Ruling 1271

Chapter 1271

Janice shook her head. “Forget it then. I’ll find some other opportunity. I have to give this to him personally. Thank you.”

Sylvain did not continue the conversation and went off to get coffee.

He returned from buying coffee and found Janice still there. It was a hot day and she was sitting in front of a flower terrace by the side of the road. A few strands of hair on her forehead were drenched in sweat, causing them to stick together. He smiled politely at her when their eyes met. “Sylvain!”

“Mm?” he answered, thinking that she had changed her mind.

Janice strode forward and stared at him pleadingly. “Could you please help me out? Ask Mr. Tremont to see me, just this once? Just tell him that I’m here to pay him back. I have to see him; I can go inside, or he can come out. Just give me five minutes!”

Sylvain nodded. “Sure, I’ll send the message. Wait ten minutes. If nothing happens, you don’t have to wait any longer. That means he doesn’t want to see you.”

Sylvain went back upstairs and went straight into Mark’s office. “There’s someone waiting for you at the building entrance. Apparently, she wants to pay you back for something. Her name is Janice Bell. The woman our lovely Mrs. CEO fired? Are you too scared to see her?”

“She doesn’t owe me a single cent,” Mark replied irritably. “I have no need to see her. I’m not afraid to meet her.”

Sylvain chuckled. “Right. It’s not a necessity, it’s not fear. But… if Janice is paying you back for the financial aid you once offered to her, that would mean… that she does owe you? Based on my observations, she won’t leave unless she sees you. I’ve delivered the message, the rest is up to you. Now, I’m going back to work.”

Mark was frustrated. After a bout of hesitation, he called Davy. “Let Janice upstairs.”

“What if Mrs. Tremont finds out that you’ve met her?” Davy asked in a whisper. “Would she…”

Mark shot him an icy glare. “How whipped do you think I am?”

Davy laughed nervously. “No, no, of course not. You’re a model among men, Mr. Tremont. You’re not whipped at all. I’ll go right now!”

Soon, Davy led Janice into the office. She was careful and meticulous, just like her first visit. She changed into a pair of disposable slippers and wiped off the sweat from her face. However, she couldn’t do anything about her cheeks, which were flushed from standing outside in the hot sun. “Mr. Tremont…”

Mark lifted his gaze and stared at her with a cold and distant look in his eyes. “Here to pay a debt?”

Janice nodded and pulled out an envelope of cash from her bag. “This is all the money you’ve given for my scholarship. Not a cent less. I’ve worked tons of part-time jobs just to pay you back as soon as possible. Thank you for your help. I can’t thank you enough.”

Mark was surprised. He did not think that she had worked so many part time jobs just for this. He paused and said, “You don’t have to pay me back. I’ve provided financial aid for many people and I’ve never thought of getting a single cent back. Isn’t that the whole point of charity?”

“I’m different,” Janice insisted. “From the moment I received your financial aid, I swore that I’d pay you back some day and that I’d repay you for your help too. It’s just that… I can’t repay you anymore. I don’t know why Mrs. Tremont hates me so much, I haven’t done anything wrong…”

A hint of gentleness crept into Mark’s eyes when he thought of Arianne. “Oh, her? That’s just how she’s like. She’s temperamental. She doesn’t like it when other women get too close to me. I assume there’s nothing else? If not, you may go now.”

Janice gritted her teeth discreetly. Isn’t Mark going to give her an explanation at all? She had been dismissed for no good reason. She couldn’t accept this. “Mr. Tremont! Please, give me another chance! I’ll change! I’ll do my best to fit you and Mrs. Tremont’s standards. I like working here, and I’d like to continue repaying you. Please, let me stay!”

Chapter 1272

Mark frowned. “The world is big. You should explore it. This company isn’t a good fit for you. My wife won’t be happy.”

So, this was all to make Arianne happy?

Janice gritted her teeth angrily, but it couldn't be helped.

Seeing this, Davy spoke up. "Let's go. Mr. Tremont has work to do."

Janice took a deep breath, nodded at Mark, then left. Arianne… One day, she would make her pay!

…

Mark returned to the Tremont Estate at 5PM. Arianne was giving Aristotle a bath. Tiffany had left with Plato. They were too rambunctious during playtime in the courtyard this afternoon, so Aristotle was covered in mud.

"I'm just about to take a shower. I'll wash him," Mark offered, seeing her drenched in sweat. "Go and rest."

Arianne accepted the offer. She had been taking care of Aristotle all day. She was exhausted.

