

Chapter 877 Ariadna Was Found

Loraine was stunned, her voice filled with concern. "She's not here. What happened?"

Tillie's voice choked as she began to explain, "Yesterday, she mentioned meeting a friend but Mr. Cruz refused her... It didn't sit well with her."

Tillie recounted the events from the day before. All seemed normal. She occasionally glanced at the ward where Ariadna lay. But she refrained from disturbing Ariadna on her request.

Later that night, after Clifford concluded his business at the banquet, he arrived at the ward. Listening to Tillie's account of Ariadna's actions, he remained silent, standing outside the ward in contemplation before going away.

However, the next morning, after Tillie woke up, she discovered that the lump on the bed remained unchanged. Something seemed off, so she entered the ward. Upon closer inspection, she realized Ariadna was nowhere to be found.

Clifford, upon learning of Ariadna's disappearance, attempted to trace her steps. Unfortunately, the area she had supposedly jumped from the window was beyond the surveillance reach. Despite being a member of the Cruz family, even Clifford couldn't immediately access the surveillance footage on the streets.

Only after an extensive search did Clifford decide it was time for Tillie to contact Loraine.

Clifford suspected that Ariadna's mentioned friend wasn't Loraine but the person who messaged her the day before.

Yet, in his eyes, it was Loraine's responsibility for Ariadna's impulsive act, blaming her for Ariadna's association with those bad guys. He believed Loraine held the key to Ariadna's whereabouts.

Loraine, shocked at the news, assured Tillie, "Don't worry. I will help you find her. Did Ariadna mention who her friend is or what exactly happened yesterday?"

Tillie hesitated, then murmured, "Well... No..."

Despite altering her perception of Loraine, Tillie refrained from exposing family conflicts to outsiders. She deemed it unnecessary to disclose the rift between Ariadna and Clifford.

Reading Tillie's apprehension, Loraine's tone turned chilly. "Ariadna is my friend. I'll do everything in my power to find her. If there's any update, I'll contact you. I expect the same from you—keep me in the loop if you hear anything."

With gratitude, Tillie bid farewell and ended the call.

Subsequently, Loraine's expression darkened. She previously assumed Ariadna's absence from the banquet stemmed from disliking such events, coupled with her fragile health. Little did she know she was under house arrest by Clifford!

Ariadna was typically obedient and considerate of others. She wouldn't have attempted an escape through the window if not for Clifford's oppressive actions driving her to despair.

At that moment, worry and anger consumed Loraine. She once again recognized the autocratic and unreasonable traits of the Cruz family!

They cared little for Ariadna's and Marco's true desires, imposing their own beliefs and rules upon them.

Complaints were futile. Loraine's priority was locating Ariadna and bringing her back.

Everyone's anxiety intensified as Ariadna hadn't returned all night.

Concerned that something might have happened to her overnight, Loraine planned to visit the company before searching for Ariadna. However, as she stepped out of her car, she spotted Ariadna in disarray, crouched in the parking lot. Ariadna's eyes lit up when she saw Loraine, appearing distressed and vulnerable.

"Lorrie..."

Ariadna's appearance was unkempt—hair messy, clothes disheveled, face pale, and eyes red and swollen. She seemed both pitiful and embarrassed, calling Loraine's name timidly.

Sighing, Loraine helped Ariadna up and guided her into the car. Offering bread and water, she inquired, "Where were you last night? What happened to you?"

Ariadna, flustered, nibbled on the bread and whispered, "I... I was bored, so I snuck out. I had to hide everywhere because I didn't want to be found by my father. But I didn't know where to go, so I came to the Universe Group to find you."

Loraine sensed Ariadna's inability to fabricate a story. She realized it must have been a harrowing night for her.

Witnessing Ariadna's nervousness, Loraine refrained from probing further. As she contemplated informing the Cruz family and sending Ariadna back, she discovered Ariadna had

fallen asleep, utterly exhausted.

Choosing not to disturb her, Loraine covered Ariadna with a blanket and instructed her assistant to reschedule several meetings. She then drove back to the Torres' house.

