

Chapter 817 Refusing The Cruz Family's Offer

A sleek, black luxury car stretched across the middle of the road, its audacious presence matching the usual style of the Cruz family. Pedestrians on the street couldn't help but cast curious glances at the vehicle, but no one dared to approach.

Standing resolutely in front of the car was Marco, his gaze sharp and icy as he spoke without any trace of flattery or reverence for the Cruz family.

Clifford narrowed his eyes and clenched his jaw.

It had been a long time since anyone dared to speak to him in this manner. Even in Zodiac, anyone he personally sought out would either tremble with respect or show their gratitude to him.

Many yearned to be connected to an influential and prestigious family like the Cruz family. Even an extended branch of the Cruz family still held a position of authority.

Yet, here was a young man named Marco, rejecting them and saying that he didn't want to be part of the family!

Clifford found this very absurd. He even wondered if Marco was employing a strategy that would enable him gain more leverage by playing hard to get.

But even though Marco's expression was calm, it didn't seem like he was lying.

After locking eyes with him for a moment, Clifford felt an

incredible feeling of respect for Marco, who was exhibiting the kind of unwavering determination his elder brother used to express.

It was just that Marco was behaving in a manner that he didn't approve of. So, he said to him, with a smile that didn't reach his eyes, "Young man, as far as I know, you're penniless right now and can only cling onto a woman for financial support. So why wouldn't you want to return to the Cruz family?"

The bodyguards that were standing nearby had a smug look on their faces as Clifford said this. They felt Marco was ignorant and unaware of the power and influence the Cruz family had.

Even though they were only workers of the family, they were treated with utmost respect wherever they went. Now Marco had a golden chance to become a part of the Cruz family, yet he was acting so arrogantly.

In response to Clifford's question, Marco chuckled and retorted, "Members of the Cruz family are truly interesting. Each and every one of them would always boast about the so-called glory of the Cruz family. I acknowledge that the Cruz family is powerful, but that has nothing to do with me. Now, step aside."

Clifford was surprised to hear this and he asked in a stern tone, "Are you willingly embracing failure and staying by a woman's side with no accomplishments to your name? Come on, we can give you everything you desire!"

Marco shot him a cold look and said, "What I choose to do is my business. I want nothing to do with the Cruz family. The things I want, I'll obtain them on my own without relying on others."

He paused for a moment, then he added, "And by the way, you're from the main branch of the Cruz family, right? Then please convey a message to them for me. Even if I am truly a member of the Cruz family, I have no intention of returning



because the Cruz family disgusts me!"

"How dare you!" The two bodyguards growled in fury, ready to swing into action, but Clifford raised his hand to stop them. He had an unpleasant expression on his face as he asked Marco, "I guess perhaps you have some misconceptions about the Cruz family?"

But Marco didn't even listen to him. He just turned and walked away.

His behavior made it impossible for him to be reasoned with.

Clifford's expression darkened as he watched him walk away. Even the two bodyguards were mad with anger and were itching to chase after him, but Clifford ordered them to remain where they were.

After a while, he let out a cold chuckle and murmured, "He's got some backbone; I'll give him that. Clearly, he's my brother's son, with that same foul temper. Unfortunately, even with all that attitude, he's utterly useless, except for seducing women and being disrespectful to his elders."

When the two bodyguards heard this, their anger instantly dissipated. They had not known that Marco was the son of the older brother of Clifford, otherwise they wouldn't have attempted to attack him just now.

Meanwhile, Clifford was still nursing his anger and dissatisfaction as he thought about his nephew's actions. Marco was entangled with a member of the Torres family, while having an ambiguous relationship with his own daughter.

Besides, Marco had dared to be so arrogant and rude to him. It was annoying and yet baffling!

Before meeting Marco, Clifford never believed that anyone



could remain indifferent to the favor of the Cruz family. Unless... Marco had ambitions far greater than the status of a member of the Cruz family.

With this thought in mind, Clifford couldn't help but sneer. "Humph! So young and already reaching for the stars. Do you think you can be greater than the Cruz family?"

