she didn't try to refuse. She got up, stretched, and said with a smile, "I'll leave that up to you."

Cayson, who traveled often for work, was very familiar with Zodiac and its culinary scene, perhaps even more so than Loraine. He took her to a restaurant known for its unique flair.

After they were seated, Cayson handed her the menu with a smile. "Choose whatever you'd like. The food here is fantastic."

But Loraine could only muster a weak smile; she wasn't really in the mood to eat. "I'm fine with anything," she said softly.

Cayson noticed her disinterest but didn't comment. Instead, he simply smiled and ordered several dishes he knew she liked.

Just then, someone asked in surprise, "Loraine, why are you here?"

Loraine turned around and saw it was Vincent. She was momentarily lost for words. Hadn't she realized before how he was always around?

Vincent, seemingly unaware of any irritation, walked up and asked in astonishment, "Why are you eating with another man behind Marco's back? What about him?"

Loraine's face fell. She knew she was right in her previous advice to Vincent. He really needed to learn how to speak more tactfully!

Cayson also seemed quite annoyed. However, Vincent, not picking up on their disapproval, went on, "After I last saw you, I visited the Cruz family to look for Marco but didn't find him. I actually came to apologize for what happened earlier..."

Loraine listened to him, her patience wearing thin. She let her eyes wander around the restaurant, looking for something to divert her attention. That was when she noticed something rather amusing.

In the corner, someone sat hiding behind a newspaper, like a detective in TV shows who was following someone.

When she looked his way, the man behind the newspaper seemed nervous and gripped it tighter.

Chapter 965 Follow Loraine In Secret

Loraine ignored the person in the corner. Turning around, she noticed Vincent was still speaking. She cut him off abruptly and said coldly, "Mr. Wilson, this is my personal matter."

Vincent paused, his beautiful eyes showing a touch of grievance. Knowing he had overstepped earlier, he held back from arguing.

When Loraine heard Marco's name, she felt a surge of resentment. She scoffed, "Besides, I've broken up with Marco. Why can't I have dinner with my friend?"

The restaurant was nearly empty and very quiet, making every conversation audible throughout the space.

At the mention of the breakup, the man in the corner accidentally tore his newspaper. The sound caught Loraine's attention, and she glanced his way again.

The man quickly adjusted the newspaper to cover his face, but behind it was Marco, looking somber.

He had people watching over Loraine and kept tabs on her whereabouts. Learning that she planned to dine with Cayson had unsettled him.

In a rushed disguise, he had come to steal glances at Loraine, hoping it might soothe his longing. But her dismissive words about their breakup stung him. He looked down, his face showing a mix of disappointment and sadness.

Unsure if her words were spoken in anger or sincerity, hearing them firsthand felt like a knife twisting in his heart.

Observing the man clumsily hiding behind the newspaper, Loraine pondered for a moment, then sneered and turned away.

Vincent was shocked by the news of their breakup. He thought Loraine hadn't grasped the gravity of the situation and quickly said, "Are those your words of anger because you couldn't reach Marco? It wasn't his fault. He's no longer with the Cruz family, and he's missing! Even the Cruz family is searching for him!"

Approaching his forties, Vincent could sometimes be incredibly naive. Overlooking his previous irritation with Marco when Kaley had pursued him, he frowned and expressed his concern. "You know, something serious must have happened for even the Cruz family to be unable to find him. Here you are, not worrying at all, dining with another man. It's really..."

Loraine looked down and couldn't suppress a laugh.

"What's so funny?" Vincent asked, puzzled.

Loraine smiled and replied calmly, "I was really worried when I couldn't contact him for two days. But now I see that worrying is pointless, as he might not even value it."

She went on slowly, her tone slightly icy, "And how do you know his disappearance means he's in danger? What if he's turned into a billionaire instead?"

Vincent scratched his head and asked bluntly, "What do you mean? Have you seen him?"

Besides, Marco hadn't yet gained access to the Cruz family's property. How was he supposed to have become a billionaire?

Loraine, not answering directly, replied sarcastically, "Honestly, a powerful man like him hardly needs my concern."

Vincent couldn't grasp what was going on, sensing only the bitterness in Loraine's tone that suggested she was upset.

Clueless about the situation, he touched the tip of his nose in frustration, thinking it best to make a quick exit to avoid further trouble.

Though Vincent was confused, Marco in the corner understood all too well.

He lowered his head, burdened with guilt and regret, realizing Loraine's disappointment was directed at him.

He was at a loss for words. He hadn't informed Loraine directly about his safety after escaping from the Cruz family. It had been Carl who told her.

And now, another misunderstanding had arisen. It wasn't unjustified for Loraine to hold him responsible.