Just as she arrived downstairs to rest, Tiffany suddenly sent her a text: 'Ari, Will's back in the country. He was here last time to borrow money. Their company is in financial trouble. This is his second time coming back to borrow cash. I don't think he'll get too much from this. He's so stressed that he has asked me for help. Otherwise, I wouldn't have known. I don't have the balls to ask Jackson for money. His company is in the middle of a project and cash flow is critical. I've given him everything I can, but it's definitely not enough.'

Arianne stared at the message, entering into deep thought. She had been too naive to believe Will when he said that he was back in the country to visit relatives. After all, they knew each other. Will would never have been forced out of the country if it weren't for her. Remembering that she had some cash on hand, she was moved.

After some deliberation, she replied: 'I have some money, close to a million. Transfer it to Will for me. Don't tell him that it was from me. Just send it back when his business picks up again. I don't need the cash.'

That money was from Helen. She never touched it and did not expect to end up using it, just for this.

Tiffany was in shock: 'Where'd you get so much cash? This isn't extra cash from your allowance from Mark, is it? That's too much. Your dessert shop couldn't have earned that much either.'

Arianne replied helplessly: 'That's not it. This was from Helen. I have a house too. I can sell the house if Will needs more money, but don't tell him that it's from me. Mark will kill me if he finds out.'

Of course, this was an exaggerated statement.

Tiffany felt bad: 'But Will knows that I don't have that much money for him, and he's not stupid. He'll know that it's from you. I wouldn't be surprised if you and Mark end up in a fight when he finds out. You shouldn't risk it.'

Actually, Arianne had a bout of hesitation too. However, she felt bad for Will, so she stood firm on her decision. She deleted all relevant messages on her phone after sending the money to Tiffany and pretended as if nothing had happened, hoping that Will would successfully overcome this obstacle.

It was raining again the next day. She arrived at the office early in the morning and stared at the pattering rain outside her window. She felt depressed. She was used to hearing Robin's cheerful chatter in the morning. She wasn't used to this silence at all.

Chapter 1273

Tiffany called her around noon. "Ari, Will still needs a bit more cash on his end. Are you going to sell the house? It's fine if you can't. I think we should be careful with this. What if Mark finds out? You're not the only one who's scared. So am I."

Arianne sighed. "I'll do it. I can sell it, as long as he gets past this obstacle. Mark paid a lot of money for me to renovate Wynn Mansion. Now, I've used the money that Helen gave me to help Will. I can't let Mark find out about this. I'll look at the house this afternoon and get an agent to sell it, then have it sold as soon as possible. Did you say anything to Will?"

"No," Tiffany answered. "But he's getting suspicious. He has asked me where I got the money from, so I lied and said that I asked Jackson. He asked to thank Jackson, and I was so scared. I somehow managed to trick him. He has gathered quite a lot on his end too, so I think we'll get over this once you've sold that house. Don't worry. I won't let Jackson find out about this either."

Arianne went online after the call to check on the location of the house, which was worth quite a sum. At the end of the work day, she went to a real estate agency and put the house on sale. The price was lower than other houses, as this was a rushed sale.

The house was sold in less than a few days. She signed the agreement with the new house owner behind Mark's back and let out a sigh of relief once escrow was closed. She gave the money to Tiffany immediately after receiving it so that she could transfer it to Will in her place.

Mark had been busy during this time and didn't have time to be suspicious. Besides, she had taken extra care to keep this from him, so it didn't seem like anything would leak out. As time passed, she gradually put the matter at the back of her mind.

She received a message from Will more than a month later: 'I know you gave me that money. Tiffie refused to say, but I know… Thank you for helping me. I'll pay you back once business picks up. I wouldn't have gotten through this easily if it wasn't for you.'

Will seemed so sure. She wanted to deny it, but she couldn't find any way to persuade him. Hence, she had no choice but to confess: 'Mm, don't worry about it. We were once friends anyway.'

Will didn't reply. Arianne regretted using the word "once". Were they not friends anymore? That word was rather hurtful…

Just as she was in a daze, Mark suddenly walked towards her with Aristotle in his arms. "Why are you staring into space? It's almost Smore's bedtime."

She instinctively pressed the phone against her chest as a hint of panic flashed across her face. It made Mark's gaze sink. He handed Aristotle over to her with a deadpan look on his face. "I don't check your phone, you know."

She realized that she had a lapse of character and forced a smile. “That’s not it… You’re overthinking. There’s nothing on my phone. I’m going to put Smore to bed.”

