

Chapter 1203 Mourning

After settling matters with Aldo, Marco's obligations in Vagow were nearly complete. He spent one more night with the Torres family and departed early the next morning.

He drove out of the suburbs and arrived at a cemetery.

Dressed entirely in black, Marco walked solemnly to a familiar gravestone, a bouquet of flowers in his hand.

The day was cloudy and windy, and he stood there silently, like a statue, lost in thought for a long time.

Memories of the past swept through his mind, the young man on the tombstone forever captured in his early twenties, his smile bright and unwavering.

Unlike Slater and Jimmie, Jorge had been a co-founder of Solar Company. Those early days were challenging; passion was high but funds were low.

Their team was youthful, brimming with talent and ambition, yet lacking in worldly wisdom.

Their swift progress had unsettled some influential locals. Back then, neither of them was willing to back down, buoyed by the belief that starting over was just a matter of time and opportunity for the young.

However, they underestimated their circumstances abroad. With the Mafia prevalent, guns legal, and the grim realities of underground dealings, the situation was far more perilous

than they had anticipated.

On a dark and windy night, following the team's celebration of completing a project, Marco and Jorge made their way home, with Jorge humming a tune in carefree happiness.

Suddenly, a group of Mafia members confronted them, brandishing their guns, shattering Marco's and Jorge's youthful arrogance.

Using the terrain to their advantage, Marco and Jorge managed a desperate escape, both sustaining serious injuries in the process.

Marco took out his phone to call for help, but a gunshot rang out. He turned to see Jorge, blood gushing from his mouth, using his body to shield him. In those critical moments, Jorge uttered a few hurried instructions and pushed Marco, urging him to escape.

Jorge's sacrifice bought Marco time to be rescued. By the time Marco regained consciousness, he was devastated to learn that Jorge had died and had already been buried by the Riley family.

He never got the chance to see his friend one last time.

Before his death, Jorge had made Marco promise to look after his fiancée, Keely, should anything happen to him.

That scene was seared into Marco's memory, often morphing into a nightmare that jolted him awake in the dead of night. Each time he awoke, he was engulfed by a wave of guilt and regret.

Marco often wished he had been stronger back then, believing that greater power on his part might have deterred those

Mafia members.

He sometimes thought that if they had been more discreet in their business expansion and heeded warnings more cautiously, Jorge might still be alive.

Occasionally, he even questioned why it wasn't him who had died instead.

Jorge's death was abrupt and traumatic, the image of his friend pushing him away while bleeding profoundly haunting Marco. It was this memory that compelled him to fulfill Jorge's last request. He took care of Keely, forgiving and indulging her repeatedly, sometimes at the expense of his own well-being and relationships.

Reflecting on Keely, Marco took a deep breath and returned to the present. He stooped to place the bouquet at the gravestone and whispered, "I have done my utmost to take care of her. If you were still here... you would understand. Jorge, you'll always be my buddy. We promised that whoever got married would invite the other. I kept my word. Here's my invitation."

The invitation card, uniquely crafted by Loraine and signed by both of them, lay before Jorge's tombstone. Marco's expression softened, a gentle smile crossing his face. "Now, I've found someone I truly love, and I plan to spend my life with her. I know you'd bless us."

On the tombstone, Jorge's photo seemed to smile back, offering silent approval. In that moment, Marco felt as if the haunting images of blood from his nightmares began to fade.

Perhaps Jorge was indeed blessing him from beyond.

With a sense of peace, Marco smiled, turned, and walked away.

The wind stirred the dead leaves around the cemetery. Soon after Marco left, another figure approached the grave.

This man studied the name on the tombstone with a complex expression and a faint smile. He lingered quietly for a long while.

Leaves gently settled on his shoulders. He reached down, picked up the invitation, opened it, then closed it, and finally, tucked it inside his coat. With a thoughtful glance at the grave, he turned and exited the cemetery.

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Chapter 1204 Friends And Family Gather

After concluding his business in Vagow, Marco returned to Zodiac earlier than expected, surprising Loraine who was busy preparing for their engagement party.

