Ruling 1091

Chapter 1091

The reason sounded similar to what Arianne had told her, which did make it a bit more convincing to Tiffany. “So you’re telling the truth? Can you swear to God on it? Now? Cause if you lie, this relationship will be over very, very soon.”

Jackson was at his wit’s end. Swear on this? No way in hell would he be able to swear on this! “Tiffany West! I’m not gonna swear on something because the whole concept of it is ridiculous! And we’ll never be over! You’re bound to me forever, and that’s that!”

Tiffany pulled him closer to her. “Scared, huh? Why? Is it because you’re lying? That’s it, isn’t it?! You think I’m stupid? You think I’m a fool?! You—urgh, you are the worst!”

He kissed her. It was the best way to stop her from escalating the quarrel.

On her end, Tiffany responded by putting more force into the kiss while her hand snaked around his waist. She was about to do more when he stopped her. “That’s enough. Sleepy time.”

Tiffany was displeased. “So I’m not even desirable to you anymore?”

Jackson almost burst into laughter. “Please, you know deep down inside that that ain’t the case at all. I’m only stopping myself for the sake of our child… Tiffie, we’re happy together, aren’t we? I’d never do anything that would betray you, not now and not ever. Please don’t doubt me like that.”

Tiffany gave a quiet sneer and turned her back against him. “Here it comes again, Jackson. You saying such frickin’ nice things that I cannot help but melt and stop being mad. But whenever I'm alone, I’d start to overthink and speculate these horrible scenarios. Can you please stop hiding things from me all the damn time, Jackson? I’m stronger than you think, you know.”

Jackson helped tuck her in with their sheet. “‘Kay.”

Presently, in the Smith’s Private Manor, Alejandro and Don Smith were on a standoff, scowling at each other and not backing down.

Don suddenly smacked his hand on the desk. “I’ve been doing all of this for your own good! Aren’t you the one who wants to be Alejandro f*cking Smith?! Not one—not a single one—of us Smiths is a wide-eyed softie! None! How the f*ck am I supposed to feel okay to hand over the family to you, huh? Everyone who has betrayed you has to die—no exception! If you let the rats go, they will bite you back in the ass. All I was doing is to help you clean the f*ck up!”

“But I didn’t f*cking ask, did I? Lynn knew nothing! All Jackson asked her to do was to pick a lock of my hair! He didn’t tell her anything else! Must you kill her?” Alejandro retorted icily. “For f*ck’s sake, I don’t need you sticking your hand into my affairs!”

Don laughed mirthlessly. “Ha, leaving your affairs alone? As long as you’re my grandson, I’ll stick my hands into your affairs however I like! You don’t wanna turn back into pathetic little Ethan Connor, do you? Because your ass is gonna get kicked into jail,” he mocked. “That’s right. I’ve investigated your past. Every disgusting thing you’ve ever done is known to me, especially the juicy bits between you and Tiffany West. You’re even less humane than I’ve imagined, tsk.”

Alejandro fell silent. Don’s words had succeeded in bringing back his shadows—the ones he had been trying to put behind him.

While watching Alejandro's expression, Don's stance softened accordingly. "Listen, Alex. I just want the best for you, okay? Besides, whatever happened, happened. Lynn's dead! We don't let a dead woman get in between our relationship now, do we? Go and rest up. When your legs have recovered, you can take over the family company. I'm basically just a bag of old bones now. I can't do this for long. Hell, I'm f*cking tired almost all the time."

Alejandro did not say anything. Instead, he pushed his wheels and left his study.

He returned to his bedroom and found himself staring straight at Melanie, who was standing by his bedside. He sized her up with the same nonchalance. "What?"

Melanie placed the news article about Lynn in front of him. "Didn't you tell me you're gonna let her live? You told Jett to let her go and then stabbed her in the back? Alejandro Smith, I've been blind about you!"

Alejandro looked at her, deadpanned. He looked like he was about to explain himself, yet his lips remained stubbornly sealed.

He realized there was no reason to explain anything to her. He never did care about what Melanie thought of him.

His stoic, affectless attitude made Melanie's heart plummet to the abyss. "You know what? Fine. People like you are monsters. I… I should stay as far away from you as possible, which is why I'm going back to the Ayashe tomorrow. Relax, I'll tell my parents it's because I miss home and not because we have a… complication."

With that, she spun on her heel without hesitance and left.

