

Chapter 822 The Arrogant Cruz Family

A towering figure loomed in front of the vending machine.

Marco, his gaze lowered, grabbed a bottle of water and a loaf of bread, preparing to head back.

But as he turned around, he was surprised to find someone waiting behind him.

Upon recognizing the man, Marco looked at him with a blank expression and asked icily, "What do you want?"

Clifford adjusted his glasses, a gentle smile on his face, as he said, "I believe there's been a misunderstanding between us. It's important we sit down and clear things up."

Marco held a selection of inexpensive instant food from the vending machine.

His clothes were neat and clean, though lacking any hint of luxury branding. Apart from his air of superiority, there was little that stood out about him.

Clifford, a prominent member of the Cruz family, believed Marco should value the opportunity to speak with him, a respect few earned.

Yet Marco remained aloof.

"There's no misunderstanding to discuss. I have nothing to say to you," Marco declared, passing Clifford without a second

thought.

A shadow of annoyance crossed Clifford's face as he said in a displeased tone, "Marco, you're aware of your true identity, aren't you?"

Tightening his grip on his belongings, Marco halted but didn't turn back.

Laughing behind him, Clifford said, "Marco, remember we're family. I'm your uncle, and Ariadne is your cousin! There's no fault in saving your cousin. Don't fool yourself into thinking you did it for that unimportant stranger."

Marco remained still, a smile of self-derision on his face.

"We are family," he echoed inwardly. These words were familiar, having been uttered by the Bryant family before, always with an underlying threat.

Liza used them once to intimidate him, and now Clifford did the same, without a hint of sincerity.

With a deep breath, Marco closed his eyes, reining in his emotions. He turned, his voice icy. "Don't you get it? Like I said, I want nothing to do with the Cruz family, and I refuse to be a part of it!"

Clifford's smile vanished, his expression darkening.

Nobody had ever dared to speak to him with such disrespect. Yet, Marco did.

With a stern warning, Marco said, "I don't care about your plans, but if you keep troubling Loraine and me, I assure you, you'll regret it."

Upon hearing this, Clifford's fury surged, exclaiming, "You!"

However, glimpsing the resemblance of Marco to the Cruz family patriarch, he restrained his anger, clenched his teeth, and said rigidly, "This is the last time I'm asking. Will you return to the Cruz family with me?"

Not pausing for a response, he pressed on, "Consider your answer carefully. Your father is tied up in Zodiac and couldn't come personally. But remember, you're the only direct descendant besides Ariadna!"

Marco's eyelashes quivered slightly. On the surface, he appeared collected, yet a touch of sadness lingered in his heart.

His so-called father was too engrossed in his affairs to retrieve his estranged son? Clearly, he was an afterthought.

Clifford's voice persisted. "Understand the weight of being a direct descendant in the Cruz family. Your status will eclipse any prestige you have as Mr. Bryant!"

Marco quickly regained his composure, replying indifferently, "I don't need such status. I'm content to stay with the one I love."

Clifford, irked, mocked, "Would you really forsake the Cruz family for that woman? She's no saint! Perhaps she's aware of your lineage and remains by your side for opportunistic reasons, to exploit the Cruz family."

Until now, Marco had been unmoved, but Clifford's words struck a nerve. He glared intensely, demanding, "What did you just say?"

Startled, yet refusing to show it, Clifford recovered swiftly and scoffed, "Isn't it obvious? She's recently ingratiated herself with Ariadna, gaining her trust in a short period of time."

After a brief pause, he concluded, "Without the Cruz influence,



she wouldn't bother with such kindness."

These words made Marco clench his fists, his knuckles emitting a soft crack.

His mind raced with memories of Loraine's support for Ariadna, her efforts to secure a surgery robot, and her quest to find a suitable donor.

In the Cruz family perspective, all these acts were mere manipulations!

Enraged, yet mocking, Marco retorted, "Really? It seems the daughter of the Cruz family lacks any appeal beyond her family's wealth, unworthy of genuine friendship or loyalty."

Chapter 823 Confrontation

Marco had known that the Cruz family, encompassing both the main and side branches, including the longstanding servants, all exhibited a distinct sense of superiority. It seemed to Marco that they thought every street dog was eyeing their fortune, with Ariadna being the sole exception, an outlier in their ranks.

