

Chapter 524 Do You Still Like Him

After sending Marco away for the moment, Loraine exhaled a heavy breath of relief.

Each interaction with Marco seemed to cloud her thoughts, inexplicably muddling her mind, making it impossible for her to react sensibly.

Loraine's gaze fell, her silence continuing to reign. She seemed cast under a gloomy cloud.

With Marco's departure, the girl in the neighboring bed poked her head out. With a blink and a curious upward gaze at Loraine, she nestled her face in her palms and asked, "Miss, what caused your disagreement with that gentleman?"

A complex expression etched itself on Loraine's face and she struggled to find her words, a bitter feeling swirling inside her.

Witnessing the sight before her, the young girl let out a weary sigh, as if she had seen it all before. "Well, I don't know what's going wrong between you and him, but from what I see, I feel that man really loves you. At the very least, he's kind to you, right? Could this whole thing with Keely be just a mix-up? Why not give him a chance to clarify things?"

A lump formed in Loraine's throat and she couldn't help but let out a sigh.

How was she to explain to this little girl the layers of

resentment and emotional conflict that stood between her and Marco? How could she voice out that she had once been deeply in love with Marco, only to watch him choose Keely over her time and again?

She could never forgive these past actions.

However, in the hush of the hospital ward, the company of this cheerful and unfamiliar girl felt comforting. Even though Loraine didn't know her well, she felt an urge to share her emotions.

Her family would worry if she shared this with them, and mentioning it to her best friend Jennie would only result in a direct confrontation with Marco.

Cayson was out of the question too.

As she considered all her options, she had finally decided that the unfamiliar patient in the same ward as her was the perfect companion to share her thoughts with at that moment.

Loraine found it hard to find a starting point. After a moment's pause, she said softly, "Actually... I was his wife."

The little girl's eyes sparkled immediately. She grinned, triumphantly saying, "I knew it!"

But her joy was short-lived as Loraine continued, "But we're divorced now."

The smile on the little girl's face froze as she struggled to piece together Loraine's story. She exclaimed in frustration, "Is Keely the reason for your separation?"

Loraine merely responded with a bitter smile, not denying it.

Indeed, Keely played a significant role in their growing apart, but their marriage had been marked by disappointment and growing indifference over three years.

Upon hearing this, the little girl's face flushed with anger. From her sickly pallor emerged a fiery indignation as she proclaimed, "Indeed, a good man is hard to find! I thought he cared for you deeply based on his actions. But who would've guessed he was involved with another woman all along! Such a man can't be trusted!"

The girl who had been enthusiastically rooting for their reunion now vehemently advised Loraine against rekindling her relationship with Marco. She said harshly, "Miss, you're so gorgeous. You can have anyone you desire. Don't waste yourself on this unworthy man. He doesn't deserve you! Tell me what you look for in a man. I'll find you someone much better!"

Caught off guard, Loraine shook her head and replied, "I have no interest in falling in love again."

The girl's face tightened with anger as she declared, "That's unacceptable! Did he leave you scarred? Should I teach this Keely a lesson to help you let off some steam?"

"No, thanks!" Loraine quickly interjected, followed by a sigh. "Truthfully, my reasons for not being with him don't solely revolve around Keely."

Though she held on to the anger from the day's events, she had found tranquility and had thought things through.

If Keely was truly engaged to a deceased friend of Marco's, then there was no romantic connection between them. At most, Keely might be clinging onto Marco, purposely stirring up trouble to incite misunderstandings.

Lorraine had figured this out, yet a hurdle remained within her heart.

Discussing her history with Marco felt akin to reopening old wounds.

"I'm still trying to comprehend my relationship with him." She paused mid-sentence, and then proceeded, "From the moment I fell in love with Marco and married him, until the end when I gave up, divorced, and decided to leave, three years have come and gone. How many three years do I have?"

Her voice was barely above a whisper.