Alejandro closed his eyes in frustration and called out to Jett. “I want you to personally see to it that Melanie returns to the Ayashe tomorrow. Be by her side until she reaches home,” he ordered. “After that, you may take a break. No need to serve me unless I call you. Tanya’s moving into late pregnancy and she needs someone to look after her.”

Chapter 1092

Jett had a pretty good guess as to why Melanie left. Nonetheless, he asked Alejandro gingerly, “Was it really you who killed Lynn?”

Alejandro shot him a meaningful, sidelong glance. “What do you think?”

“I don’t think it was you,” Jett admitted, shaking his head. “None of your people had been mobilized that day, while I received no directives from you. So… It’s from the Don, isn’t it? Why didn’t you tell Madam the truth?”

Alejandro flashed him a self-deprecating smile. “Why would I do that? Does it matter how she thinks of me? I’ll never love her, and neither will I let her love me. Her affection’s only going to get in my way. Besides, she’s made it clear that she’s never gonna divorce me, which is all I need from her,” he said. “I’m exhausted, and I need a rest. Go.”

Jett gave a grunt of understanding and went out of the room, shutting the door.

After a night of heavy snowfall, the city woke up to see itself blanketed by white flurries. Even before the morning broke, city cleaners were already hard at work, shoving the mounds of snow out of the streets.

Arianne puffed her breaths onto her hands. “It’s f-f-freezing today! Gotta tell Mary to let Smore put on some extra clothes today.”

“Why? Our home’s heated,” Mark pointed out flatly.

Arianne was stunned into silence. It was moments like these when she suspected that her intelligence had fallen, if not because she had been so preoccupied with her pregnancy that she neglected other faculties of her brain.

When they arrived at Arianne’s company entrance, Mark tidied her collar and said, “Fetch you after work.”

She smiled and stepped out of the car. “I know, I know.”

Weathers like this would inadvertently bump up the popularity of any warm beverages—so much so that upon reaching her office, Arianne realized that the hot water supply in the water station was almost always stuck on the red light of “empty”. Apparently, everybody was desperate for something hot, so getting a cup of warm water had turned into a race, with the losers having to wait for the next round.

Arianne finally obtained her priceless cup of warm water and was ready to work. With her drafts in hand, she marched into the workshop and began working out a sample.

Unfortunately, the climate had stiffened her hands a little too much. While using the sewing machine, Arianne's hand slipped, and the needle punctured through her finger.

Agony flared up so strongly that cold sweat broke out of her. Face ashen in pain, she freed her finger and quickly placed it inside her mouth, sucking the blood and hoping it could hasten its healing.

It was then when someone gave her a band-aid. "Try this."

Arianne squeezed out a smile and thanked the young woman who came to her rescue. She opened the band-aid, wrapped it around her wound, and drew out a long breath. "God, that frickin' hurt. I should have waited until my hands were warmer and more nimble before starting on this sample."

"If your hands aren't in their best, maybe… Maybe I can help you make that sample instead? You could just hand me the design plan and details, and I'll sew away," the young woman said. "Yeah, not an official worker here—still an intern, me—but making samples for other people is kinda my thing. You can say I know my way around this machine, haha! You could always watch me make your stuff from the side."

Arianne gratefully stood up from her seat. "Thank you so much! I'll bring the mannequin over here in the meantime, okay?"

Just then, someone shouted from the door leading into the workshop, "Arianne Tremont, someone's looking for you!"

Arianne gave an “oh!”, placed the mannequin down, and hurried outside.

When she reached the hall on the ground floor, she found out that the person looking for her was none other than Aery Kinsey, whose presence immediately summoned a layer of frost on Arianne’s face. “Why are you here?”

Chapter 1093

Aery’s appearance had changed a lot. Her erstwhile garishly technicolor hair had been dyed to black. She wore no makeup, which made her look like a sweet, youthful ingenue. For a moment, she looked a little identical to Arianne with her modest outfit.

“Hey now, Ari, don’t misunderstand me. I’m not here looking for trouble,” she stated. “I’m only here because… Well, Mom’s sick. She didn’t want me to let you know about it, but I thought you’d probably liked to know and visit her sometime, so I came here. I can’t take too many breaks to care for her all the time, especially since I’m gonna go back to studying overseas after a few days. Sorry to trouble you, Ari, but you might have to take care of Mom for a bit.”