They had decided on a subdued celebration, inviting only close friends and family to a hotel owned by Universe Group, with entry strictly by invitation.

A few days post Marco's return, they hosted the engagement party discreetly at the hotel.

The guest list, consisting of dear friends and relatives, ensured a warm, vibrant atmosphere filled with laughter.

In the lounge, Loraine was chatting with Jennie when Vincent walked in, accompanied by his personal makeup artist.

Vincent, eager to make up for past missteps during a previous makeup session, gestured to his artist. "Loraine, let my makeup artist give you an unforgettable look today. You deserve to shine!"

Gratefully, Loraine responded, "Thank you, Vincent."

Vincent beamed, took a seat, and began to speak excitedly. "Lorrie, you've really shown the Wilson family a thing or two! They're only starting to behave now because of the lessons you've taught them!"

Loraine laughed lightly. "What do you mean?"

"Take my nephew, for instance. He was nothing but trouble before, but now he's got his act together, working hard at a Wilson company, no longer the spoiled brat he was! And Damon, whom I never liked for his pretentiousness, is actually making a difference. He's taken a lead in fighting human trafficking."

Upon hearing the revelations, Loraine opted to keep her response light, merely smiling.

Jennie sensed Loraine's discomfort with the topic and interjected, "Today is Lorrie's big day. Let's not dwell on irrelevant topics."

Vincent, realizing his misstep, quieted down. Jennie seized the opportunity to lighten the mood further. "Vincent, can your makeup artist do a touch-up for me too? I've never been styled by someone who works with an award-winning actor before!"

Vincent agreed, grateful for the shift in conversation, and the earlier tension was smoothly defused.

After Vincent departed, Ariadna entered the room. Loraine's face lit up as she quickly invited Ariadna to sit next to her.

She held Ariadna's hand, noting that although she seemed thinner and her lips pale without makeup, she had a healthy glow.

Concerned, Loraine gently inquired about Ariadna's recent wellbeing. Receiving a reassuring nod, she smiled and offered, "Would you like to have your makeup done with us?"

Ariadna smiled back, a new sense of maturity and restraint evident in her eyes, and gently declined, saying, "I'm not feeling up to it today... I'd prefer to stay without makeup."

Observing her with concern, Loraine was about to respond when Jennie chimed in, "It's okay, Ariadna. You look wonderful as you are. Today is all about happiness!"

Ariadna nodded shyly. Loraine knew that Marco had arranged discreet monitoring of Ariadna to ensure she was well, discovering that her daily routine was consistent, yet she seldom ventured out except for her vegetable stall, likely due to her health.

Determined to give Ariadna's health more attention in the future, Loraine reassured her, "It's fine to go without makeup. Everyone here is family. Jennie is right, today is about happiness."

Blushing, Ariadna hesitated before she brought out a gift she had left outside. Handing it to Loraine, her cheeks flushed with modesty, she said, "Lorrie, congratulations on your engagement. I made this wedding dress for you."

Surprised and touched, Loraine quickly thanked her and unfolded the dress. It was beautifully crafted, fitting perfectly and clearly made with immense care.

Overwhelmed, Loraine expressed her gratitude. "Ariadna, this is incredibly precious. Thank you so much."

Ariadna's smile widened. "I'm happy you like it! I've started designing clothes in my spare time, and the first one had to be for you!"

Loraine adored the dress and was moved by the evident labor that went into it, noting Ariadna's hands, which were rougher than before, marking her hard work.

"Ariadna, I cherish it. Thank you for putting in so much effort, especially when you're not feeling your best."

Shaking her head humbly, Ariadna listened as Jennie excitedly complimented the dress, then playfully added, "When it's my turn to get married, you'll have to design one for me too!"

"Of course," Ariadna responded with a smile.

While the three of them were engaged in a lively chat, Ariadna suddenly looked up at the door, her face paling as she noticed something. Then she immediately lowered her head, her mind drifting elsewhere.