Mark nodded, turned around and went into the study. He sat quietly for a moment, then pulled out his phone and called Jackson. “You mentioned that Will’s company was in dire straits before and that he needed money to turn things around, right? Tiffany lent him some money, but do you think Arianne would have done the same?”

“I don’t think so?” Jackson replied hesitantly. “Tiffany’s been asking me for allowance money lately, so I asked her what the money was for. Then, she told me that it was for Will. I suspected Arianne’s participation at the time, so I asked Tiffany and she denied it resolutely. She even added that Arianne’s relationship with Will was so awkward that he would never have asked her for money. Why are you asking this all of a sudden?”

Mark fell silent for two seconds, then said, “She was sending a message to someone behind my back, and when I approached her, she panicked and hid her phone screen away, afraid that I’d see. Besides… I’ve noticed that she would go out behind my back from time to time, and it’s not to the office… Tell me, why won’t she tell me, unless she’s feeling guilty?”

Chapter 1274

Jackson didn’t dare comment on the subject. “Well… You should probably ask Arianne. There’s no use in asking me. I won’t get involved in your affairs. Handle the outcome yourself. Arianne can hold a grudge. If I start something, just because of what I’ve said, she’ll remember it for life.”

Mark took a deep breath, got up, and went back to the bedroom. Aristotle was about to fall asleep but woke up when he heard Mark opening the door. Arianne felt helpless. “Why did you have to come in now? He was falling asleep, and now he’s awake again… My arms are sore.”

He glanced at her phone on the bed, walked forward, and said, “I’ll hold him. Let me put him to bed then.”

Arianne’s arms were very sore, so she gave Aristotle over to him and sat on the bed to rest.

After a while, Aristotle stopped moving. That meant that he was fast asleep. Mark did not put him down immediately. “I’ve heard that Will Sivan’s company is in financial trouble. Did you know?” he asked in a seemingly casual manner.

Arianne’s body stiffened. She didn’t know how to answer him. Had he found out? Or was he just testing the waters?

Half a minute later, she finally answered. “I know, Tiffie told me.”

“You never considered helping him?” He raised a brow.

Her defenses were crumbling. She couldn’t bring herself to look him in the eye. “I’m tired. I’m going to bed.”

Then, she pulled up the covers and laid down.

Mark carefully placed Aristotle in his cradle, then turned around and went to the side of the bed, looking at her. “You can help Will, but you should discuss it with me first. I don’t like it when you keep things

from me. I've checked. It's such a huge debt. Covering it up won't be easy, and Tiffany won't be able to help him that much…"

Arianne bit her lips. "Fine, I admit it—I gave him money. I just wanted to help him. Tiffie transferred the funds and I told her not to say that it was from me. Will guessed it on his own. He sent me a message just now to express his gratitude, nothing else. I didn't discuss it with you because I didn't want to create unnecessary problems. I didn't want to fight with you, nor did I think you would have agreed anyway. I didn't ask you for money to help him but instead sold the house that Helen gave me and used my savings. I gave it all to him. He'll pay me back once business picks up again."

Mark balled his hands into fists. "You used the money that your mother gave you? And sold the house? Heh… Were you going to sell Wynn Mansion too, if his debt continued? Arianne, you didn't touch those savings during the Wynn Mansion's renovations, but now you've given it all away for Will! Did you know, I would have preferred you talking to me about it first and asking me to help him instead…"

Arianne could hear the suppressed emotions in his tone. Her first instinctive was to run away. "Can't we discuss this tomorrow? Smore is asleep. Don't wake him."

Chapter 1275

Mark didn't respond. He remained standing in his spot for a while, then turned around and left.

Soon after, his car drove away from Tremont Estate. He was gone and probably wouldn't be coming back tonight.

Arianne couldn't sleep. She got up and gave Tiffany a call. "How did Mark find out about my loan to Will?"

Tiffany was shocked. “He knows? I didn’t say anything! I’ll turn into a dog if I’m lying! Well… Jackson is aware of this, but he’s only aware that I loaned Will the money. He also knows that Will’s company is in financial trouble. I didn’t say anything, you’ve gotta believe me. I don’t know how Mark found out about this!”

That explained it. If Jackson knew, Mark could easily piece everything else together.

“Forget it,” she replied weakly. “He knows. I’ll just have to face facts… He has just gone out. I’m pretty sure he’s not coming home tonight. He’ll probably ask Jackson to go drinking with him. Tell Jackson to keep an eye on him and don’t let him drink too much. It’s bad for him.”