This attitude filled Marco with disdain, yet he also found it amusing. Were these individuals truly human, or just blind followers of their family's prestige?

Clifford challenged him, saying, "How dare you question the Cruz family's ways?"

A smug grin spread across Marco's face, his eyes sparkling with derision. "Didn't you just label me a Cruz family member? So, why wouldn't I have that right?"

Realizing his mistake, Clifford was momentarily speechless, his face turning darker. After a brief pause, he forced a scornful laugh. "Alright, alright, you have a way with words! But remember, being connected to the Cruz family doesn't entitle you to arrogance. The family adheres to strict traditions, and since you were raised outside it, you've got a lot to learn."

Marco's eyes shone with contempt. "Did I ever accept being a part of your family? It's you who keeps pushing this identity on me, and then you're quick to call me arrogant. Who here is really depending on their family's name and causing a scene?"

Once again, Clifford struggled, unable to muster a clever retort.

Deep down, he was baffled by Marco's indifference towards the

esteemed status of the Cruz family's main branch. It seemed Clifford himself had been more eager about Marco embracing this standing.

If not for his elder brother's directive, why would Clifford, of his high rank and position, spend time dealing with such an audacious young man?

Resentment simmered in Clifford's heart. His eyes filled with discontent as he scanned Marco's face.

He even entertained the idea that closeness to the powerful could corrupt. Marco, not raised in the main family, had adopted these unseemly habits, defying those he ought to respect, all influenced by Loraine.

Nevertheless, Marco was still the bloodline of the Cruz family. Clifford couldn't stand by and watch Marco's steady decline. And it wasn't just Marco. Even Ariadna seemed to be enchanted by Loraine.

The possibility of his once compliant and sensible daughter turning into someone like Marco, bold enough to defy and oppose him, chilled Clifford. With a hint of worry, he firmly stated, "Enough, Marco. As your senior, I've overlooked much of your conduct. Do not stir further trouble!"

Then, adopting a gracious demeanor, he stated, "Upon our return to the Cruz estate, you should cut ties with individuals such as Loraine. I will overlook the recent incidents."

Marco's brows knit together, briefly at a loss for words.

He realized arguing with such people was pointless. Their narrow-mindedness seemed incapable of understanding normal conversation.

Despite Marco's repeated disinterest in the Cruz family, Clifford

consistently chose to ignore it.

Marco pressed his lips tightly and remained quiet. Clifford, misreading this as agreement, relaxed his features and said arrogantly, "You and those like her are fundamentally mismatched. Even if you persist in associating with her, the Cruz family will not stand for any disrespect to our honor."

A hidden implication in Clifford's words struck Marco, darkening his expression. He glared at Clifford, hostility burning in his eyes.

Clifford, taken aback, questioned with barely concealed anger, "What do you mean by that look?"

Marco, unflappable, stepped forward confidently, his dominant presence overwhelming Clifford into a reluctant step backward, panic momentarily flashing in his eyes.

"What are you trying to pull off?"

Eventually, Marco stopped next to him, standing a full head taller. He leaned in, issuing a calm, yet firm warning. "Cross Loraine, and I'll turn everything you cherish to dust."

After issuing his warning, Marco, holding bread and water, walked away with a calm demeanor. Clifford stood motionless, paralyzed, until a lone sweat droplet slid down his forehead. That's when reality snapped back for him.

By the time Clifford regained his bearings, Marco had disappeared, leaving him soaked in a cold sweat.

Confronted with this threat, Clifford felt a pressure surpassing any encounter with the head of the Cruz family.

He gasped for air, overwhelmed by a mix of residual fear and intense humiliation. The notion of being overpowered by a

young man was unfathomable to him!

He glared in the direction Marco had left, his face darkening. Gritting his teeth, he hissed, "You impudent brat!"

Yet, he grudgingly acknowledged that Marco was indeed his elder brother's son. Despite a less privileged upbringing and lacking deserved resources, Marco still radiated an impressive authority.

Nearby, his subordinates remained eerily composed, eyes lowered, pretending to be oblivious to the recent altercation.

Underneath his controlled exterior, Clifford simmered with frustration. He motioned for a subordinate to come closer.

"I'll be busy looking after my daughter in the days ahead. Deal with him as we planned. I refuse to accept that we can't handle a young nobody."