Despite his disdain, Clifford knew he couldn't act impulsively right now. Though he hated how Marco was behaving, he couldn't deny the fact that Ariadna's life was practically in Marco's hands.

The poor girl's surgery was imminent and Clifford couldn't afford any complications. The only reasonable thing to do would be to keep Marco in check for now and avoid provoking him. Then he would wait until Ariadna had fully recovered before ensuring that Marco got a taste of the Cruz family's wrath.

Meanwhile, in Universe Group, Loraine had just finished the day's work and was preparing to leave when she got an unexpected call from the front desk.


"Miss Torres, there's someone waiting for you downstairs, and he seems a bit peculiar. Should I ask him to leave?" the receptionist inquired.

Who could be looking for her? Loraine wondered.

Nevertheless, she said to the receptionist, "Don't worry. I'm just about to leave the office. I'll come down to check."

With curiosity gnawing at her, Loraine left the office and went downstairs. When she arrived at the visitors waiting area, she spotted a man seated on the sofa. His head was bowed, and he had an aura of desolation around him, giving him the appearance of someone who had lost his way in life.

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Lorraine stood still for a moment, wondering what could have gone wrong. Then she called him, "Marco, what are you doing here?"

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Chapter 818 His Home

Lorraine was taken aback to see Marco at Universe Group, not expecting his visit.

And his appearance alarmed her. He looked as if he had just been through a hard time.

Surely, he should have been resting at home, not in her company. She pondered if Aldo had been a source of trouble for him.

A wave of concern washed over Lorraine. She crouched before him, her voice laced with worry. "What's the matter, Marco?"

Marco lifted his gaze to meet hers. His eyes briefly betrayed a vulnerability. Words seemed to fail him, and instead, he embraced Lorraine, his head nestling into her hair, finding solace there.

Holding her close, his voice, rough with emotion, broke the silence. "Nothing's wrong. I just missed you too much, so I came."

Lorraine's heart melted, increasingly convinced something had troubled him. They had joyfully gone on a date this morning, and Marco had seemed to be fine at the time.

She refrained from questioning him about his troubles. Gently stroking his head, she reassured him with a tender smile, "I'm right here, Marco. I won't leave you."

Marco's response was a silent, tighter embrace, as though he feared losing her.

Loraine comforted him further, "Since you're here, let's head home together."

The mention of "home" seemed to resonate with Marco. He nodded, grasped Loraine's hand, and rose to his feet.

Yet, the loneliness in his eyes lingered, and his smile was forced.

Loraine noticed all these subtle signs.

A sense of unease grew within her. Once in the car, she ventured a question, her smile tinged with concern, "What's going on? You appear quite disoriented. Did something happen?"

Marco, in the midst of fastening his seat belt, froze. His expression turned rigid, and his eyelashes fluttered as he looked down.

An encounter with a Cruz family member had both confirmed his fears and thrown him into turmoil.

He had intended to buy Loraine a gift, but Clifford's words haunted him, leaving him restless. Before he knew it, he found himself outside Universe Group.

Despite his efforts to appear indifferent, he couldn't escape his concern for those connected to him.

Lost in his thoughts, Marco yearned to see Loraine. Her presence soothed him, offering a sanctuary for his mounting panic.

Gripping the steering wheel, Loraine inquired gently, "Can you share what's bothering you? Only if you're comfortable."

Once, she longed for Marco to confide in her every thought, but now, she merely wished to ease his anguish.

They aspired to a lifelong bond, requiring both tolerance and understanding. Honesty was crucial, yet respecting each other's personal space was equally important.

Her gaze radiated warmth and empathy. Marco, moved by her compassion, regretted burdening her with his emotional turmoil.

Attempting to regain composure, he forced a smile and said, "It's nothing, really. I planned to surprise you with a gift today, but an unexpected accident thwarted my plans. I'll find the perfect gift for you soon."