On the other end of the call, Tiffany turned towards Jackson, who was standing in front of a window and answering a call. She lowered her voice. “You’re right, Jackson is answering a call right now. It must be from Mark. Hold on, bestie…”

After hanging up, Tiffany hopped off the bed and crept behind Jackson, who happened to have just finished his call. “What are you doing?” he asked skeptically.

She narrowed her eyes at him. “Did you tell Mark about my loan to Will?”

Jackson felt guilty. “Well, you didn’t tell me that Arianne loaned him money either. I wasn’t ready at all. This is on Arianne too. Why didn’t she talk to Mark? The more she hides it, the more he’ll think that something’s up. If she had been honest from the beginning, this wouldn’t have happened, would it? Stop scolding me. Mark has asked me to go for a drink with him. I have to go, so get an early night’s rest.”

Tiffany smacked his bottom. “Why did you have to tell him? Can’t you keep a secret from him? You can be such a blabbermouth for a guy. Keep an eye on Mark, and don’t let him drink too much. These are Ari’s instructions.”

Jackson endured it, bearing his indignance in silence. He gritted his teeth and pinched her cheek. “I understand, madam!”

Jackson drove to the bar straight away. Mark had already arrived and had begun drinking.

He was unsure. He didn’t know how angry Mark really was, so he carefully asked, “Have you had a fight with Arianne?”

Mark flashed a self-derisive smile. “No. She doesn’t even see the need to fight with me anymore. She didn’t react at all when I laid my cards on the table. She was particularly calm about it… She shouldn’t have reacted that way, right?”

Jackson’s heart sank. “Th-that can’t be right. Look at where you two are at now. Why does it sound like you’re at the end of the line? Let me put things into perspective here. You know her relationship with Will, don’t you? I mean, they used to be close. She would always help Will out whenever he was in trouble. There’s nothing wrong with that. Maybe she’s worried that you’d refuse or start a fight with her. That’s why she didn’t tell you. I believe that’s what happened, so stop splitting hairs. Tiffany gave Will a loan behind my back too, didn’t she? I would have been kept in the dark too if I hadn’t asked her about it.”

Mark shot him a glare. “How is that the same? Your woman and Will are like bros. Will and Arianne… They’d probably be married by now if I hadn’t stepped in. I didn’t ask you here to console me. Drink with me.”

Chapter 1276

Jackson remembered Tiffany's instructions before he left the house. "That's enough. Stop drinking. This is exactly how Eric f*cked up his health, drinking too much from a young age. At the rate you're going, you'll be sent to the hospital for intestinal bleeding before morning."

Mark ignored him and continued drinking, as if alcohol was the only way to numb his mental state. That way, he wouldn't feel so bad.

Jackson was panicking, scratching his head. After a while, he secretly sent Arianne a message when Mark had drunk himself into a stupor: 'He's going to collapse from all of this drinking if you don't come now. You aren't completely innocent in this either. Is it that hard to apologize? Mark isn't completely unreasonable, you know. You're living together, you'll have to patch things up sooner or later.'

Arianne was still awake. She got up and changed her clothes when she saw the message, then asked Jackson for the address to the bar. She would pick him up. It wasn't her first time anyway.

Jackson let out a sigh of relief when Arianne agreed. He could leave once Arianne had arrived. Mark's face was terrifyingly grim. Even he was frightened by the sight of it.

Unfortunately, before Arianne could arrive, Mark began flying into a rage. "Haven't I been good enough to her? Does she have to pine for her first love? What's so great about him? She couldn't bear using her mother's money, she didn't even want to accept it at first. She left it there and never touched it. She wouldn't even use it on renovations for the Wynn Mansion! But for Will? She actually made the withdrawal without hesitation! She gave me all that cr*p about keeping it from me to avoid an argument… Hehe… If she talked to me about it, I would have used my name to bail Will out. Wouldn't that have been the best solution? It makes sense… I don't blame her for not trusting me. I don't even trust me. I've never believed that I could make her fall in love with me…"

Hearing this brought a pang in Jackson's heart. "Mark… It's not like that. I think she does have feelings for you. Otherwise, she wouldn't have come home with you after getting pregnant."

As if he had heard a funny joke, Mark laughed. "Hehe… Feelings? It's not even gratitude. My mom killed her dad. How did I end up falling for her? This is more like… Retribution!"

Suddenly, they heard the sound of a beer bottle shatter. Jackson turned around to look and found Janice frantically cleaning up the pieces on the ground. "I'm sorry, I wasn't eavesdropping on purpose. I'm just here to serve whiskey…"

Jackson rubbed his forehead. "Don't tell anyone about whatever you've heard, understand?"

