Ruling 1331

Chapter 1331

Smore was already wide awake. Arianne had, in a sweet gesture, placed the child next to Mark on their bed. When Mark looked, his eyes were met with Smore's big, watery ones as he muttered, "Mwilk… Want mwilk…"

Mark rubbed his face, forced himself to be awake, and carried Smore off the bed with one hand before heading down the stairs to make him some milk. Unfortunately, he had never done this before, and now, he was having trouble figuring out the amount of milk powder alone.

He was just about to try filling half of the milk bottle with powder before pouring half a bottle of water when Mary quickly swooped in for the rescue. "Oh, Mr. Tremont! Let me handle this. It will take just a jiffy; you can distract Master Aristotle in the meantime. Now, if you're in a hurry, you could always go. I'll help Master Aristotle change first, then."

Mark still looked a little too blue. "I'm not in any hurry. I could go to my office a little while later."

Smore looked around him and started crying out for his mom, which did not help Mark's melancholy at all. "Gosh, Smore, Mom's left us. She's not coming back until after a week. No point shouting for her now."

Mary watched the pitiful state the father-son duo had sunken into since Arianne was unavailable, and her laughter burbled out of her. "Well, I'll be! Who would have thought you'd take Madam's temporary absence so hard, Mr. Tremont?"

“Me? Taking her absence hard? Utter nonsense!” Mark denied loudly. “Screw a week. I can go on without her not just for a week, but for a month or even a year!”

He immediately regretted what he said. If Arianne were to not be home for a month or a year, Mark did not know whether he or Smore would devolve into a crying fit first.

….

Back in Alejandro’s private manor, the man of the house had not once stepped out of his study since his visit to Tiffany’s. Every day, he locked himself inside the room and refused to partake in any affairs of the real world.

His company had made several calls to him until a distressed Jett admonished him. “Mr. Smith, please, I implore you to look into the urgent affairs of the company. They’ve made several calls already, sir!”

Alejandro laid on the back of his chair languidly, his eyes cast on a pot of shriveled, dying flowers. “What, you’re telling me that everyone in that massive company is an idiot? None of them can do anything without me? Ugh. I’ve only missed out on work for, like, how many days exactly? Christ, what’s a man got to do to be granted a space to clear his mind?”

Melanie, with their daughter in hand, approached him while signaling Jett to leave them alone. With a sigh, the stalwart man obliged.

“If you’re not in the mood for work, then let me be your temporary replacement, okay? I know a broken heart needs a long time to mend.”

Alejandro was quick to detect the thinly-veiled jab in her words. “No one asked you to weigh in with a witty remark, woman. I’m not in the mood to humor you.”

Once again, his words chilled Melanie to the core. “It wasn’t a witty remark; it was an actual observation. Look at you! All you’ve done after visiting Tiffany is moping around. Can’t even allocate a responsible amount of attention to the affairs of your own company! What else am I to do with you—except becoming your replacement when you’re too brooding to handle it?”

Chapter 1332

Alejandro looked up and met Melanie’s gaze. “No, you stay at home and take care of the child. I don’t need you sticking your hand into the business of my company. And the last thing I want is to be dragged into some stupid fight with you while I get all kinds of stress from work. Also, next time? Don’t talk to me with that asinine tone.”

Melanie placed their daughter on the couch nearby as though she was ready for a throwdown with Alejandro. “What ‘asinine tone’ did I use? My God, don’t tell me you’re feeling worn out—not when I should be the one who’s sick and tired of all of this first! After all, look at my dear husband being emo over some other woman while neglecting his wife and daughter. How charitable do you expect me to be, huh? Or would you only turn around if I go to Tiffany and tell her to coax you back into your sensibilities?”

Alejandro’s expression turned icy. “Enough! Any attempt to get close to her and you’re finished!”

The poor baby watched her parents’ altercation from her spot on the couch and began to bawl. Melanie gritted her teeth, forced back tears of anguish, and steeled herself from rushing to pacify Melissa.

She could no longer understand what compelled her to cling to the hell she was in, especially since she expected stalemates like these to happen after Don passed away. For some reason, she simply could not seem to summon the determination to turn her back against all of it.