Initially anxious, Loraine felt a surge of amusement upon hearing this. Was his sorrow merely over a failed gift?

She pondered that Marco, once affluent, now struggled with financial constraints, likely embarrassed by his changed circumstances, especially in the eyes of luxury store staff.

Loraine had always lived a life of comfort, never worrying about the cost of presents. Yet, she realized that Marco might struggle with adjusting to the present from his past.

Aware of Marco's pride, she chose not to highlight this difference. Gently taking his hand, she smiled and said, "Just having you pick me up today is the perfect gift. Thank you. It means a lot to me and brings me joy."

Marco, taken aback, wanted to express his own gratitude to Loraine for guiding him through the turmoil caused by the Cruz family.

But in the end, all he did was grasp Loraine's hand in return and smile.

Together, they returned to the Torres' family. The journey was

somewhat somber, with neither initiating conversation. While it wasn't awkward, Loraine was concerned Marco might still be feeling down.

Once home, she reassured him, "Marco, listen. Your wealth doesn't matter to me. In fact, I think you've changed for the better! You're more down-to-earth now, showing your cute side and emotions more openly!"

Marco, hearing this, was amused. Was she complimenting him or teasing him?

Yet, her words strengthened his resolve.

He vowed never to return to the Cruz family.

For him, home was wherever Loraine was.

Chapter 819 Farce

In just two days, the time had flown by, and the moment for Ariadna's surgery had arrived.

Loraine had a strong worry for Ariadna and had dedicated the entire day to visiting her in the hospital and being with her.

What she hadn't anticipated was Marco's sudden proposal to join her.

While Loraine remained in the dark about the situation, Marco knew all too well that a member of the Cruz family's main branch had shown up, probably Ariadna's father.

His concern was that Clifford might accidentally say something inappropriate in front of Loraine, sparking avoidable confusion, prompting him to come along.

As they reached the hospital, Loraine noted an unusual increase in security, with guards clad in black stationed near Ariadna's room. These bodyguards were not the usual ones assigned to Ariadna.

At that moment, a figure stepped out of Ariadna's room, and Loraine's expression turned stern as she caught a glimpse of his face.

Her suspicions about the Cruz family keeping tabs on them seemed confirmed by this observer's presence. Undeterred, she and Marco entered Ariadna's room together.

Inside, they found Ariadna accompanied by a middle-aged man sitting by her bedside. He was distinguished, with graying

temples and dressed in a sharp suit, his back to the door.

He was speaking to Ariadna in a calm, reassuring tone. "Fear not, Ariadna. Just take the surgery as a short break. When you awake, you'll already be on the path to healing."

However, the man's demeanor changed as he heard the door shut. Turning around, his eyes, framed by gold-rimmed glasses and set in deeply carved sockets, landed on Loraine and Marco. His brows creased slightly at the sight of them.

Loraine felt puzzled. This man's discomfort with her and Marco was noticeable, though he masked it well.

She couldn't understand why, as she had never met him before.

His warm interaction with Ariadna suggested he was part of her family, but the reason for his apparent dislike remained a mystery.

Choosing to ignore the matter, Loraine stepped forward to approach Ariadna, but was abruptly halted when the man blocked her way.

Clifford, having glanced at her covertly, recognized Loraine as the woman looking after Marco, thanks to his own inquiries.

He scoffed with contempt, "Who gave you permission to enter?"

Loraine's brow creased involuntarily, realizing the tension.

She opened her mouth to speak when Ariadna intervened from behind, "Dad, they're my friends!"

Then, addressing them, she said, "Lorrie, Marco, meet my father. Don't worry about him. He means no harm."

Clifford, however, remained stern, his mood seemingly soured

further by the mention of Marco.

Loraine, puzzled, shot Clifford a confused look. She deduced that the people who had followed them previously might have been sent by Clifford. Yet, instead of showing gratitude for their help with Ariadna, his demeanor radiated dissatisfaction.

Bewildered, yet composed, Loraine courteously introduced herself, "Hello, sir. I'm Loraine Torres, Ariadna's friend."