Janice nodded. "I understand… I won't tell anyone…"

Mark downed his glass. "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter who knows. Janice, come here."

Janice wondered if she had misheard him. She stared at Mark for a long time and confirmed that he had asked her to come over. Then, she stepped forward. Before she could stand still, Mark pulled her into his arms.

She felt joy intermingled with surprise. She sat on Mark's lap, too afraid to move. "Mr. Tremont… I… Don't think this is a good idea."

Jackson gaped. “Then why are you still sitting on his lap?”

Mark wrapped his arm around Janice’s delicate waist. “Jackson, I should’ve been like you, in the past, living freely and easily. I’ve watched over her for more than ten years. I should have been fed up by now. I’m too rigid. She doesn’t love me anyway…”

Chapter 1277

Jackson was so close to letting loose a flurry of his worst swears. Arianne was fast approaching, for Christ’s sake! What would happen if she took in the full glory of this debacle?!

Janice feigned struggling to free herself, but it only looked more like she was courting more of it. “Oh, Mr. Tremont! You’re drunk, aren’t you? Have you gotten into another tiff with your wife again?”

Just mentioning Arianne turned Mark’s frustration up to eleven. “Urgh, can we not mention her? What, you think I don’t know how far you’ve gone to get near me? Oh, so you’re doing all this just because you wanna ‘repay’ me? Gimme a break. Just because I don’t wanna be a lady’s man doesn’t mean I don’t know what you women are like. I mean, if I’m being honest, you’re not exactly the bottom choice, either. I mean, your presence would piss her off, but other than that, you’re… alright…”

Of course, Janice was well aware that Mark had zero genuine feelings for her—the drunken man saw her as a prop to get back at his wife and nothing more. The reasoning behind his sudden closeness was frustrating, and yet, Janice relished in her newfound power to infuriate Arianne!

Jackson, however, could no longer keep to himself and watch. Swiftly, he grabbed hold of Janice's arm and yanked, bellowing, "Mark Tremont, you better wake the f**k up right now! Arianne is coming to you as we speak—stop doing sh*ts that you'll regret, goddamned it!"

Hearing the news of Arianne's arrival shook Mark out of his trance a little and filled him with momentary dread. It did not last, however; soon, gasconade stamped out of his concerns and prompted him to slap Jackson's hand away.

"Fine by me! She better be coming to us, 'cause I'm not scared at all! The one thing I want to do the most is to show her that I can live without her, too!"

No sooner than Mark boasted his seeming independence loudly than Jackson espied Arianne standing within earshot. Everything happened at just the right time to create the perfect storm.

The boys were doomed.

With a stoic expression, Arianne focused her eyes on Janice, who was still curled comfortably in Mark's embrace. "Congratulations on your promotion, Janice," she said mockingly. "I thought you'd vanish from my sight and life after I fired you, but from the looks of it, I was clearly too optimistic. You cling like a pathetic has-been who can't move on."

"Excuuuuse you, Mrs. Tremont, for making such a bold assumption. Mr. Tremont is simply drunk. This is why he's cuddling with me like this—you just happened to be here by sheer coincidence," Janice retorted icily. Despite what she claimed, she did not seem to display any sign of removing herself from Mark's lap.

Seeing no sign of Mark releasing her from him, Arianne's heart sank into abject dismay. "Mark, let's go home together, alright?"

The man said nothing while the air in the room slowly gelled.

Jackson refused to give up his role as the mediator. "Er, Arianne, uh, hi. You see, he's kinda wasted right now—like, seriously, butt-f**king wasted out of his damn wits. Janice, meanwhile, works here. Part-time. B-But of course, you already know that! Uh, so, this whole thing? It's just Mark's trying to get a rise out of you. Irrational, I know, but he's seriously bloody wasted that he'll probably have forgotten his own damn name if you asked him right now. So, yeah… Don't get mad, please..?"

Arianne ignored Jackson altogether. Her eyes were glued to Mark.

The strange charge in the air proved to be too unsettling to Janice, so the woman finally moved away from Mark's lap after a moment. "I'll make you a pot of warm tea, Mr. Tremont. To help you sober up."

Once Janice left, Mark downed yet another pint. Not once in his abandonment had he shot Arianne a look. It was as though he could not see her.