Within the Torres residence, the family doctor was evaluating Ariadna, busy in diagnosis. Loraine briefed Marco about what was going on, pondering where to send Ariadna for the night.

Thinking aloud, Loraine proposed, "Should I give Tillie a ring?"

But Marco, with a cold look, shook his head. "Send Ariadna back discreetly when she recovers. Don't involve the Cruz family."



Chapter 878 The Bruise

Loraine stared at Marco, confusion written all over her face. Seeing that, Marco tried to expatiate on what he meant. "You are making a decision out of the kindness of your heart, oblivious to the fact that the decision isn't a wise one. Think about it for a moment. Naturally, if the Cruz family find Ariadna here, they would come to the conclusion that you masterminded her escape and kept her in your home all this while."

Going over his words, Loraine realized that his words weren't far-fetched. She knew just how nearly impossible it was for an individual to reason with the Cruz family. This was a family that was known, when dealing with any sort of issue, to jump to conclusions without any proper investigation. For all she knew, rather than being praised and thanked for what she had done, they would blame and criticize her instead.

Loraine shook her head and sighed deeply. Informing Tillie about Ariadna's whereabouts was no longer an option.

The Cruz family had done everything they could to find Ariadna, but to no avail. For Loraine to have successfully found Ariadna with little effort, that would definitely raise a lot of eyebrows.

Not that Loraine was afraid of the Cruz family, she just wanted to avoid getting into unnecessary trouble. She ran her fingers through her hair, looked at Marco in the eye and said, "I still can't believe the Cruz family would do something as oppressive as putting Ariadna under house arrest. Now I see why you didn't want to live with them. Even Ariadna, meek as she is, couldn't live with their draconian rules."

Hearing that, Marco nodded and breathed a sigh of relief. A smile spread across his face as he remembered just how nervous he was about Loraine finding out about his real identity.

He had feared that their relationship would be irrevocably damaged and she would break up with him. To his joy, his real identity didn't impact her love for him. In fact, she stood with him and did her best to support him.

All of his fears turned out to be unfounded. Perhaps, this was the perfect time to disclose his connections with Solar Company to her. She was a rational and considerate person who would understand his motives and not judge him unfairly. Once he explained to her just how tied his hands were, she would also understand and forgive him for not telling her sooner.

He took a deep breath and was about to tell her the truth when the door suddenly swung open.

The doctor came out and in the blink of an eye, Loraine was up in his face. "Sir, is Ariadna okay?"

The doctor took a step back and took off his stethoscope. His eyes landed on Marco, and he became visibly uncomfortable. He swallowed very hard and finally replied Loraine, albeit awkwardly, "She's okay. She passed out because she was too tired. In fact, she has regained her consciousness now."

Observing the doctor's strange behavior, Loraine was pretty sure that he was hiding something. He wasn't telling them the truth about what had actually happened to Ariadna.

The condition she met Ariadna in this morning couldn't possibly have been caused by tiredness only. Her skin was too pale and her dressing all mangled up with two buttons



fastened in the wrong buttonholes. She couldn't just be tired. There was definitely something else up with her.

The doctor had held back his words when he saw Marco, as if what he intended to say about Ariadna wasn't deemed suitable for a man like Marco to know.

Loraine, being more meticulous than Marco, was able to calm herself down and put the pieces together. Whatever happened to Ariadna, the doctor definitely regarded it as really sensitive. Then, taking into account how bizarre the poor girl's dressing was, she might have been sexually assaulted.

Loraine took a sharp intake of breath as she came to this conclusion. She then feigned a look of composure and turned to Marco. "Marco, can you arrange some trusted people to send her back later?"

Marco didn't notice the deception. He simply nodded and left. Loraine looked back at the doctor and gave him her most sweetest smile. "I really appreciate how much help you have been. By the way, could you please not tell anyone else about what happened to Ariadna? Just keep it a secret."

The Cruz family, including their daughter Ariadna, had recently been the talk of Vagow. If news of what happened to her spread, her reputation would be tarnished and she might never recover from it.