Arianne frowned. Since when had Aery become so… prim and proper? She called her “Ari” and Helen, “Mom”. The difference between her present and past was so jarring, Arianne wondered if the woman standing before her was someone else wearing her skin.

“Don’t call me Ari. I can’t stand hearing it from you. Leave her address with me, and I’ll visit her after work.”

Aery hung her head. “Um, I know I’ve done a lot of terrible things in the past, but I was young and stupid. I didn’t know better, you know? People learn from their mistakes. I certainly did. I’m different now.”

Arianne was not at all convinced. The sort of atrocities Aery had committed was simply not something that could be forgiven over a few words of apologies. “I’m not interested to know anything about you, especially since it’s got nothing to do with me. Also, I’m busy. If you’ve got nothing else to talk about, then I’m leaving.”

With that, Arianne turned and walked away, ignoring Aery’s repeated calls.

Arianne returned to the workshop and found unease gnawing her mind. Had Helen fallen sick? Was that why she had not been visiting her for a long time? She should, perhaps, check on her mom, after all.

Since the finger Arianne hurt was her right index finger, it effectively prevented her from drafting ideas or creating samples. In other words, It was just the perfect excuse to request a half-day leave.

Arianne filled the young intern helping on her sample in on the details. After making sure the intern got it right, Arianne left.

She arrived at the destination, following Helen’s address. She pressed the doorbell several times until Aery yanked open the door, her face shining happily while exclaiming, “You’re here, Ari!”

Bile rose within Arianne. “I told you not to call me Ari. It’s ‘Arianne’ for you,” she replied stoically.

Aery's hands tightened around the edge of her clothes, visibly despondent. "Okay, then. Mom's in her bedroom upstairs."

Aery tailed Arianne as the latter climbed the stairs. When she appeared inside the bedroom, Helen, who was lying on her bed, hurriedly sat up. "Arianne! Why are you here?"

Arianne dragged a chair from the side and sat. "Aery told me you're sick. What kinda sickness?"

Helen cast Aery a sulking look. "It's not as serious as it sounds, just a small surgery. I haven't gotten the time to see you or Smore… How's it been going? Life's good, I hope?"

Arianne nodded, her discomfort showing. This would be the first time the three of them—mother and two half-sisters—were together in a room without an undercurrent of conflict.

As though she read through Arianne's mind, Helen tried to get Aery out of the room. "Aery, don't you have something better to do? You don't have to stay here."

Aery shot Arianne one last wistful, brooding look and went out of the door.

Helen sighed. "Well, Aery's a lot better than she used to be, isn't she? That's something I could be proud of—or, at the very least, she's not embarrassing me anymore. I don't harbor any lofty hopes for her. I would be happy if she could have even half of what you are, Ari."

Arianne shrugged. “Let us hope that she really has taken a turn for the better. But you don’t need to compare her to me. Everyone’s different. We all are.”

Helen smiled. “Heh. Still the same, unaffected girl as I remember. You always talk to me like we’re strangers. I bet a casual observer wouldn’t think of us as mother and daughter,” she remarked. “I planned to leave the Capital—and everything about it—behind, before Jean’s released from prison. I want to make sure that he won’t ever get to us and haunt us… For the sake of our peace.”

There was still a long time before Jean’s scheduled release, especially since Arianne had not heard any news of an early release. What made this decision especially ironic, however, was that Jean Kinsey was the original impetus that had driven Helen to abandon everything she had for that chance to be with him. And yet now, he had become her impetus to flee as far as possible.

Fate always has a rather sick sense of humor.

Chapter 1094

After a momentary pause, Helen continued. “You’re now living a good life, Arianne. You may not even need any reparation from me anymore. The future hides behind a fog. We don’t know how it’ll be. All I know is that we’ll definitely be in different cities, so please, make sure you continue living well.”

For some reason, Arianne was starting to feel a little irritated. “I’ve never wanted any ‘reparations’ from you. It has always been your idea. And honestly, it’s not like I can stop you from going anywhere you want.”

Faint despondence lingered in Helen's eyes. "I only worry that, since you believed that I'd abandoned you out of my selfish reasons, you would think the same as well this time. I know you don't need me anymore, I do, but… I can't stop myself from going there. From feeling a deep sense of regret, and then hesitance—"

Arianne rose to her feet. "No, I won't even think that way at all. You don't need to feel regret, either. Anything I was denied in the past, I have them now in the present. I'm not alone," she proclaimed. "I'm glad to see that you're fine, so please excuse me, I gotta go."