Marco, standing quietly behind her, chose silence.

Clifford ignored Loraine's introduction, fixating his stern gaze on Marco, his expression darkening.

Feeling the brewing tension, Loraine instinctively moved to shield Marco, meeting Clifford's eyes firmly.

In the background, Ariadna, sensing the growing strain, quickly interjected, "Lorrie, I didn't expect you two today. I'm overjoyed! After the surgery, we should all hang out!"

Loraine shifted her attention and smiled. "Of course, Ariadna. Marco and I would love to show you around Vagow."

Marco, in agreement with Loraine's suggestion, nodded without objection.

These gestures did not escape Clifford's notice, further aggravating him.

Originally planning to focus on Ariadna's surgery and maintain composure, his anger now erupted. "What? Marco, are you exploiting the funds from the lady who's supporting you to fool my daughter?"

Loraine's face clouded over. Her doubts were now verified. Clifford indeed harbored resentment towards them. However,

his choice of words... What was he implying?

"Mr. Cruz, I urge you to consider your words with care! Why do you say that Marco fooled your daughter?" she shot back.

Ariadna was equally perplexed. "Dad, what's going on? They just wanted to show me a good time, and you..."

With his teeth gritted and anger boiling, Clifford retorted, "Ariadna, you don't see the reality! Do you intend to share a man with Loraine?"

His statement stunned everyone present.

In her confusion, Ariadna queried, "Dad, what are you insinuating? I merely wanted to spend time with her. Marco's presence is irrelevant, isn't it?"

Clifford hesitated, impulsively asking, "Wasn't the friend you mentioned the other day Marco?"

That's when Ariadna grasped why things felt amiss previously and exhaled a heavy sigh, massaging her forehead. "Dad, you've completely misconstrued the situation. The friend who has been a great support to me is Lorrie!"

A sneer crept onto Marco's face, and Clifford, recognizing his mistake, turned rigid.

Loraine, piecing together the scenario with Clifford's behavior, had a general understanding of the events. Her brow furrowed in displeasure, and she commented, "The Cruz family may be influential, but isn't it careless to hastily accuse someone without thorough inquiry?"

Chapter 820 Suspicion Deepened

Clifford, who was used to being treated with the utmost respect, found himself taken aback. No one had ever dared address him so bluntly, even when he was in the wrong.

Yet, here in a small city like Vagow, two youths had openly shown him disrespect. Loraine was particularly direct, scolding and reprimanding him without reservation.

Annoyance simmered in Clifford as he responded with a clipped tone, "Miss Torres, I'm aware of your actions, and the Cruz family will certainly acknowledge what you've done for my daughter. However, I'm curious about the man accompanying you. What is he doing here?"

Loraine's response was laced with anger. "Marco is under my care. If I can be here, why can't he? Remember, it was Marco who matched Ariadna for the transplant. For a family that prides itself on its noble heritage, your hostility in return for our kindness is quite shameful!"

It only seemed to dawn on Clifford at that moment that Marco was of great help to Ariadna, his expression reluctant. "You speak as if you're noble, but is this not just to gain favor with the Cruz family? Both of you..."

"Dad!" Suddenly, Ariadna's cry pierced the tense air.

Tears filled her eyes as she grasped her chest, her voice laden with confusion. "Dad, why are you treating them this way? Lorrie and Marco helped me! What are you doing to them?"

At Ariadna's words, Clifford found himself at a loss for words.

On the other side, Marco grasped Loraine's hand, his voice reflecting a detached tone. "Don't worry about it. I'm here for the transplant only because Loraine suggested it. It's a matter of chance that I'm a suitable match, so there's no need for the Cruz family to express gratitude. If anyone should be thanked, it's Loraine, not me."

His demeanor remained calm and earnest, underscoring his genuine lack of interest rather than sarcasm. He was present for the transplant solely on Loraine's advice, indifferent to the potential match and unconcerned about the wellbeing of others, including the Cruz family.