"I acknowledge that Marco and I have evolved significantly after we divorced. But, the memory of his past indifference still instills a sense of dread in me, and Keely acts as a thorn in my heart, pricking me with reminders of our past. So I'm not sure if Marco's actions stem from genuine love or a feeling of loss because I initiated the divorce."

With a perplexed gaze, Lorraine added, "Or could it be that his longstanding guilt has him clinging onto me? Is he now trying to make amends?"

Keely was merely a catalyst. Today, Marco's lie had struck a critical blow to their fragile relationship, exposing long-standing issues.

Unconsciously, Lorraine had said quite a lot. Upon finishing, she chuckled at herself. "Our relationship is riddled with too many misunderstandings and contradictions, lacking the basic pillar of trust. Can we really continue in this way?"

Lorraine had shared several episodes of her history with Marco with the girl. She had left out several details, but the girl listened attentively, posing only a single question in

response.

"So, do you still hold feelings for him?"



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Chapter 525 Miss Ariadna

Did she still like Marco?

Loraine was stunned. Marco had asked her this question several times before, and she had always denied it.

Yet, she hadn't managed to figure out the answer to the question at all.

At one point in time, Loraine made a firm resolution that she would no longer allow herself to love Marco, believe in love, or develop any affection for anyone after her divorce.

After a while, however, her resolve wavered in the face of his pursuit, and her heart gradually began to soften towards him.

Up until now, she had been contemplating how to reconcile with Marco and convince her family to accept him.

Now that his lies had been exposed, however, her previous indecisiveness seemed foolish, mocking her innocence and naivety.

Loraine was speechless. Upon realizing that the little girl was patiently waiting for an answer, she instinctively replied "No." However, when she said the word, she felt the lack of conviction in her voice as it came out weakly.

Even if she could fool others, she couldn't fool herself. If she truly didn't like Marco, why had she repeatedly cooperated with him and endured the complications that came with it? So far, things had spiraled out of control.

The little girl let out a sigh, almost as though she could see through Loraine's charade. She then remarked solemnly, "It looks like you haven't let go of him yet."

Loraine immediately felt a pang of sadness. She hadn't expected that she'd be unable to deceive a young girl she barely knew. Was it so obvious that she still liked Marco?

As she observed Loraine's gloomy expression, a thought struck the little girl. She reached out and gently touched Loraine's hair, sighing softly before breaking into a smile.

"Since you still like him, cherish him! It's hard to meet a person you truly like. If you let him slip away because of a misunderstanding, won't you regret it for the rest of your life?" The little girl continued earnestly, "Life is short. An unexpected illness or accident can take it away in an instant. So, to avoid lifelong regrets, you must cherish what you have!"

Moved by the young girl's words, Loraine couldn't help but think of her parents. She nodded blankly, amazed at the profound wisdom coming from someone so young.

The little girl had spoken excitedly, revealing her pale, slender wrist from beneath her sleeve.

On her wrist, she wore an in-patient bracelet that displayed a line of words: "Special Ward 505 Bed 1, Ariadna Cruz."

When Loraine saw those words, her eyes widened in surprise. Her mind immediately became flooded with countless questions.

She was in an ordinary ward. Why was Ariadna there?

As far as Loraine knew, patients in special wards were

usually those who were seriously ill...

Her heart skipped a beat. She had thought Ariadna had a common cold like she did, and hadn't expected her condition to be so serious.

Noticing Loraine's gaze, Ariadna quickly lowered her hand and covered the bracelet once more.

Loraine couldn't suppress her curiosity and concern, and bombarded Ariadna with questions. "Your name is Ariadna, right? You are supposed to be in Ward 505. Why are you here? Are you alright?"

Ariadna scratched her head and flashed a smile. "Oh, you caught me! Please don't tell on me. My room is so boring. I couldn't stand it anymore, so I snuck out. I just got transferred to this hospital, so I wanted to take a little walk!"

Amidst this wave of new information, Ariadna avoided saying a word about her illness. Instead, she just smiled and smoothly changed the topic. "Miss, your fever has gone down. You can be discharged after taking this bottle of saline water. What's it like outside the hospital? I've never been to Vagow before."