Chapter 824 Acquiring The Bryant Group

Exiting the area, Marco didn't immediately hurry back. Concerned that Loraine might detect his emotional distress, he purposefully lingered in the hallway, taking a moment to compose himself.

He gazed down at the crushed bread in his grasp, a sense of helplessness washing over him. The frustration buried deep within him refused to dissipate.

Ever since his liberation from the clutches of the Bryant family, Marco had seldom met individuals as obstinate and exasperating as Clifford. Merely thinking about Clifford's visage was enough to enrage him.

To make matters worse, Clifford's torment wasn't limited to Marco. He had entangled Loraine in this chaos as well. Not only had Clifford maligned her, but he also exploited her to gain leverage over Marco.

A cold glint appeared in Marco's eyes. He was resolute in his decision to protect Loraine, regardless of the complications it might create with the Cruz family, a family with whom his relations were already tenuous.

With this determination in mind, Marco retrieved his phone and called Carl, inquiring, "How's the progress on Solar Company's Zodiac project?"

His scheme to refocus Solar Company's operations domestically was no mere whim. He had initiated several

experimental strategies upon conceiving this plan.

He also remembered a pact made with Loraine during their time at Bryant Group, where they dreamed of expanding from Vagow into Zodiac.

The response was prompt from the other line. "All is moving as planned."

Marco gave a subtle nod, instructing, "Keep a close eye on the Cruz family. While scouting for our subsidiary's location and conducting business for International Solar Company in Zodiac, try to carve out a share from the Cruz family."

His words took Carl by surprise, yet there was no challenge to his directive. "Understood."

After setting down his phone, a steely resolve remained evident in Marco's eyes. He intended to reunite with Loraine, but as he turned, a distant figure caught his attention, one that strikingly resembled her.

He squinted for a clearer view and moved closer, his suspicions growing.

And there, unmistakably, was Loraine. She was deep in conversation with a man. It was Jeroy.

Marco made no attempt to hide, striding into view openly.

Jeroy, who had been lounging against the wall with an easy smile, stiffened at Marco's approach. He straightened abruptly, his body language resembling a salute. "Bo..." Halfway through a greeting, he stopped abruptly, biting his tongue under Marco's icy stare, his smile now forced and overly ingratiating.

"Yes. Boss was anxious, so he sent me here to await the surgical outcomes and report back immediately," he explained

smoothly.

Loraine, understanding yet contemplative, reflected on Jeroy's earlier remark.

The ninth-generation surgical robot was crucial for Solar Company. Their greatest need was for clinical experience. With learnings from a previous operation, this surgery promised new insights. Naturally, the CEO of Solar Company paid close attention to the surgery and its results.

This time, however, the hospital had asked for manual control, relegating Solar Company to a more observant, reactive role.

She brushed aside Jeroy's sudden tone change, turning her attention to Marco, her expression tinged with gentle criticism. "What took you so long?"

It had been quite some time since his departure. Her search for Marco had led to her crossing paths with Jeroy. They had barely exchanged greetings when Marco made his appearance.

Marco, with his striking features perfectly serene, extended the water bottle he was holding, showing no signs of distress. He explained with calmness, "It was busy there. I had to wait in a queue."

Loraine didn't sense anything unusual, yet she caught the complicated look on Jeroy's face. He seemed torn about speaking up, cautious around Marco.

She pondered if Jeroy was holding back due to Marco's presence, seeing as he was, in a sense, an outsider.

Bearing this in mind, she offered a reassuring smile and said, "Jeroy, if there's something on your mind, feel free to share. Marco's not an outsider. You don't have to be so guarded."

Jeroy's expression grew more complex as he stole a quick glance at Marco.

His reluctance stemmed not from his boss but from Loraine. Discussing anything regarding the Solar Company was a delicate matter he wouldn't dare mention in Loraine's presence without Marco's approval.

Meanwhile, Marco, ever unflustered, gave a discreet nod, unseen by Loraine.

This gesture eased Jeroy, who then smiled and began, "Actually, there is news that involves both of you..."

Loraine appeared confused, and Marco quirked an eyebrow in surprise. Jeroy cleared his throat and announced, "The spot for the Solar Company's new branch in Vagow is set. It's the old Bryant Group building. We've taken over the bankrupt Bryant Group, and the building is now renamed the Solar Company building!"