Helen wanted to leave her bed and see her away, but her movement seemed to have pulled on her surgical wound, causing a sharp stab of pain that made her face turn white.

Arianne's instincts almost spurred her into holding Helen's hand, yet the other part of her forced that intuitive action down. "It's fine. Rest. You don't have to see me off."

With that, she left—or more accurately, she fled.

Arianne did not know why she wanted to flee so much. Was it because she was afraid that Helen might catch that little widening crack of vulnerability in her heart?

She truly meant to say that no. She did not want to be abandoned again, and yes, she wanted Helen's reparations! But Arianne knew what reality was. For Aery's future, Helen would, one day, leave Arianne again. She would go somewhere far away so that Jean could never locate them.

A human's lifespan was always too short. It was bad enough when one had lost 20-odd years of their life. It was bad enough that it caused an unrepairable void behind. But to also realize that her future was fated to be just as empty and unimproved as before? It was a sinking, bitter realization.

Arianne wished Helen never reappeared after she vanished from her life. Why did the two of them have to cross paths again after so many years? Why force Arianne to suffer the cruel fate of having her hopes dashed?

Arianne returned to the Tremont Estate and took off her heavy-duty parka and enjoyed the weight leaving her. She lay on the couch, settling into the inertia too much to want to move.

A while later, Mary brought Smore with her and approached Arianne. "Ari! Are you back already? What about work?"

Arianne raised her right hand and shook it. "I hurt my finger, so I took a half-day leave."

Smore struggled out of Mary's arms and made his way toward his mommy, prompting Arianne to joke. "Hey, Smore. Mommy's gonna lose her mom again, while you're not gonna have a maternal grandma."

She did not seem to realize how palpable the dejection and anguish were in her voice.

All of these happened because of one Jean Kinsey. Helen had abandoned her the first time because of him, and now she abandoned her a second time to avoid him. What changed, however, was that Arianne no longer made the moroseness of being abandoned known.

Sadness was a useless emotion. It did not matter how sad she might be—it simply righted nothing.

It was only when the day had almost reached one's usual time off work when Arianne finally remembered that she had not informed Mark of her early return. She rushed to call him, though, to her relief, Mark had yet to start driving toward her company.

After receiving the news of Arianne's injury, Mark instantly rushed home. "How did you get hurt, exactly? Is it serious?"

Arianne made a show of flexing her bandaged index finger. "Oh, the needle went through my finger. It hurts, but that's about it. It happened while I was working away in the workshop. It's fine. Oh, and uh, I… went to see Helen in the afternoon."

Chapter 1095

Arianne had automatically treated Mark as someone worthy of sharing her joy and troubles, just as a typical human was wont to do. People would always leave very little of themselves secret from their close ones.

Mark looked at her, serious. "What happened?"

She flashed him a forced smile. "She's sick, but it didn't look too serious. She had just undergone some small-scale surgery, which is why she hadn't been able to visit Smore and me. And then she told me she's gonna leave this city with Aery before Jean's release. She wants to make sure that Jean won't be able to find them. I guess I agree with her decision? I just don't get why she had to keep nagging about how remorseful she feels for abandoning me again or something. As if I care!"

Mark ruffled her hair. “It’s alright, Ari. Everyone walks a path made only for them. She might not stay in this city, but that doesn’t mean you two won’t be able to contact one another in the future! It’s all parts and parcels of human lives, I’m afraid. No need to be so blue.”

“Blue?” Arianne protested. “I’m not blue at all! How did you get that idea?”

Mark raised her by her chin and gazed into her eyes with his piercing eyes. He traced invisible circles on her cheeks with his smooth fingers. “You’re so depressed that it’s practically overflowing from your eyes. When you vented it out, the first thing you did was to give Helen’s excuse on why she had not been visiting you and Smore. You’re subconsciously emphasizing on how unfortunate circumstances had stopped her,” he explained. “Helen’s your mother, Ari. You may hate her, but you’d still yearn for that special motherly connection. I bet you’ve already forgiven her deep in your heart.”

‘Is that so?’ Arianne thought, lowering her eyes before forcing her emotions back in. “I can’t tell if I did forgive her or not. All I know is that I don’t really care. Aery’s gonna go overseas a few days later. She made her departure sound very soon and told me that I should help take care of Helen.” She added, “I just don’t know if I should. I mean, it’s not like I mean much.”