When Melanie remembered Jett telling her that Don bequeathed a large amount of the Smith company's shares to her, she found the flames within her flaring even more wildly. She was going to wield those shares as her weapon.

"You think I have no means nor hearts to leave you, don't you? You're wrong. I'm the treasured heiress of the Lark family—I didn't come to the Smiths to be ordered around by you like one of your mooks! You love Tiffany Lane to bits, don't you? Fine, I'll be the good guy and free you from this marriage. Oh, but I wonder what would happen to the company if I take away my shares? Will it inconvenience you?"

Alejandro leaped to his feet, his hand hurling toward his wife before grappling her by the neck. "Is that a threat, woman? You really think I don't dare to divorce you, do you? Melanie Lark, don't force my hand. If I must, I'll force you to spit all of your shares out before expelling you from the Smith family."

Instead of fear, all Melanie felt was the anguish of a heart mercilessly torn open and laid bare. It hurt her so much. Tears streamed down her cheeks like glass shards. "Do you… hate me to this extent, Alejandro? I was so stupid. Stupid to think that those little moments of apparent kindness you've shown me before were at least sincere enough. But no, I read too much into it, after all…"

Her pride wanted her to defend the last shred of dignity—give up the shares Don left for her and file for a divorce, yet another part of her was livid at the prospect of leaving. She was roped into a political marriage, pumped out a baby for Alejandro, and now he was going to kick her to the curb like a scorned dog? No, Melanie Lark would not be sullied this way!

Alejandro released her from his grip with a curse under his breath, perhaps spurred by his daughter's ceaseless bawls. Quickly, he took Melissa into his arms and started toward the door.

It was the first time he ever held his daughter—and he did it while broiling. Panicked, Melanie ran out of the room frantically. "What are you doing? Give her back!"

"You really think of me as the devil reincarnate, don't you? My daughter has been bawling, woman; how deaf are you?" Alejandro snapped. "If you wanna throw a hysterical b*tch fit, then do it somewhere else where she can't see!"

His words made Melanie realize that she had been overreacting, so she willed herself to compose herself. Reflecting on her recent states of mind, she was suddenly aware of how many times she lost her grip over her emotions. It was especially pronounced after childbirth and Don's passing, with moments of her sudden, furious outbursts becoming more and more frequent.

She had to admit that she was wrong for assuming Alejandro would hurt Melissa. She was still his own flesh and blood. He could not possibly do that to his daughter—right?

In an effort to avoid seeing Melanie, Alejandro decided to bring his daughter with him to the company. He ordered Jett to take some baby's essentials with them.

Jett could not help himself from explaining Melanie's position while they were en route to the company. "Sir, I know Madam could be a bit difficult sometimes, but she's only acting out of anxiety and insecurity. The fact that you—well, hardly spare her a shred of care also doesn't help. She had just given birth a month earlier and is now in a critical period where many women could develop depression out of a combination of life's uncertainties and emotional turmoil post-childbirth. It's a really dangerous thing, Mr. Smith, and I know you can tell Madam wasn't like this at all in the past."

Alejandro studied the baby in his arms, his eyes twinkling with rare gentleness. “Who would have the patience for a woman you have no feelings for? Especially when said woman comes looking for trouble from me when I’m in my worst moods—it’s even harder to be patient then! If she keeps this up, I swear, I’ll divorce her. Honestly, it wouldn’t be half-bad if she could be more like how she used to be back then. At least, she wasn’t half as repulsive as she is now.”

Jett mustered his courage and gave Alejandro the truth. “No other woman would be able to stand your behavior. You say Madam is weak for not being able to tolerate you devoting your heart to another woman, yet you’re in just as much anguish as she is when you see how much Tiffany loves Jackson too, right?”