Arianne snickered. "I see. I shouldn't have come and disrupted your little drinking party. If I'd known that my presence would damage your fun, I wouldn't have come at all. Go ahead and have fun. I bet sleeping in a foreign bed is much more comfortable than the one at home," she jeered. "Anyway, I best be going. Hey, Jackson? Please help me take care of him. If he wants to, oh I dunno, f**k Janice for the night, help him book a room and tell me the number. Because you see, despite everything, I still have a duty to this guy if anything happens. Like, say, if he suddenly dies out of cardiac failure, I'm still obliged to claim his corpse."

With that, Arianne spun on her heel and left.

Jackson wanted to chase after her, yet part of him also thought against it, making him stuck into inaction. “What. The. F**k?! What the hell just happened?! —Mark-smarta-Tremont, you’ve done fked up, you know that?”

Mark, however, merely answered flatly. “Don’t care. See? She doesn’t either. You’re the one who called her, didn’t you? Shouldn’t have done that—look at how reluctant she was to come over.”

Arianne was just about to exit the entrance of the bar when Janice, holding freshly-brewed hot tea, blocked her way. “Hey, Mrs. Tremont! You’re leaving already? Aren’t you going to wait for Mr. Tremont?”

Chapter 1278

Arianne scowled at Janice and replied tartly, “Well, I must go for the two of you to get on with each other, right? I know you’re itching to see me leave anyway, so get out of my face before that itch in your coochie runs out of steam.”

Janice turned blistering red in rage. “You and your b*tch mouth—!”

Arianne was at zero patience with her, so she shoved Janice aside. The latter’s tray tilted, and the boiling tea she was holding poured out and scalded the back of Arianne’s hand.

The woman winced. “You tw—!”

Janice's relish of that snap vengeance was practically shining out of her eyes. "Hell no, you're the one who pushed me, b*tch! You can't pin this on me for what you did to yourself, can you? Ugh, thanks to you, I'll have to remake that tea for Mr. Tremont again, but I guess this is what you want, right? You want me to take good care of Mr. Tremont—it's what you explicitly said, anyway—so chill and go home. I'll definitely take good care of him in more ways than you could ever!" she declared coquettishly before spinning on her stilettos with a victor's flourish and sashaying away.

Arianne was beyond confident that Janice scalded her hand on purpose.

However, the more important question was this: would Mark really sleep with Janice tonight?

She felt a sharp stab in her chest and raised her hand to it, but still, she gritted her teeth and left. If Mark saw no problem doing that, then what could Arianne say? Besides, she knew Jackson would stop him with all his might if Mark ended up wanting to go through with that plan.

If Jackson did not stop him when he should, Arianne might have to reassess these men entirely.

When Janice returned to the room with a newly-brewed glass of tea, she asked in phony concern, "Oh, so Mrs. Tremont did leave after all?"

Mark snapped with a bellow, "Don't bring up that woman's name!"

He had not at all expected Arianne to put her words to action and leave him alone. She did not care if he was coming home or not tonight. She did not even care with whom he was going to spend the night.

She did not give a damn, did she? Mark would gladly subject himself to all kinds of pains and tribulations if it meant he could make her happy. Yet, that woman would not do the same for him—he never meant a mote in her heart!

The fact that Janice showed no sign of leaving the men alone vexed Jackson enough to bark, “Excuse me, but what more business do you have here? If there’s nothing else, get out of here and get back to whatever it is that you do! Aren’t you here to work? Running out of things to do already?”

Janice was reluctant to go, but her apprehension of Jackson made his order hard to ignore. She knew that Jackson could get her fired from this job with just a word, which she could not afford ever since Arianne ejected her out of Mark’s firm, therefore cutting off her income source.

She cast a pleading look at Mark but found the man’s eyes diverted from her. Neither did he say anything that could be covertly meant as permitting Janice to stay.

Janice had no choice but to retreat for another day. “I need to busy myself with some other things now, Mr. Tremont. If you have anything you would like to ask of me, don’t hesitate to call,” she said before she left.

Her implication was so clear that it could not possibly be misconstrued—she was waiting for Mark.

Jackson waited until Janice was several distances away before adjusting his tie in frustration. “Mark, you listen to me right now. It’s getting late, you hear me? You want to go home and snuggle with your wife

and kid until tomorrow, don't you? Fine, Arianne's goddamned pissed right, but what if she's still waiting for you outside, huh? How about we leave this place right now?"

In truth, Jackson's real concern was how possible it was for Mark to sleep with Janice for the night. It was not at all news that men, when compelled by a rush of blood to their heads, were liable to make rash and destructive decisions. Even more deleteriously, many of these mistakes would turn out to be unforgivable and unsalvageable, so Jackson could not let it happen at all.