The doctor nodded, closed his eyes for a moment, then let out a heavy sigh. "There are some medicines that she needs to use because she is very weak. Also, be careful with what you say to her when you decide to talk to her. She might get flustered."

"Okay," Loraine replied softly before sending the doctor on his way. She then stood in front of the room. After staring at it for a while, she sighed, then gently pushed the door open.



Ariadna, with a quilt over her arms, was huddled near the headboard. With her red eyes serving as evidence, it was clear to see that she had been crying for quite some time. Immediately she saw Loraine, a faint smile appeared on her face and she softly said, "Oh, Lorrie. Thank you so much. I'm really sorry to have troubled you again."

Loraine sat close to her and was about to stroke her hair when she suddenly caught sight of a bruise on Ariadna's collar.

Since her skin was delicate, the bruise was very easy to notice.

Loraine felt sick in the stomach. Her initial guess had been right. The poor girl had been assaulted!

But, who could be behind this disgusting act? Oh, no! Hope Ariadna wasn't a victim of some gangsters? She was just a young girl!

Horrible images of what might have happened to her last night flashed through Loraine's mind, which made her even more sick.

Loraine knew just how terrible it was for a frail girl to be caught in the midst of gangsters, as she had experienced their terror first-hand. Even before they attacked, fear had taken control over her whole body. It was a horrible experience.

It was terrible to think, but sweet Ariadna had probably been defiled by gangsters.

Loraine shook her head as she tried to calm herself down. If Ariadna really went through what she thought, she needed to approach her in a way Ariadna wouldn't feel ashamed or blame herself for what had happened.

Loraine vowed to see to it that Ariadna never developed



+120 Points at most

suicidal thoughts or got stigmatized over what had happened. She would need lots of therapy books and the guidance of psychological experts.

Loraine looked softly into Ariadna's eyes and gave her a gentle smile. Softening her tone, she gingerly asked, "About last night, Ariadna... Could you tell me what happened?"



Chapter 879 His Biological Father

Loraine treated Ariadna like a younger sister, showing an exceptional level of gentleness and patience in every action and word, as if afraid even the slightest thing might hurt Ariadna.

Ariadna could tell from Loraine's demeanor that she likely knew about the previous night's events.

Biting her bottom lip, Ariadna was unsure whether to reveal that Slater was the culprit.

He had overstepped his boundaries with her while under the influence of alcohol, yet she hadn't pushed him away. Instead, she had reacted positively to his behavior.

Ariadna worried that telling Loraine the truth would infuriate her and lead to her labeling Slater as a womanizer. She didn't want to cause trouble for him, especially since he had once saved her life, and deep down, she harbored feelings for him.

Finally, she chose not to divulge Slater's actions or her reasons for being at the bar. She evaded the main issue, focusing on less important details in her conversation with Loraine.

She behaved like a defiant teen, frowning in frustration. "After getting better, I thought I'd have more freedom. But it's the opposite; my dad's even stricter now! I'm so fed up with him. To rebel against his oppressive rules, I ran away from the ward, and then... Well, you know the rest." She laughed it off as if it were all a minor incident.

Loraine was at a loss for words. What a rebellious spirit! In defiance of her strict father, Ariadna would even entertain the idea of a one-night stand!

Loraine felt a strong urge to reprimand Ariadna for such rash actions. But then she recalled the doctor's advice: to maintain Ariadna's positive spirits, she must refrain from any harsh criticism.

With a sorry expression, Ariadna grasped Loraine's hand and said earnestly, "Lorrie, I'm aware of the implications of my actions last night. It happened because I chose it. Please don't worry!"

Ariadna's resolute stance indicated that her mind was made up. Any effort to lecture her would be futile. What was done couldn't be undone.

Therefore, Loraine refrained from lecturing Ariadna about the lessons from the previous night. Instead, she comforted her gently, "Remember, we're friends. If you're ever in trouble, come to me. Don't act on impulse."

Ariadna's eyes brimmed with tears as she nodded. "Understood. I'm really grateful, Lorrie."