Mark could tell that Arianne was sulking and smiled. “Well, if you do manage to stop yourself from going to help her, then fine. I’ll take a bath first. Then I’ll examine your hurt finger more carefully. Seriously, you ought to be more careful during work! It would be a problem if the needle went through your bone.”

Mark noticed during dinner that Arianne was holding out her index finger as she used her utensils. Worried, he pulled the bandage out and checked on Arianne’s injury more carefully.

The needle had punctured through her nail, apparently. That had got to be agony! Even though the wound looked deceptively small and seemed to have started healing, it was still the sort of wound that was uber-sensitive. It would also require a rather extensive time for recovery since Arianne would need quite some time to regrow her nail.

Mark was visibly upset. “What kinda rundown company is this? You’ve only been there for a while and already suffered a hazard. Quit that job.”

Arianne quickly plastered the bandage back to her cut. “Relax, Mark. It was as small as a scratch! Besides, every other fashion designer create their own samples. I can’t be left out for reasons. Hey, I’d requested for a half-day break and to have the intern in the company working on my design. Look… the bottom line is that I’m not a kid anymore, and I can handle high-pressure without help.”

Mark gave a slightly unsatisfied frown, but he said nothing. He never wanted her to go out into the field, yet Arianne kept wanting to ignore his protection and build her individualistic life.

Due to her finger injury, Arianne had pushed the job of taking care of Smore to Mark. She was worried that carrying Smore might accidentally hit the injury, so Mark had to try to make him sleep.

Arianne watched as Mark tried his best from her spot on the bed. The corner of her lips quivered—since Mark was very tall while Smore was, well, as small as a newborn, but this dissonance was what made this unlikely duo work.

Mark drew a sigh when Smore finally fell asleep. He placed the baby down in a cot carefully before climbing up his bed.

Arianne was suddenly struck by a mood for jocularity. “Hey, look at me! I warmed your bed for you! Maybe you should take over the job of getting Smore to sleep while I work to warm the bed for us. I mean, you’ve got skills in getting babies to sleep.”

Mark tilted her chin upward with his hand and looked straight at her with suggestive eyes. “Oh, the art of warming a bed isn’t just this step, you know. Besides, what are you trying to do, asking a manly man like myself to carry a little baby in his arms all day?”

Chapter 1096

She blushed. “This wasn’t a euphemism. Empty your dirty mind… What’s a big guy like you avoiding carrying a baby? You’ve been carrying him every day, hypocrite. That’s enough now, time for bed. I have to breastfeed in the middle of the night. I think it’s time to wean him off his nighttime feed. It’s too tedious.”

“If it’s tedious, don’t go to work,” Mark grumbled. “Put all of your attention on Smore. Isn’t the baby more important? I told you not to push yourself, and now we have to reduce the baby’s food. That doesn’t make sense, does it?”

Arianne saw right through it. Every time she complained, he would make use of it and try to stop her from going to work. “No weaning. Okay? I can do it. Stop scolding me.”

He didn’t reply. He held her wounded hand and carefully examined it. His mind was distracted unconsciously, as he had wandered back to the past. Her hands would always suffer from chilblain in the past, and she had been plagued with all kinds of diseases. She had always been dressed in thin, old clothes like a pitiful unloved worm.

She had been refusing to yield to him, and he had been refusing to soften his heart. Now, when he thought of it, he was filled with guilt. He couldn't understand why he had been so cruel in the past. His heart clearly ached every time her skin broke.

By the time he turned toward her again, she was already asleep. She was breathing steadily, and her long lashes cast a shadow under her eyelids. Her pinkish, puckered lips seemed particularly enticing under her pretty nose. It gave him the urge to kiss her.

He gently traced the outline of her face as if in a trance. That little girl from the past was now the mother of his child, his only blessing from god.

The next day, Arianne headed to the office full of energy because Mark had taken care of Aristotle last night. She managed to have a good night's sleep.

Just as she arrived at the workshop, she heard a noise from inside. Mr. Yaleman was scolding someone. "You can't even handle a small job like this, why should I have you around? This job doesn't suit you. You should just switch careers. Instead of accomplishing the job, you've spoiled everything!"

She pushed the door and headed inside, feeling apprehensive. She saw the intern, who had been helping her out with a sample yesterday, crying. Her sample was a mess too and wasn't completed within her expectations.