Loraine replied in a gentle voice, "Vagow is prosperous, with several beautiful attractions. I'll take you around when you get better."

A sense of longing gleamed in Ariadna's eyes. It was as if she wanted to stretch her thin body out into the vast world outside the window.

"Great. I hope so... I haven't been in good health since I was a child, and I've missed out on so much. I can't go to many places or do many things I want to do. Alas, what I regret most is that I can't experience falling in love."

Lorraine's heart sank. She had initially felt a wave of sadness engulfing her, however when she heard Ariadna's last sentence, she wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. "What's the use of falling in love? It only ruins the mood."

Ariadna replied in a serious tone, "I know that love can hurt people, but there must also be some sweet and tender moments to go along with it. I'd rather experience brilliance and unrestrained passion for a short while than be filled with regret all the time. Right now, I can do nothing and feel nothing."

Lorraine felt sour. "Ariadna..."

In a surprising twist, Ariadna gave Lorraine a gentle pat on her hand and comforted her, saying, "Don't worry. I have it all figured out! Just remember my advice; cherish what you have now!"

Just as Lorraine was about to respond, a frantic woman burst into the ward and glanced around anxiously.

Startled, Ariadna instinctively grabbed Lorraine's hand and tried to shield herself, however the woman had already pounced on her and exclaimed, "Oh, Miss Ariadna! I've finally found you. You scared me to death!"

The woman strode forward and ran her hands over Ariadna from head to toe, checking for any signs of harm. After confirming that nothing had happened to Ariadna, she placed a hand on her chest and breathed a sigh of relief, giving thanks to God.

"Miss Ariadna, come back to the ward with me. We've been looking all over for you!"

Turning around, the woman noticed Lorraine standing

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beside her. She immediately narrowed her gaze and asked fiercely, "Who are you? Did you lead Miss Ariadna astray?"



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Chapter 526 Their Identities Are Worlds Ap...

The woman was somewhat rotund, garbed in a maid's uniform crafted from exquisite materials. However, her outfit was soaked with sweat, leaving noticeable damp spots, and sweat also covered her forehead.

Even though Loraine knew the woman's ire stemmed from concern for Ariadna, her tone still made Loraine feel uneasy.

Loraine fixed her with a piercing gaze. As she was about to say something, Ariadna grabbed the woman's sleeve, shook her head and intervened, "Mrs. Castro, please, don't."

It was apparent that Ariadna trusted this woman, and even seemed somewhat dependent on her.

"Mrs. Castro, it gets so monotonous staying in my ward all day, so I ventured out. I happened to meet Loraine outside, and we conversed for a while. She's been quite pleasant to me."

Upon hearing this, Tillie Castro's expression softened. She offered a slight bow to Loraine and apologized, "I'm sorry. I was just overly concerned about Ariadna. Please forgive me."

Loraine shook her head, signaling that she took no offense.

After apologizing, Tillie helped Ariadna out of bed and gently took hold of her slender arm, her eyes filled with worry. She couldn't help but grumble, "Vagow is truly inferior to Zodiac. It's heartbreaking that you have to suffer

for a while."

From Tillie's actions, Loraine deduced she must be one of Ariadna's personal servants brought to the hospital to attend to her. The sincere concern in Tillie's words was not something an ordinary servant or hired nurse could feign.

Ariadna stuck her tongue out at Loraine, as if to complain about Tillie's nagging. Then she smiled and said, "Actually, I like Vagow. I've heard about the newly constructed smart city and the new commercial area in the CBD. Once I recover, I must go and explore."

Despite Ariadna's naughtiness, each of her actions indicated a solid upbringing.

Loraine surmised that Ariadna must hail from an affluent family. However, Ariadna's amiable and relaxed demeanor made Loraine increasingly fond of her. She encouraged Ariadna with a warm smile, "Ariadna, return to your ward first and undergo your treatment. Once you're well, I can take you sightseeing."