Despite her impulsive actions the night before, she harbored no regrets.

After so many years confined to her bed due to illness, for once, she had allowed herself some freedom.

Loraine soothingly brushed her hair and offered to sneak her back the ward discreetly. Ariadna agreed, knowing her family must have been fraught with worry over her overnight absence.

Thanks to Marco's adept planning, Ariadna managed to elude



the Cruz family's security and quietly return to her ward. Once Clifford discovered Ariadna's return, he would surely ask about her whereabouts from the night before. But that was not something Loraine should be concerned about; it was Ariadna who should be.

The following couple of days passed uneventfully concerning the Cruz family. Loraine and Marco continued their lives undisturbed. It seemed the Cruz family chose silence, possibly viewing Ariadna's ordeal as an embarrassing internal matter.

One morning, Loraine headed off to her job, while Marco busied himself with Solar Company's business in his room.

Every once in a while, Carl would report to him about what was going on in Solar Company. Meanwhile, Carl would ask him to make decisions on some important matters.

Once he finished his update, Carl mentioned, "Miss Hoffman has been a great help to us over in Zodiac. Our branch company is thriving thanks to her."

Then, with some hesitation, he added, "Also, you asked us to monitor the Cruz family. We've discovered that aside from Solar Company, another entity is secretly targeting the Cruz family."

Marco's brow creased slightly, and he scoffed, "No surprise the Cruz family has enemies. Just think of all the harm they've done!"

The Cruz family strutted around, acting as if they owned the world. Many pretended to admire them but actually despised them behind their backs.

"We should figure out who's opposing the Cruz family. And be discreet! We can't let our ties to Solar Company become known."

After all, the enemy of his enemy might just turn into an ally, ready to join forces at any moment.

Carl agreed with a nod. Just then, Marco's phone buzzed with an unfamiliar Zodiac number.

With a frown, Marco ended his call with Carl. After a moment's thought, he decided to take the call.

For a brief few moments, only the sound of breathing filled the silence on the other end of the phone.

Then, laughter cut through the quiet, followed by a stern male voice, saying, "My son, I've heard you're not too fond of your dad or the Cruz family?"

Marco paused, holding his breath as he listened. It dawned on him that the man on the line might be his biological father.

The voice continued, "Regardless of your feelings towards the Cruz family, I'd like you to consider returning to assist me. Your track record with the Bryant Group speaks volumes. I'm confident you're more than capable of handling our family business."

Marco's expression turned grim. Just as he was about to flatly refuse, the caller added a chilling threat, "If you refuse to return the Cruz family, I can't promise your safety, nor the safety of those you care about."

Right then, an urgent knock interrupted him. Beal's voice, laced with panic, resounded from outside the door. "Marco, it's bad news! Something's happened to Lorrie!"

Chapter 880 Being Attacked

Just after getting this threat from the caller, Marco heard that Loraine was in trouble. It was clearly not a coincidence. Marco felt like he was being tied up by an unseen rope which had left him helpless and unable to resist.

He clenched his fists in impotent rage and growled to the caller, "What the hell did you guys do to Loraine?"

But the caller replied with a chuckle, "Marco, you're a member of the Cruz family, whether you like it or not. You shouldn't have distanced yourself from your roots just because of a woman."

Marco slammed his fists on the table in fury, shouting a string of filthy words at the caller. "If Loraine gets hurt, I'll make sure you pay dearly!" he threatened hotly.

But the caller scoffed and said, "Well, you'd better hurry then. After all, I never expected that those attackers would take action so swiftly."

Marco hung up immediately. When he eventually opened the door to meet Beal, he tried to feign a look of composure.

"What happened?" he asked anxiously, eager to know the details of what was going on.

Beal wiped the perspiration from his forehead and replied, "Lorrie called me just now. She had forgotten a particular document, so she asked me to bring it over and wait for her at the door. But while we were still talking on the phone, she suddenly cried out in fear, 'Who are you?' Then, the call was

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Marco frowned and hurried to the garage, beckoning Beal to follow him. "I'll search for her myself. Had she left the company at the time you talked with her on the phone? Was there anyone with her at that time?" he asked anxiously.