Mark shot him a snide sidelong glance. "Do you really think I would start committing reckless actions just because I've gotten drunk? Ha! No, I don't wanna go home, plain and simple. I don't wanna go back to her stupid stoic face that wouldn't change even if a comet were coming toward her!"

Jackson would be a fool to trust the words of a drunken man. "Yo, I don't give a rat's a** if you'd become reckless or not when you're wasted. Either way, we're leaving this crapsack place right this goddamn moment! If you don't wanna go home, fine! You're coming with me. I have just the right-sized space on my floor that you can sleep on!"

Mark stared at the unfinished bottles on the table and expelled a breath. "No. We're finishing them before we go."

Jackson could feel a migraine kicking in. All these liquors? By the time they finished these, they would be so drunk that they would roll back home because they lost the ability to stand.

The men did not manage to finish the drinks in the end, anyway, as Mark had gotten so wasted halfway through that he had abandoned all of his usual lucidity. The alcohol had reduced the fierce young man into a mess who could not stop slurring through rants about Arianne, his most oft-repeated complaint being, "That woman… is even more… s-s-stone cold than I am!"

Chapter 1279

Jackson exhausted all of his strength to lug that mess of a man back to White Water Bay Villa. Right off the bat, Tiffany caught the commotion and clambered down the stairs before exclaiming, “Holy crap, how did he end up here? Where’s Ari? What, she gave up?”

Jackson slumped onto the couch and replied between heavy pants, “Urgh, don’t mention it! I’m out of ideas and I don’t know what to do, man, so let’s just… do whatever we can for now. Help me clean up a room for Mark for the night, mmkay?”

Tiffany was just about to go when Mark suddenly slurred groggily, “How could you be so heartless, Arianne? How?”

His voice was soft, but Tiffany caught it, and immediately, a glare befell her. “What did he say? ‘Heartless?’ Wow, gotta’ love how some people have such low self-awareness that they could point fingers at others!”

Jackson’s head was throbbing at the advent of more chaos. “No, no, no! You stop right now and don’t add fuel to the fire, please! Who the hell would argue with a wasted schmuck and expect something out of it? If you’re really that indignant, then wallop him secretly or whatever to let off your steam, I dunno! Not that he’s gonna remember any sh*t when he wakes up,” Jackson grumbled. “F**k, if I weren’t there with him before, that woman was bound to drag him away for whatever evil plot she has. I can’t believe I thought this Janice Bell was innocent! From the looks of it, she’s exactly like all the other vying women throwing themselves onto him!”

Tiffany let out a furious sneer and stormed upstairs to prepare Mark’s room. She was never one to tolerate anyone saying anything remotely bad about Arianne—no, Tiffany would not stand even one pip of it!

After settling down Mark, Jackson took a video of him and sent it to Arianne. It was to act as evidence that Mark spent the night at Jackson's place rather than sleeping with some opportunistic broad.

Arianne did not reply to him. The first thing she did after returning to the Tremont Estate was to treat her scald burn. A large swathe of the affected skin had begun to blister, which stung her enough that she could not rest.

There was nothing Arianne could say at this point. She would have to save her words until Mark woke up, sober, and came back home.

The next morning began with Smore throwing a tantrum the instant he woke up, evidently demanding someone to hold him. Arianne, who had not slept a wink the entire night, tried to carry him downstairs despite her fatigue.

Halfway through her journey, a pang flared from the back of her hand. Putting down Smore, she saw that the blister had burst. It needed professional medical treatment to avoid infections.

Arianne called out to Mary to help take care of Smore, but the boy had the bad timing to be unspecifiable, stubborn, and clingy to his mother this morning.

Amid the boy's hysterical fits, Arianne felt crushed and utterly defeated. She could not work, her hand was seriously wounded, and she could not even hold a toddler without hurting herself. As Smore's bawls and shrieks intensified, Arianne's own deluge of emotions was building up and challenging her control.

She was close to eruption, but her last shred of rationality was reluctant to leave Smore with the trauma of seeing his mother losing control. She tried again, coaxing as patiently as possible, “Please, Smore, Mommy’s hurt. I can’t hold you, alright? Let Granny Mary care for you now, okay? Mommy needs to see the doctor, okay?”

Mary was very worried. “How did this happen to you, dear? You need to get that treated quickly before it leaves a nasty scar! Go, to the hospital with you! Oh, don’t worry about Smore. Let him cry it all out of his system, and he’ll be back to normal after that. Go, Ari.”