She strode forward and asked, "What's going on?"

Mr. Yaleman's expression softened when he saw her. "It's nothing. This new intern has been messing things up. I've told her countless times. We can't hire her if she goes on like this. It's just so

disappointing. By the way, has she completed that sample for you? The client has asked to examine it today."

Arianne pointed at the messed-up fabric in the intern's hands. "There, isn't that it? I took the day off yesterday afternoon. This little girl did it for me. It's fine. I can rush it out. Just try and stall the client."

Mr. Yaleman exploded when he heard this. "And I thought that she was doing this for someone else. So she was doing it for you? And it turned out like this? She's caused a big delay! Get out, now! You idiot!"

Chapter 1097

"It's not like that. I did overtime until 11:00 p.m. last night to finish this. I really did do it nicely. I put it on the mannequin, checked everything, and made sure that it was fine before I left," the intern replied, choking with sobs. "Someone took the mannequin and used it this morning. The sample was taken down and reduced to this. I really don't know what happened!"

None of the staff members who had crowded around to watch dared to speak. Arianne looked at the intern. Her intuition told her that she wasn't lying, which meant that someone had pulled a cruel prank. She reached out and patted the intern on the shoulder. "It's fine, It's not your fault. I left in a hurry yesterday, so it's my fault. Mr. Yaleman, maybe we should let this go. I still need some help with this sample. I've hurt my finger."

Mr. Yaleman shot the intern with a fierce glare when he heard this. "You're lucky. You'd better get your shit right for Arianne. Make one more mistake, and you're gone!"

Arianne waited for Mr. Yaleman to leave before sitting down. She looked at the intern's staff card and said, "Your name is Robin Cox? I think you should help me out anyway. Things will go much faster if we work together. I've seen it. The sample was ruined after it was completed. It's not your fault."

Robin wiped the tears from her eyes. "Do you really believe me? But Mr. Yaleman won't listen to my explanation. No one would stand up for me in this company. They just order me around. I'm swamped every day, and I'm constantly made to do overtime until late at night. No one says 'thank you' to me. They all take it for granted."

Arianne looked at Robin's scarred fingers. All of her fingers were plastered with bandages. She had new and old injuries. It was obvious that she was telling the truth. "You'll be helping me from now on. Ignore everyone else. I'm sorry to trouble you but let's start."

Robin stared at Arianne in surprise. Everyone in the office had been gossiping about her behind her back, as she was Mrs. Tremont. She was usually aloof and rarely interacted with anyone in the company. To her surprise, she wasn't difficult to get along with at all. She even apologized for the trouble. The haze that had consumed her after she had been scolded was immediately wiped clean. She gathered all of her energy and said, "Okay, we'll finish this by today. I managed to do it on my own yesterday. If we both work together, we'll finish this in one afternoon."

Arianne smiled and stayed quiet. She turned her attention to her task at hand. It was important to finish the sample now. She could deal with the destruction of the previous sample later.

Robin had deft hands. She was very well-versed with the equipment in the workshop and didn't seem to run into any setbacks. The sample was complete by the first half of the day. Now that the current problem was solved, Mr. Yaleman stopped scolding Robin.

Arianne invited Robin out to have lunch with her. The pair had just walked to the office area when someone loudly ordered, “Hey, intern, grab some takeout for me. Three servings. Don’t mess it up. Hurry, we’re starving!”

Robin seemed used to doing these sorts of things. She didn’t object to it at all. She simply grunted in reply and headed off to get takeout when Arianne stopped her. “Are you supposed to be doing these things? You’re here to learn about your job, not to be their nursemaid. Tell that big baby to solve her own problems. Didn’t we agree that you’d only help me out?”

Robin paused and nodded resolutely. “Okay!” Then, she turned to the back and answered, “Get your own takeout next time. I don’t have time to run errands for you anymore.”

The people around were about to lose their temper when they noticed Arianne with her. Thus, they didn’t dare object. They could offend anyone they wanted in this company, expect Arianne.

Chapter 1098

They returned after lunch, and Arianne went back to her own desk to take a short nap. There was nothing much to do this afternoon, so she was considering visiting Helen. However, she was reluctant to run into Aery again. She was conflicted.

Suddenly, she heard a noise in front of her. She opened her eyes to find that Robin had given her a glass of hot water. She smiled. “Thank you, I can do this on my own next time. You don’t have to go through the trouble.”