Beal felt comforted by his relative calmness in the face of danger and difficulty. After thinking for a moment, he answered, "I think she must have been at the garage at that time. The guards there would come to her aid instantly if they heard her cry for help. But if she was surrounded by too many attackers, it would be difficult for the guards to handle them."

Marco didn't say anything in response. He simply bit his lip and stepped on the gas before speeding off.

Fortunately for him, there was no traffic jam. It didn't take long at all before he arrived at Universe Group. He went straight to the underground parking lot.

Since it was working hours, there were only a few people in the garage. The sound of fighting resonated clearly in the empty space. Before long, Marco located Loraine. She was being protected by a few security guards who were facing off against some gangsters.

These three security guards were fighting against five gangsters in black suits. Clearly, they were outnumbered. No matter how hard they tried, it would not be easy for them to guarantee Loraine's safety. Loraine herself wasn't just sitting and hiding. She was also participating in the fight as much as she could, seizing every opportunity to hit back whenever possible.

But she and the guards could not match the physical strength of the criminals.

Just as Marco arrived, he caught sight of one of the gangsters throwing a steel pipe at Loraine.

Marco swung into action immediately. Just as the pipe was about to hit Loraine's head, he put out his arm to fend it off. The steel pipe hit his arm with a heavy and painful thud.

Marco darted a fierce glare at the gangster who had thrown the pipe, and the next second, he gave him a hard kick in the chest, which sent the gangster flying into the air. Then he grabbed Loraine and pulled her to himself. "Be careful!" he warned her.

Loraine was in a daze. She wondered how on earth Marco could have arrived so soon.

Whenever she was in danger, he would always rush to her rescue, as if he were a guardian angel sent from up above.

With his help, the current situation was instantly reversed. The security guards, who had been struggling against the gangsters, now felt relieved and their morale was boosted significantly. They fought back with all their strength and soon began to prevail over the gangsters.

Before long, the last gangster was thrown down and pinned to the ground by the guards. All in all, five gangsters had been subdued.

With an expressionless face, Marco waved his hand dismissively, indicating that the guards could do whatever they liked with the gangsters. Then he turned around to look for

Loraine.

Fortunately, she was safe and sound. When he saw her, he breathed a sigh of relief and asked in a soft tone, "Are you all right?"

Loraine nodded her head and frowned at his bruised arm. "Your arm," she pointed out to him.

At this moment, one of the gangsters suddenly broke free from the guards and lunged towards Loraine. He was determined to finish his task even at the expense of his own life!

Marco had been looking into Loraine's eyes and whispering soft words to comfort her, and since his back was facing the gangster, he didn't see the incoming danger at all. But Loraine did, and her face turned pale at the sight of the gangster. She grabbed Marco in her arms and quickly dragged him aside.

As a result, the gangster missed his target and landed on the ground, shouting in fury. Just as he was about to launch a second attack, there was a loud siren, indicating the arrival of the police!

The police and Marco's bodyguards arrived at the same time. But the security guards had already grabbed the gangster and restrained him.

As he was being restrained, the only thing he could do was to give Marco a ferocious look. Suddenly, his eyeballs became motionless and he slumped to the ground.

Immediately, the policemen called for a doctor. It seemed the gangster had committed suicide!

Loraine was petrified. She had never seen such a relentless killer who would sacrifice his life for his mission. But just as she breathed a sigh of relief that the whole thing was finally



over, she felt a piercing pain in her arm and she couldn't help but let out a groan.

It turned out that her arm had been cut by the gangster when she helped Marco dodge his attack. She didn't notice the bleeding wound until this moment.

Shocked and horrified by her injury, Marco quickly helped her treat the wound, feeling very sorry and guilty.

But Loraine's mind wandered back to the gangsters and she said to Marco, "That last gangster glared at you with a lot of hatred in his eyes. It seems he attacked more ferociously when he saw your face."