Upon hearing this, Ariadna's eyes sparkled with surprise. "Really?"

Loraine nodded, "I'm from Vagow. My name is Loraine Torres. You can seek me out anytime."

Flushed with excitement, Ariadna nodded fervently, took hold of Tillie's hand, and pleaded, "Mrs. Castro, can I exchange phone numbers with Loraine?"

During her hospital stay, all her electronic devices had been confiscated and kept by Tillie.

Tillie shot a glance at Loraine and, remaining silent, provided the phone number.

Lorraine didn't mind Tillie's glance.

After all, she was befriending Ariadna, not her servant Tillie.

After jotting down her number, Lorraine reciprocated by generously providing her own.

Ariadna's smile brightened as they exchanged phone numbers and she repeated her agreement to meet Lorraine for a fun outing once she recovered. Consequently, she no longer resisted returning to her special ward and departed in good spirits.

Tillie watched her retreating figure with affection, but did not immediately follow her. Instead, she lingered behind in the ward.

Observing Tillie's actions, Lorraine realized that she wished to speak with her privately.

After Ariadna was out of sight, Tillie turned around, her gaze settling on Lorraine. She warned in a low voice, "Miss Torres, whatever your intentions are, don't assume you can simply attach yourself to Ariadna. She may be kind and naive enough to agree to your friendship, but I'll be watching her closely and won't allow anyone with ill intent to approach her."

Lorraine furrowed her brows, but still sought to clarify, "You've misunderstood. I bear no ulterior motives. I simply wish to be friends with Ariadna."

Tillie gave her an arrogant once-over and scoffed, "So you've discovered that Ariadna is the daughter of the renowned Cruz family from Zodiac, and now you've chosen to demonstrate your friendliness, correct?"

Hearing that Ariadna's surname was Cruz and that she hailed from an influential family, Loraine was slightly taken aback. She had speculated that Ariadna might belong to the Cruz family of Zodiac, but hadn't expected such a coincidence to be true.

No wonder Tillie, despite being a servant, seemed so lofty. Loraine found it amusing. So what if Ariadna was a Cruz? Did that imply everyone should shower her with extra attention?

Yet, Tillie continued to posture arrogantly, her pride evident. Clearly, that's exactly what Tillie thought.

With a stern tone, she advised, "I suggest Miss Torres relinquish any hopes. Don't dream of becoming Ariadna's friend. Your identities and statuses are worlds apart, so you better..."

Before Tillie could finish, a cold male voice interrupted.

"You are right. Loraine is the CEO of Universe Group and the daughter of the Torres family. Not just anyone is worthy of her friendship."

Chapter 527 Don't Belittle Miss Ariadna

Tracing the source of the sound, Loraine spotted Marco entering, clutching a fancy lunchbox. His protective stance suggested that he had caught wind of Tillie's prior conversation.

His words startled Tillie. The Universe Group was no small player in Vagow. Its reputation had spread far and wide, even into Zodiac. The group's latest accomplishments had drawn the attention of the influential Cruz family.

A young girl like Loraine was the CEO of the Universe Group? That was something Tillie had not anticipated!

Her facial features softened, but she maintained her pride, shaking her head. "Even as the precious offspring of the Torres family, you stand no chance against Miss Ariadna of the Cruz family in Zodiac."

Loraine, through her interactions with Grady, had an idea about the power and prestige of the Cruz family. This vast ancient lineage, with ties to European royalty, was certainly an aristocratic one.

Yet, the arrogance displayed by Tillie, a mere servant, made Loraine sneer. Ariadna, the Cruz lady herself, was far less haughty. How could Tillie be so disrespectful and cocky?

Not knowing exactly what had happened, Marco only knew of Tillie's disrespect for Loraine. He stepped forward to defend Loraine, his face stern. "Is a noble family's prestige

all that impressive? The age of nobility is long gone! Compared to such status, Loraine's achievements shine brighter!"

Anger surfaced on Tillie's face. "What can she possibly accomplish compared to Miss Ariadna?"