Robin nodded shyly and went back to her office desk.

“Hey Robin, managed to claw your way into some VIP?” Someone taunted. “You don’t have to pay us any attention now, do you? She’s Mrs. Tremont, who knows how long she’ll stay here? Maybe she’ll go back and live out her days as a rich man’s wife tomorrow. What will you do then?”

“Can’t you be nice?” Robin replied with a lowered voice. “I’m just here to learn, not to play nursemaid with you. You haven’t taught me a thing aside from ordering me around. I’ve been in this company for a long time, and they still won’t hire me. I’m not going to take your orders anymore. Even if Arianne won’t be staying here for too long, I will stay with her until the day she leaves.”

The chatter in her ear prevented her from falling asleep. “Is it so hard to be more self-aware during lunch break and keep your voices down?” Arianne snapped icily. “When I leave is none of your concern. I’ve signed a contract for a year, so I’ll be staying for at least a year. Who told you that an intern could be used for odd jobs? Where did this come from?”

The office immediately went silent. No one dared to say another word.

At 14:00, Mr. Yaleman came again. Arianne ensured that there was nothing else to do before requesting to leave work early. She decided to visit Helen anyway. Perhaps Mark was right. She wasn’t abandoned again this time. Even if Helen left with Aery, it wasn’t like she would cease all contact. She had her own life, and so did Helen. She wasn’t a nestling yearning for food anymore. She had her own wings now.

Aery opened the door again when she arrived at Helen’s place. Aery warmly received the nutritional products and fruit that Arianne had brought along with her. “Sis… Ah, no, Arianne. Mom is waiting for you. She would always talk about you to me in your absence. I knew you’d come again.”

Arianne didn't reply. She didn't spare Aery a second look either. How could she have forgotten the things that Aery had done to Tiffany? How could she have forgotten what Aery had shared with Mark? All of that would sicken her for the rest of her life.

Helen looked much better than yesterday. It would seem that Aery had been taking good care of her. Helen got down from the bed and drew the curtains to let some light into the room so that it wouldn't seem so gloomy. "Arianne, you came. This won't get in the way of your work, will it?"

Arianne shook her head. "I came after work. Uh… If you're leaving, where will you go? I'm not implying anything, I'm just curious."

Helen leaned against the wall by the window, paused, and said, "Probably Canada. I'm not sure yet. Regardless, I hope we can keep in touch. I'd like us to live peacefully as a family, but I know that it's not possible. You might be able to accept me, but I don't think you can accept Aery. Aery is my daughter too. I can't cut her off completely, and I don't deserve to have you call me 'mother'. Whatever it is, I hope that you and Mark will live happily together. Your family of three is doing very well. I can relax."

Arianne paused in silence, then said, "It's a long way away from Jean Kinsey's release from prison. You don't have to leave so soon. I'm usually at home during the weekend. Smore… wants to see his grandma. You can visit us as often as you like once you're feeling better."

Chapter 1099

Helen nodded, expressing the gravity of the situation. "I used to think… that you were only being courteous. So… I avoided bothering you too much. My little sickness isn't much of a problem. You don't have to visit me so often. I'll visit you in the next few days and see how much Smore has grown."

So that explained it. Helen believed that she was simply being courteous to her. That's why she had avoided visiting her so often. Arianne now understood. "I don't like indulging in courtesy, and I dislike hypocrisy. You should rest. I'll be on my way now."

Helen escorted her to the door, personally. "Be careful."

The gentleness on Helen's face remained as she watched her leave. Years of hurt and pain were finally over.

Aery suddenly strode forward. "Mom, I'm leaving the day after tomorrow. Could we have a meal with Arianne and my brother-in-law? I haven't met my nephew yet…"

Helen's expression immediately turned cold. "There's no need for that. The very thought of your brother-in-law being your former lover disgusts me. You can forget about having any connection with them for the rest of your life, even if you've turned into a well-behaved girl. Understand? You'd better stay away from Mark and stay away from Arianne too!"

Aery's face drained of color. She gritted her teeth and didn't answer. Helen was so kind and gentle to Arianne. Why did she turn so cold and distant whenever she spoke to her? She thought that she could wipe away her past mistakes, as long as she behaved well enough…

Arianne noticed that it was still quite early as she made her way home, so she decided against going home straight away. Instead, she decided to pay Mark a visit at his office and see what he was up to. Not for anything else, but she was suddenly reminded of Janice, the intern. She wondered if she had been promoted to permanent staff yet.