Arianne nodded in agreement, hardened her heart, and left the still-bawling Smore at home. Her eyes reddened by the time she was far enough from the house to cease hearing his cries.

The treatment was so agonizing that Arianne was sweating cold throughout the process. The doctor had helped her take care of the damaged dermal layer before administering medicine and wrapping her wound up. She was ordered not to let her wound come into contact with water and to have it regularly treated with medicines at intervals to prevent infection. Failure to do those would cause a scar, the doctor told her, but since it was a superficial dermal burn on the back of the hand, a correct treatment could salvage it back to normal.

Arianne wondered why she had let Janice get away with her deliberate, malicious little act. Maybe she was too haunted by what Mark said to think about a comeback. In retrospect, she had probably been a little too kind to Janice for letting her off the hook like that.

He said he did not need her to live.

He said that while cuddling with another woman sitting on his lap.

Had Arianne not gone to see Mark, she would have been saved from such an affront to her eyes, would she not?

Arianne went straight back home after her trip to the doctor's. Right now, Smore was her only emotional support. She would not let any bad blood between her and Mark influence her love and care for her son.

That was the one line she would not cross: Arianne would never make Smore live through an unhappy childhood.

Chapter 1280

The first thing Arianne saw after entering through the door was a towering silhouette playfully lifting Smore.

Mark had returned. He had decided not to work today.

Arianne wanted to go past him and up the stairs, but her conscience persuaded her to not do anything that could signal to Smore about the fracture in their relationship. After some slight hesitance, she approached him and asked, "Not working today?"

Mark froze for a beat before placing Smore down on the floor, not looking at her once. He did not reply to her either. He just went straight upstairs and went into his study.

Arianne drew in a quick breath. Mark did not think the way she did, after all—while she was open to negotiations and cooperation for their son, it was not at all a concern to him. It was moments like these that made Arianne feel lucky that Smore was too young to understand the crack in his parents' relationship. In fact, the innocent boy was now spreading his arms wide at her, asking for a cuddle.

Arianne looked at him and carried him in her arm despite the agony. "Have you been good at home? Had your meal? Go on, play with Granny. Mommy needs to talk to Daddy for a bit; it's super important adult stuff, not for a baby."

She had always taught Smore to address Mary as Granny since the woman's age and seniority would mark her exactly that. Coupled with the fact that Mary had worked in the Tremont Estate for so long and that Mark no longer had his parents with him, it was only apt that Smore called her that. Besides, Mary clearly saw Smore as her grandson.

Mary could tell that the couple had a rather serious fight, so she quickly took Smore away from her before advising, "Talk to Mr. Tremont, alright? This isn't the first time the two of you had ever gotten into a row. Just say it's your fault and call it a day, alright? You know how hard-headed he has always been."

Arianne did not want Mary to worry, so she flashed her a reassuring smile. "I know, I know. It's alright. Please keep Smore company."

Arianne stopped before the door to Mark's study. There, she stood for a moment or two and reminded herself to be calm and composed so as not to make a war out of it.

She pushed open the door and found herself in the middle of a faint haze of smoke. Mark had been smoking in front of the window in his room.

Arianne coughed, as the smoke irritated her throat. Mark pushed the glowing butt of his cigarette onto the ashtray and demanded, “Why are you here? If trouble is what you are looking for, don’t.”

Arianne collected herself and approached Mark, whose first reaction was to avoid her, his feet showing signs of leaving. She grabbed hold of his hand and said, “Please, stop. Can’t we just talk this out?”

Mark swung her grip away. “I don’t want to see you right now. I don’t even want to hear your voice. It’s grating, got it?”

When he saw the wound on her hand, the light in his eyes dimmed, but he forced his queries of concern back down his throat.

Arianne, meanwhile, was stunned. She stared at the tip of her shoes. “Took you more than a decade to finally see me as an eyesore, huh?”

“No, I’ve always seen you as an eyesore,” Mark replied tartly. “I thought I knew you well enough, but now, I realize how wrong I was. I thought you were someone I could spend the rest of my life with. I opened up my walls and bared my heart to you. But what did you do? Heh. I don’t even care about what you think of me because I get it now. You can’t force anyone to love you, and if you insist on doing that, you should be prepared to get hurt. Don’t you get it? I’m sick of you.”

White noise exploded in Arianne’s mind. Something deep inside of her collapsed and crumbled.

She concentrated and tried to find a faint whiff of alcohol in him, anything to absolve him of the verisimilitude of his words. And yet, she failed. He was not drunk.

He said all of this while sober.