His remarks clearly set boundaries while simultaneously showing his disregard and scorn for the Cruz family.

Clifford's face darkened further. He felt irritated not only by Marco's lack of respect for him, but also by his own emotional response to these younger people's words, which diminished his own dignity.

Loraine sensed the tension rising. They had come to visit Ariadna before her surgery, but their kindness was met with arrogance and sarcasm, which was quite annoying.

As for Clifford's unexplained hostility, Loraine pondered if it might be linked to a past conflict... Could it be tied to an earlier altercation with a minor branch of the Cruz family in Vagow?

This seemed plausible to her. Not everyone in the Cruz family shared Ariadna's level-headedness. From Clifford's perspective, part of the family's main branch, their past actions might have seemed like a challenge to the Cruz family's influence. Perhaps this was the reason for Clifford's show of strength.

With these thoughts, Loraine instinctively stepped in front of Marco, protecting him. She declared, "Mr. Cruz, the Torres family may not be on par with the Cruz family, but there's no need for you to act in such an arrogant manner. No matter the Cruz family's power, neither Marco nor I have any desire to be involved with you guys."

Behind her, Marco's emotion was evident.

Loraine softly squeezed his hand, reassuring him, and continued in a gentler voice, "Our assistance to Ariadna is purely because she's my friend. I hope the Cruz family will refrain from bothering us in the future or suspecting us of hidden agendas."

Clifford's expression grew stormy as he found Loraine's words bold and presumptuous.

Her justification failed to sway him.

Numerous individuals sought to gain favor with the Cruz family by various means.

To Clifford, Loraine appeared as just one more, feigning indifference while covertly striving for a Cruz connection.

Why else would she go to such lengths for Ariadna, a mere associate, ensuring her access to a state-of-the-art surgical robot? Despite her claims of no interest in a relationship with the Cruz family, wasn't she already forging a bond with Ariadna?

Clifford had deliberately left Ariadna in Tillie's care to shield her from those with hidden motives. Yet now, Loraine had entered Ariadna's circle, making him doubt her intentions.

He viewed Loraine's composed facade as potentially concealing more.

His inquiries revealed Loraine and Marco's longstanding acquaintance. She had once concealed her identity to marry into the Bryant family. Even after their split, she stayed by Marco during his struggles.

Was this loyalty born of true affection, or had she, a shrewd woman, discerned Marco's real stature? Was she aiming to take advantage of his identity?

Although Clifford pondered various scenarios, he recognized the inopportuneness of voicing them. Ariadna had been misled by them, and until the surgery's success, his anger must be held at bay.

Biting back his frustration, Clifford conjured a forced, insincere smile, uttering, "Miss Torres, perhaps your view isn't entirely correct. You and Marco's significant aid to Ariadna isn't lost on us. After the surgery, rest assured, our appreciation to you both will be duly shown!"

Chapter 821 The Hidden Meanings Of Clifford's Words

Loraine had held the title of president of Universe Group for quite some time. Her ability to read the expressions of others was a source of personal pride.

Clifford, with a smile and kind words, tried to appear friendly, yet Loraine couldn't shake off a sense of unease.

To her, Clifford's smile seemed insincere. His words were laden with hidden meanings.

Among the Cruz family, only Ariadna found favor with Loraine. She was about to voice her disapproval when Marco stepped in front of her.

It was clear to him what Clifford was insinuating.

Marco's expression was icy, yet he restrained from escalating the tension. He said calmly, "Mr. Cruz, perhaps you should spend more time with your daughter, given the impending surgery, rather than chatting here."

Clifford's eyes narrowed, and his lips twitched, but he remained silent. Turning away, he rejoined Ariadna.

Ariadna, witnessing this, breathed a sigh of relief.

She was torn between her dear father and friends who had been greatly supportive. A confrontation between them was the last thing she wanted.

Ariadna threw a silent, apologetic glance towards Loraine. In response, Loraine gave a subtle nod and then exited the ward with Marco.