She arrived at Tremont Tower. When she stepped into the building, the bodyguards at the doorway bowed at her. “Good day, Mrs. Tremont.”

She felt slightly awkward. She put the staff card hanging around her neck away. It seemed inappropriate to be wearing the staff card of another company… As if she were living off on Mark while corroborating with competition in secret…

When she arrived at Mark’s floor, she had just stepped out from the elevator when Davy reminded her, “Don’t forget to change your shoes.”

She clicked her high heels and walked straight ahead. “I’m not changing.”

Davy was taken aback. “Uh… Mrs. Tremont. You don’t have to change, you’re the exception. Mr. Tremont is in the office. Please, go ahead.”

She pushed the door open and found Mark with his head lowered, pouring over some documents. He had probably run into some issues. He was furrowing his brows. She did not speak up to disturb him. Instead, she automatically went to the coffee table and poured some black tea.

Mark heard the noise and lifted his head. “What are you doing here? Don’t you need to work?”

She took a sip of tea. “There was nothing much to do in the afternoon, so I took a break. You concentrate on work, don’t mind me. I’ll go home with you if you’re leaving work early too. I’ll go home on my own if you’re going to be late.”

Mark didn’t give her an immediate answer. He completed the documents in his hands then strode toward her. “I can leave early. Let’s go home together. Are you here to check on me?”

Chapter 1100

She bit her lips and giggled. “If you say so. I won’t object. That Janice Bell, is she still in the company?”

Mark squinted his eyes, bent down, and inched closer toward her. He placed his hands on the front of her body, as if ready to push her down at any moment. “She’s probably still around… Have you been thinking about her?”

She raised an eyebrow. “I was just asking. Aren’t you overthinking? Go and get your work done. We’ll go home together when you’re finished.”

He didn’t release her and continued his oppressive stance instead. He even moved closer toward her. They were now so close that they could feel each other’s breaths. He could see her delicate cheeks oh-so-clearly. They were so fair that he could see the green veins beneath her skin. When she lifted her chin, his gaze trailed downward—it was her smooth neck that released a delightful fragrance, drawing him into a continued reverie.

Upon realizing that their situation had gotten too flirtatious, Arianne’s cheeks heated up. She lifted her hands, placed them on her chest, and pushed back. “What are you doing? Your reputation is finished if anyone catches us.”

He grabbed her frail hands, placed them against his lips, and kissed them. “No one would dare come in. Every time I think about how your time will be spent on Smore once you get home, I feel as if I should do everything necessary now… What do you think?”

She was shocked by his boldness. “Are you insane? This is the office!”

He caught her lips and pushed her against the couch. His magnetic voice murmured against her lips, “I’m not insane. I want it, now…”

He may not be insane, but Arianne was going to go mad. She wouldn’t have come here if she had known that he would gobble her up upon her arrival. Davy could still be outside. Who knew when someone would knock on the door, and he didn’t care! She always thought that he was a straight-laced man. She never pegged him for the type who’d do this kind of thing in the office!

After the deed, Arianne got up and straightened out her clothes, and pretended as if she were sitting upright. If it were not for the blush on her face, she could easily pass off as if nothing had happened.

Mark couldn’t help teasing her when he saw this. “Isn’t this exciting? You look… so cute.”

She glared at him, refusing to speak. Actually… having fun like this was quite different. It didn’t feel bad at all. It didn’t repel her, but her dignity wouldn’t allow it…

Mark smiled as he planted a kiss on her cheek. “Have some work to do. We can leave when I’m done. I’ll be finished in 20 minutes. By the way, there’s going to be a party in the next few days. Alejandro will be there. Jackson and I will be there. This is a good opportunity. If we fail in exposing Alejandro this time,

we might not get that chance again. My instinct tells me that I shouldn't drag this out any longer. Jackson's been brooding over Lynn's death… Looks like it's getting worse."

"What kind of party is it?" Arianne asked. "Do you need a date? Do you need me to go with you?"

He stared at her in silence. "I'm telling you this because I will need a date. But… I can't take you. It's risky. It's the same with Jackson. He can't take Tiffany with him. We'll just get some random women and come home when we're done. I'm giving you fair warning. Don't find fault with me when the time comes."