Marco, unfazed by Tillie's anger, began to recite Loraine's accomplishments. "Loraine is the mastermind behind Vagow's new landmark, the Smart City, and the revamped business district in the CBD. She recently undertook the project of renovating White Cloud Airport.

Starting from scratch as an ordinary designer in the Universe Group, despite being the heir of the Torres family, she climbed her way up to CEO. These feats are commendable in their own right. As for Miss Ariadna, as you mentioned, what has she achieved?"

Listening to Marco singing her praises, Loraine felt a flush of bashfulness mixed with immeasurable joy.

He vividly remembered their shared journey.

Tillie found herself at a loss for words, but managed to mutter, "Miss Ariadna has been ill and hospitalized for some time. Yet, her artistic talent has earned her acclaim from several artists. If she were healthy, she would certainly outshine Loraine!"

Marco snorted at this, his words slicing through the air. Although usually reserved, he didn't hold back when it came to defending Loraine.

"So she hasn't accomplished anything? You put so much emphasis on family status and reputation, boasting about this Cruz family... Are those praises from artists genuine, or are they simply pandering to your Cruz family?"

Tillie was left dumbstruck, her face cycling through shades of red and purple. She found herself unable to respond. Earlier, she had wielded the same argument against Loraine, and now, Marco was throwing it back at her!

With a calm demeanor, Marco continued, "In terms of talent and capability, Loraine surpasses this Miss Ariadna a hundredfold. Those who solely ride on their family's reputation should refrain from appearing in public to save themselves from humiliation!"

As Loraine listened to his sharply worded defense, she was about to intervene when Tillie, angered by his derogatory remarks about Ariadna, shot Marco a fierce look.

Just then, Marco reached Loraine, bending over to cast a tender look at her. His face was sharp and commanding, radiating a chilly aura in the dim hospital room. Tillie was taken aback by the sight, rubbing her eyes in disbelief.

She had dismissed him earlier, but now she couldn't help but give him a second look.

Sensing her disrespectful stare, Marco's expression grew cold and stern. His strikingly handsome features stared back at Tillie.

Tillie's face shifted, and she exclaimed, "Mr. Cruz..."

Marco's eyebrows furrowed in confusion, and Loraine mirrored his surprise.

What did Tillie mean? Why was she calling him that way?

Did she find Marco familiar?

Could she have mistaken him for a member of the Cruz

Chapter 527 Don't Belittle Miss Ariadna
family from Zodiac?

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
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Chapter 528 I Don't Resemble Anyone

Loraine raised an eyebrow at Marco, asking, "When did you forge a connection with the Cruz family of Zodiac?"

This man certainly had a knack for keeping secrets. Loraine hadn't forgotten his prior clandestine collaboration with the Solar Company. It wouldn't surprise her if he'd had dealings with the Cruz family of Zodiac.

Marco pursed his lips, shaking his head without hesitation. "No connection. At most, I've interacted with Grady and Mrs. Cruz, but no direct dealings with the Cruz family of Zodiac."

Loraine mused over this, puzzled by Tillie's seemingly familiar reaction earlier.

But if Marco had no association with them, what had provoked Tillie's reaction?

Regaining her composure, Tillie attempted to gloss over the situation with a light cough. "I apologize, I must have confused you with someone else. This gentleman bears a striking resemblance to an acquaintance of mine."

Her unsettled demeanor lingered, her anticipations unfulfilled as she cast another glance at Marco, asking, "Sir, might I inquire as to who you are? And how do you know the young master, Grady Cruz, from our Cruz family?"

Marco didn't reciprocate Tillie's inquiry with a friendly response.

She'd just displayed disdain towards Loraine, sporting an arrogant demeanor. Even though he didn't know who she'd mistaken him for, he had no intention of indulging her curiosity.

Tillie appeared somewhat embarrassed at not receiving a response and guessed that Marco's indifference had something to do with her earlier impoliteness. She also knew better than to make a scene.