Outside, Loraine and Marco lingered nearby, not venturing far due to the upcoming surgery and their reluctance to leave despite their aversion to Clifford.

Nurses bustled in and out of the ward, briefing Ariadna and her family on the procedures, heightening Ariadna's anxiety and causing her complexion to turn ashen.

Gripping Clifford's hand tightly, she remained silent. Yet, Clifford could feel her trembling, speaking volumes of her inner turmoil.

Overwhelmed with guilt and genuine concern for her, Clifford held her hand, offering calm reassurance. "Ariadna, don't worry. The operation will go smoothly. You're going to be just fine!"

Meanwhile, a nurse tried to soothe Ariadna's growing anxiety, but to little avail. As Ariadna was wheeled out of her room, her nerves seemed to tighten even further.


Spotting Loraine waiting outside, Ariadna's voice broke into a tearful whisper. "Lorrie..."

Loraine, with a soft touch to her head, reassured her, "Don't be scared. I'll be right here waiting for you."

Sniffing back tears, Ariadna gave a nod of acknowledgment.

Her gaze lingered on Loraine as she was rolled toward the operating room, a presence that brought her a sense of calm. As she entered the operating room, Ariadna relaxed a bit.

This entire scene, however, soured Clifford's mood. His

Chapter 821 The Hidden Meanings Of Clifford's  +120 Points at most
daughter seemed to find comfort in someone else, an outsider,
rather than in him.

This realization narrowed his eyes into a cold glare directed at
Loraine before he turned and left with a dismissive snort.

Loraine, puzzled yet undeterred, settled into a corridor seat
beside Marco, opening her laptop to tend to her business
matters.

In the meantime, Clifford's expression remained dark. Soon,
Tillie approached him, her voice laced with nervousness. "Sir, is
there something I can assist you with?"

"Tillie," Clifford began, his voice heavy with disapproval. "I
entrusted Ariadna to your care. Yet it seems your efforts have
been lacking."

His gaze once again found Loraine, his tone sharp with
irritation. "Ariadna has only known Loraine for a few days, yet
she seems to trust her more than me!"

Clifford's anger flared as he thought of his daughter's trust and
reliance on Loraine.

Unaware that his own neglect was the root cause, he
irrationally accused Loraine of enchanting Ariadna and blamed
Tillie, her caregiver, for this perceived betrayal.

He had tasked Tillie with the duty of protecting the kind and
innocent Ariadna from those with hidden agendas.

Yet, to his dismay, Tillie not only failed to keep Loraine at bay
but also unwittingly allowed her to gain Ariadna's trust.

Shaking with fear, Tillie desperately pleaded for forgiveness,
her face drained of color. Clifford, however, was deaf to her
appeals. His gaze, cold and accusing, settled on Loraine in the

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distance, his suspicions about her growing stronger.

He was convinced that Loraine's closeness to Ariadna, and even Marco, was part of a larger, more sinister plan.

Meanwhile, Loraine remained indifferent to Clifford's glaring. She was busy responding to her employees' messages when suddenly someone stood before her.

Clifford, watching from a short distance, taunted Loraine with a sneer, "Miss Torres, you seem quite concerned about my daughter."

Without missing a beat, Loraine replied indifferently, "I'm worried about my friend."

Finding a nearby seat, Clifford sat down, closing his eyes as he waited.

The wait was long and excruciating, yet he refrained from causing further disturbance. Loraine and Marco, in turn, ignored him.


After finishing her messages, Loraine, feeling the strain in her neck, was aided by Marco's gentle shoulder massage. His voice, warm and caring, broke the silence. "Are you thirsty? I'll get you some water."

Lorraine nodded in agreement, and Marco stood up to leave.

Clifford, who had been observing quietly, abruptly opened his eyes. After waiting briefly, he signaled his men to stay put and stood up to follow Marco.

Lorraine, puzzled, couldn't fathom what could be more pressing to Clifford than Ariadna's surgery.


Yet, she chose not to dwell on it, simply watching as Clifford

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walked away.



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