Chapter 825 Unexpected Situation

Upon hearing Jeroy's words, Marco's face grew noticeably darker.

It made sense now why Jeroy had said the matter involved them both. But the news that the Solar Company had taken over the Bryant Group caught Marco off guard.

Few in the Solar Company knew of Marco's connection to the Bryant Group, and the only person with the power to decide such a matter was...

Loraine, equally surprised, asked, "The Solar Company bought the Bryant Group?"

Jeroy, casting another glance at Marco, picked up on the unrest in his boss's demeanor.

He struggled to grasp what Marco was thinking. After pausing, he cautiously clarified, "Yes, following the boss's directives, we're pivoting towards the domestic market."

Loraine, having heard whispers of this from Sullivan, wasn't completely taken aback. She quipped, "I assumed Zodiac would be your first stop, considering Vagow is still a bit of an upstart."

Yet Jeroy stayed serious and deliberate in his response. "Owing to the Solar Company's partnership with Universe Group, we opted for Vagow first, after thoughtful deliberation. And just then, the Bryant Group collapsed, leading Miss Hoffman to acquire it."

While he spoke to Loraine, Jeroy subtly conveyed the truth to Marco. He wanted to underscore that Doris, not he, had made this decision.

He understood Marco's sensitivity to anything involving Loraine and the Solar Company.

Loraine, choosing not to probe further, offered a courteous smile and a nod, keeping her words to herself.

Jeroy, stealing a quick look at Marco's reaction, respectfully addressed Loraine, "I was also planning to pay a visit to the Universe Group, and stumbling upon you here seems like a happy coincidence. I wanted to give you a heads up about upcoming collaborations between Solar Company and Universe Group. I'm really looking forward to your guidance, Miss Torres."

Loraine replied with a self-assured air, undaunted by the international renown of Solar Company.

After delivering his message, Jeroy tactfully made his exit, remarking, "Please, continue your chat. I have to see to something else."

With Jeroy gone, Marco's expression shifted, wavering between clouded thoughts and clarity.

Loraine opened her water bottle, taking a drink, and noticed the chill in Marco's eyes. She lightly chuckled and asked, "What's wrong? Does the mention of Bryant Group's acquisition unsettle you?"

Despite Bryant Group's fall into bankruptcy, its intricate past connections with Marco made his sentiments towards it more complex than his feelings for the Bryant family.

Loraine briefly hesitated before speaking in a comforting tone.

"Most of the previous deals between Bryant Group and Universe Group happened because of you. If this troubles you, I'll step back from continuing those projects with Solar Company."

Back when Marco helmed Bryant Group, he had fostered deep connections with Universe Group, involving not only significant CBD projects but also numerous smaller ones.

Should Solar Company take over Bryant Group, these ventures could flourish, benefiting both. However, if Marco felt conflicted, Loraine was ready to sacrifice these opportunities for his peace of mind.

Marco pondered, weighing the advantages and drawbacks. He sighed, acknowledging Loraine's unspoken support. She had always been mindful of his emotions, like the time she thought he was financially constrained and chose modestly priced venues.

Loraine genuinely had his best interests in mind, and he couldn't stand by while she risked the well-being of Universe Group for him.

Marco's gaze softened, halting Loraine's move to retrieve her phone and text. "There's no need. Letting the projects continue is beneficial and poses no harm. There's no reason to call them off."

Loraine wavered. "But you..."

"I've put the issues with the Bryant family behind me. They belong to the past now," Marco declared, his resolve unshakable.

This sentiment had solidified, particularly after Liza's death. The previous incidents had faded into mere memories.

Noting Marco's genuine expression, Loraine conceded.

A slight smile played on Marco's lips, yet a hint of chill remained hidden in his eyes.

While he had moved on from the Bryant Group's affairs, he still had to address the Solar Company's potential takeover of the Bryant Group.

He had shown faith in Doris by entrusting her with finding a subsidiary location, yet her choice of the Bryant Group building was puzzling. Was this a test or a provocation from her end?

A serious discussion with Doris seemed inevitable.

Regaining his composure, Marco tenderly grasped Loraine's hand, inquiring cautiously, "After Ariadna's surgery, could we leave a bit early?"