It was Loraine who, in consideration of her friendship with Ariadna and for the sake of clarification, interjected, "This is Marco Bryant, the CEO of the Bryant Group. He has business connections with the Cruz family in the antique art industry in Vagow, hence their acquaintance."

On hearing the name "Bryant," Tillie's expression grew even more perplexed, murmuring to herself, "The Bryant family... Why such a similarity? How could they look so much alike?"

Loraine glanced at Tillie, curiously asking, "Similar to whom? Who did you mistake him for? Is there someone from the Cruz family in Zodiac who resembles him?"

Judging by Tillie's tone when mentioning that person, even without a name, it was clear that she held this individual in high regard, hinting at their eminent status.

But what possible connection could Marco have with the Cruz family?

Marco's brow furrowed deeper, a look of distaste apparent. He already harbored a negative impression of Grady and Florence of the Cruz family, and now, Tillie's comments just amplified his distaste. He wanted no association with the Cruz family.

His reluctance to pursue the topic further was evident in his grim expression.

Tillie spoke hesitantly. "No, no. As I mentioned earlier, I mistook him for someone else. Oh, I must return. Miss Ariadna must be getting anxious without me..."

With that, she hastily retreated, leaving Loraine to ponder her strange behavior.

The peculiar interaction with Tillie made both of them puzzled. Loraine felt compelled to clarify to Marco, "The girl in the bed next to mine is Miss Ariadna of the Cruz family from Zodiac. That Tillie is her servant."

Marco nodded. He was indifferent to Tillie's identity; had she not offended Loraine, he wouldn't have engaged with her at all.

With a curious glance at him, Loraine probed, "That Tillie had such a peculiar reaction upon seeing you. Aren't you curious about who she thought you were?"

Marco scoffed, "I don't resemble anyone. I am who I am. I have no interest in such nonsensical speculations."

Despite his curiosity about his biological mother – after discovering Laura wasn't his birth mother – he had abandoned any further investigation upon encountering the disdainful attitude of the Bryant family and his father's reluctance to reveal anything. Marco deduced that his birth mother's background was nothing to boast about. How could he have any connection to the Cruz family?

Choosing not to delve deeper into this matter, he smiled at Loraine, "It's a relief they left. Now, you can rest peacefully. Had Ariadna stayed, I would've arranged a room change for

you."

Lorraine gave him a scornful look. "Weren't you the one who kept disturbing my peace?"

Caught off guard, Marco deflected and shifted the conversation to the lunchbox in his hand. "Weren't you hungry? I've brought all the dishes you mentioned earlier. It's time for your meal."

As he spoke, Marco casually settled down beside her bed, an intimate gesture that took Lorraine by surprise.

It occurred to her then that they had been in a heated argument not too long ago.

Despite the interruption by Tillie, she found her anger subsiding. Yet, letting Marco off so easily seemed too lenient to her.

Just a moment ago, they were locked in a cold war, and now, they were sharing a meal on the same bed. The rapid shift was a bit too much for her.

Unsettled by the situation, Lorraine was about to request Marco to shift when he calmly opened the lunchbox, revealing an array of dishes she had requested.

The food was visually appealing, a varied assortment of dishes accompanied by ample soup. Despite her mixed feelings of annoyance and helplessness, Lorraine found herself unable to resist the food and glared at Marco.

This sly man must have planned this!

Chapter 529 Feeding Her

The food box towered half a meter high, large and stacked with multiple layers, brimming with an assortment of dishes that Loraine had mentioned to purposely vex Marco.

Staring at the various dishes, Loraine was in shock. She had thrown out the names of the dishes randomly just to drive Marco away. Had he taken it so seriously that he went through the trouble of ordering each and every one of them?

Did he actually visit each restaurant and engage different chefs?

Her emotions stirred at the thought, but as soon as the food was served, she realized the trick and couldn't help but feel a mix of amusement and irritation.

Marco was becoming quite the crafty one!