Overhearing Loraine speaking again, Marco tuned in just in time to hear her say to Vincent, "I didn't call for your help even when I had a car accident. And here I am, just trying to enjoy dinner with a friend. Why are you even here? As the best actor around, shouldn't you find something better to do?"

At the mention of the car accident, Marco felt a jolt.

He realized he had been wrong not to acknowledge earlier. Loraine had indeed been hurt, and there had been an accident!

When did Loraine have a car accident? Why didn't he know about it?

Marco was stunned and speechless, overwhelmed by guilt. It seemed that just before Loraine reached out to him, she had been in a car accident.

This realization helped him understand why she seemed so

fragile and sensitive.

At a critical moment, when she was facing a life-or-death situation, Marco, her boyfriend, hadn't been there for her. He had lost contact with her for too long and, worse, had been caught deceiving her.

How could Loraine, already physically and mentally drained, cope with such a betrayal?

Moreover, Loraine had mentioned meeting Vincent that day.

Marco knew her well. She was willful and endearing with her loved ones but displayed strength and stubbornness to others.

Having recently dealt with an incident on set, she wouldn't have turned to Vincent for help.

So, she faced the aftermath of the car accident alone, arranging her own pickup?

Marco's heart was heavy with remorse. He felt he deserved the breakup but hoped to atone for his mistakes.



Chapter 966 Cayson's Confession

Marco's mood shifts were unnoticed in the corner as Vincent found himself at a loss for words after Loraine's blunt comments.

Vincent had always led a charmed life, with a career that seemed destined for success. His intense focus on acting had somewhat detached him from the nuances of everyday reality.

After a moment of awkward silence, he stammered, "I was just trying to show some concern out of kindness..."

At that moment, Cayson interjected with a smile, "Excuse me, who are you? I'm Cayson Benton, Lorrie's friend. We grew up together."

His smile was polite, yet it masked deeper motives. By stressing their shared history, he subtly asserted his closeness to Loraine and preemptively addressed any of her potential objections by simply labeling himself as a friend.

Loraine frowned but chose not to contradict him.

Vincent turned to assess Cayson, quickly realizing that beneath the man's gentle demeanor was a shrewd and calculating mind.

He narrowed his eyes, returned the smile, and introduced himself. "I'm Vincent Cohen, an actor. Loraine and I are also good friends."

Loraine was inwardly exasperated, thinking Vincent quite brazen.

The two men exchanged looks, and then Cayson continued in his smooth tone, "Ah, Mr. Cohen, the celebrated actor. I've known Lorrie since childhood. I understand her character well—she isn't one to engage frivolously with strangers. Moreover, we are merely out for dinner. Do you take issue with that?"

His remarks subtly alluded to recent scandalous headlines, causing Vincent's expression to darken.

Rising gracefully, Cayson added with a polite yet dismissive smile, "Although Lorrie has been seen in the media, she has no ambitions in the entertainment industry. And I gather that you aren't fond of undue publicity. Thus, I won't be inviting you to join us for dinner."

The implication was clear—he was being asked to leave. How could Vincent, unaccustomed to such dismissal, tolerate this?

Anger and humiliation surged within him. As Vincent glanced at Loraine, her indifferent expression suggested she did not want him around. His frustration grew, and with a cold snort, he turned and walked away.

He had always considered himself a friend to Loraine, intervening out of concern. But since his concern seemed unwelcome, he decided not to subject himself to further distress.

It was unfortunate for Marco, a decent and upright man, to be entangled with such an unappreciative partner.

Unbeknownst to Loraine, Vincent muttered his grievances as he departed. Once he was gone, Loraine's energy drained away, and she gazed vacantly into the void.

She hadn't anticipated encountering discussions about Marco here.

Her decision to dine with Cayson wasn't just because he

brought up Aldo; she also hoped a change of scenery would help her escape thoughts of Marco.

Yet unexpectedly, Vincent's tactless mentions of Marco only intensified those suppressed thoughts.

A bitter smile crossed Loraine's lips as she found herself overwhelmed by memories of Marco, losing any appetite she had for the meal before her.

Meanwhile, Cayson, though unaware of the specifics of Loraine and Marco's relationship, sensed the tension and saw an opportunity to make his move.

He considerably slid a plate of dessert toward Loraine, offering a gentle smile. "Lorrie, have some dessert. It might make you feel better."

Loraine, observing his caring expression, felt a pang of guilt, realizing she had overlooked him while preoccupied with thoughts of Marco. He had been around for so many days, yet she hadn't once inquired about him.

She accepted the dessert, saying softly, "Thank you, Cayson."

Cayson, with a fond smile, reached out to tousle her hair but Loraine instinctively dodged his touch.

His hand hovered momentarily, yet his smile didn't waver as he spoke softly. "Lorrie, remember what I've told you? You never need to thank me. We're beyond formalities."

Loraine remained silent, and Cayson's voice softened further. "Lorrie, I wish I could be the one who never makes you sad or hurt. Since he's not treating you right, might you consider me instead?"

Just as Loraine was about to respond, the man in the corner stood abruptly and fixed a cold stare on Cayson.

The man had a conspicuous beard masking his face, yet Loraine instantly recognized him by his eyes.

Marco!



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Chapter 967 I Just Want To See You

Loraine looked into those eyes, tears forming involuntarily.

Deep down, she felt deeply hurt and couldn't help but resent Marco. Whenever she needed him the most, he was always absent.

Yet now, when she least wanted to see him, he kept showing up, always right there in front of her!

Marco caught her stare. He stopped, turned around, and looked at her with a pleading, almost ingratiating look in his eyes.

As their eyes met, Loraine was the first to break away, her face turning icy.

She didn't believe in coincidences, so it didn't take her long to figure out why Marco was here.

She suspected Marco had someone watching her. How else could she and Cayson have bumped into him so unexpectedly during a simple meal out?

Remembering how he had hidden behind a newspaper in the corner earlier, Loraine scoffed and said sarcastically, "When did you decide to become a private detective, Mr. Bryant?"

Marco's expression tensed momentarily when his true identity was revealed. He managed a strained smile and removed his disguise, unveiling his striking features. Gazing at Loraine, he bowed his head and offered a sincere apology. "I just wanted to see you... I was worried you might not want to meet me, so I

used this disguise. I planned to just get a glimpse of you and then go away."

He had heard from Vincent that Loraine was in a car accident before their meeting, which deepened his sense of guilt. He reproached himself for not breaking free from the Cruz family's grip sooner.

He also realized he had underestimated Melvin's cruelty and overvalued the importance of family bonds to the Cruz family.

Marco came to understand the vast power the Cruz family wielded. When things were going well, Melvin let Marco do as he pleased, which included upsetting the daughters of several prominent families and causing problems for his uncles' businesses.

However, if his interests were at stake, Melvin wouldn't hesitate to eliminate threats.

Marco regretted not being alert at all times, which led him right into Melvin's trap.

Yet, he knew that explaining all this to Loraine at this moment would be pointless. So, he concealed his turmoil, looking at Loraine with a mix of deep guilt and love. He pleaded for her forgiveness, hoping for a chance to atone for his mistakes.

Yet Loraine didn't even glance his way and said indifferently, "You've seen me. You can leave now."

Marco's heart sank, making him look like a forsaken puppy.

In the past, whenever Loraine saw him this dejected, no matter how upset she was, she would eventually soften. But this time, she steeled herself and turned away, avoiding his desperate gaze.

Marco understood that this situation was grave and couldn't be

fixed by simply looking sorrowful and shedding tears. Awkward by nature, he saw no other option to win back Loraine's heart than to offer a heartfelt apology and try to make things right. He stepped forward, reaching for her hand, and said earnestly, "I didn't mean what happened that day..."

However, before his hand could reach hers, someone blocked him.

From the moment Marco appeared, Cayson didn't conceal his animosity. Watching Marco persistently bother Loraine, Cayson silently condemned him and intervened, saying, "I used to think the rumors about you were just malicious gossip, but seeing how you are acting today, I believe they're true."

Marco's expression turned cold. He shot Cayson a frigid look and snapped, "This is between Loraine and me. Stay out of it, you have no part in this!"

He had always shown humility and respect only to Loraine, never to anyone else.

Cayson sneered, aware that Loraine now despised Marco and would relish the chance to mock him in her presence. "Mr. Bryant, maybe you need to reconsider who the outsider really is. Lorrie has dumped you. She's out having dinner with me. Looks like you're the outsider now!"

Marco tightened his lips and stared intently at Loraine, hoping she would intervene, but she remained quiet.

Seeing Loraine silent and looking down, Cayson grew more bold and smirked. "Look at you, the proud young heir of the Cruz family. Are you really going to make a fool of yourself here?"

At the mention of his family, Marco's gaze turned even colder, his voice dropping to a threatening whisper. "I'm giving you a chance. Get out of the way."

Cayson felt a chill, as if he were being hunted by a wild animal, but his resolve hardened in front of Loraine. Just as he was about to retort, Loraine finally said, "Cayson, this isn't your concern."

Cayson's expression soured at her words. Marco, on the other hand, felt a surge of hope, thinking Loraine might still care enough to listen to him.

But the next moment, Loraine simply sighed, "I'm not in the mood to eat. Let's head back to the office."