A quick glance told Loraine that the dishes weren't exactly what she'd ordered, but rather healthier, low-sugar versions suitable for a patient. Even a dish of butter-fried foie gras had the fatty liver replaced with chicken breast, yet the presentation was so meticulous that one would mistake it for real foie gras at first glance.

Loraine felt that her intelligence had been underestimated.

She picked up a piece of lean meat and feigned surprise. "Mr. Bryant, where did you find such an athletic goose? The meat is so firm that I thought it was chicken."

Marco choked on her words, and then smoothly replied,

"Given the late hour, I asked a chef to prepare it immediately. However, the restaurant's ingredients were nearly depleted, so substitutions were made. I assure you, though, these dishes are both healthy and delectable, perfect for a patient in need of nutrition."

Having once cooked a "nutritious meal" for him, Loraine could tell these dishes were thoughtfully prepared and not meant for retaliation.

Realizing Marco had genuinely considered her needs, Loraine's emotions churned. She also found herself surprised. When had Marco become so considerate and attentive?

Noticing her hand still connected to the IV with a small amount of fluid remaining, Marco offered, "You haven't finished your infusion yet, so it may be inconvenient for you to eat. Tell me what you want, and I'll feed you."

Loraine's initial reaction was to refuse, but the enticing aroma of the food overwhelmed her senses, stirring the hunger that had been building in her stomach. Her stomach grumbled in agreement, pleading for food.

Though Loraine tried to resist, her gaze involuntarily roamed over the extensive array of food, eventually settling on the chicken porridge.

The porridge was flawlessly prepared, its creamy white base garnished with tender yellow chicken strips. The sprinkle of spring onions and a hint of ginger enhanced the flavor, a medley of freshness and aroma that filled her nostrils. The prospect of a warm, gratifying spoonful of porridge was too enticing to resist...

Noticing her hesitation, Marco smiled affectionately. Without waiting for her response, he scooped up a

spoonful and held it to Loraine's lips.

The unusual touch of gentleness in his smile left Loraine feeling even more irresistible.

Exhausted as she was, Loraine had no energy to evade the tempting porridge that was brought to her lips. Instinctively, she opened her mouth and tasted it.

Instantly, her taste buds were gratified, and she heard Marco's low, encouraging voice, "Good girl, now swallow."

Unconsciously, Loraine swallowed, sighing with satisfaction. Then she abruptly came to her senses—what was she allowing Marco to do?

How was it that his smile could so effortlessly enchant her into compliance, making it seem as if she would do whatever he asked of her?

Now alert again, Loraine became irritated and snapped, "Who asked you to feed me? Do you think I'm a child?"

Marco chuckled and responded in a soft voice, "No, of course not."

Despite his words, his hand didn't cease its movement as he scooped another spoonful of porridge and presented it to her.

He was clearly treating her like a child!

Annoyed, Loraine pursed her lips, refusing to eat. Marco patiently coaxed, "Once you've eaten and the drip is nearly finished, you can go if you wish. I promise not to bother you again."

Skeptical, Loraine asked, "Are you serious?"

Marco nodded, timing it perfectly to feed her another spoonful of porridge, which Loraine obediently swallowed.

Considering the situation, she saw the benefits of complying with him and decided to relax.

So Loraine was lured into eating spoonful after spoonful. Before she knew it, she had consumed all the porridge. She shook her head to indicate that she didn't want to eat anymore.

However, Marco remained unfazed. He fetched a bowl of nutritious soup and continued his coaxing, "Eat a little more, or our deal doesn't stand."

Loraine suspected she'd been duped, but the dishes tasted divine. Charmed by his gentle feeding, she consumed two more dishes without even realizing it.

When Marco tried to serve her another portion, Loraine couldn't manage any more. She closed her mouth and attempted to shoo him away, saying, "I'm full now! You said you wouldn't bother me anymore, so leave!"

Marco pursed his lips and leaned in closer to her. He reached out to wipe something from the corner of her lips, whispering, "Hold on, you ate so fast that you made a mess."