Chapter 1333

Alejandro drew out a long breath. “I know, alright? But why must Melanie pick a fight with me over a woman I can never have, huh? Sure, it might have been my plan to take back Tiffany for myself, no matter the cost or sacrifice. But I see it so clearly now: everything is moving away and apart. Everything’s developing toward an impossibility. That old scum had cut off my options even before he died, forcing me into this marriage and having a child I didn’t want, and then using them and other things to bind me from doing what I want. Even after death, he traps me with the shares of the company, and now, I can’t cut my ties with the Larks even if I wanted to!” he ranted. “Had it not been for that old bastard, Tiffany and Jackson would not have married! They wouldn’t have a child! And I wouldn’t have been stuck with Melanie! Christ, thanks to him, I’m now trapped into the role of Alejandro Smith…”

Jett was surprised to hear something resembling resignation in Alejandro’s diatribe. “Mr. Smith, are you… Are you giving up on Tiffany?”

Alejandro said nothing for a beat before answering, “I can’t give up completely right now, but when I see how happy she is with that Jackson, I just… can’t bring myself to upend her life. Yes, my desires are conflicting, and maybe that dead old man had a point. My stubbornness is a double-edged sword. In the end, neither he nor I could truly ‘win,’ let alone have all of our desires and dreams achieved.

Jett sighed. “With all due respect, if you would look at the silver linings, you would see that everything is rather good, isn’t it? Tiffany’s happy with her life while you and Madam now have a child—an adorable daughter, at that. The two of you could finally settle into your separate but joyous lives. Let bygones be bygones, right? Let go of an attachment, and suddenly, the world brightens up.”

Let it all go? As if letting go was ever that easy. And who could be certain that the world would brighten up just because you gave something up? What if the world turned even bleaker precisely because you let go and gave up? And who in this world could ever achieve that lofty ideal of letting go of their attachment without moments of doubt and hesitation?

Distressed, Alejandro picked up a cigarette. But before he could light it up, Jett stopped him with a warning. “Mr. Smith, please think of the baby. Secondhand smoke is not good for her health, especially when you’re doing it in a small, enclosed space like a car. With all due respect, please hold it off until you’re outside.”

Alejandro threw the cigarette aside and picked Melissa up before teasing her. “Oh, had I known that, I wouldn’t have brought you with me, would I? But then again, how could I leave you with your terrifying lunatic of a mother, huh? Gosh, look at how small you are. How could you be a month old and still not have grown an inch?”

Jett, who watched his boss’s antics from the rear-view mirror, was amused. “Um, Mr. Smith, this is the usual size for a baby who’s just a month old. She’s also very feeble, so please be extra careful when you hold her. In addition to that, she should spend most of her time sleeping. It’s the best way for her to grow, so you ought to coax her into sleeping. Oh, and please do not hold her upright like that. Her neck is not strong enough to support her head yet. You need to hold her horizontally.”

Alejandro was a new father who had not bothered to learn proper baby-caring skills, so it was natural that he was utterly clueless about the dos-and-don’ts of handling a baby. He was an impatient man, yet he managed to temper his fuse long enough to follow Jett’s instruction.

As he watched the cuddly ball of flesh progressively drift into sleep, the veneer of ice on his mien gradually melted away. Alejandro was not going to withhold fatherly love from his daughter—especially since he himself never experienced any of that while growing up.

What he did not have, he would give his children to the best of his abilities. Of all people, he knew that there were some things in life that, once bereft, could never be replaced or compensated.

They reached the company. Alejandro threw himself into handling all of the company affairs accumulated over the past two days of his absence and tasked Jett with taking care of Melissa. Since the arrival of his and Tanya's child, Jett took it upon himself to care for the kid and brush up his knowledge on proper parenting. As a result, he was satisfactorily experienced in childcare.

Suddenly, the phone on his office desk rang. Alejandro picked it up instantly and said, "Yes?"

It was the head of a branch company. "Hello, Mr. Smith, I'm the head of the transportation branch. Tremont Enterprise is currently looking for a new transportation partner, and our company is more than enough to fill their needs with our wealth of experience and qualification. The Tremont Enterprise even showed interest in a partnership between us, and we were close to signing a long-term contract. Theirs is a company with heavy demands for overseas freight, which translates into an impressive long-term income source for us. The problem is… For some reason, once he heard that we're a subsidiary of the Smith family, they suddenly dropped the deal."

Alejandro gave a monotone "understood" and hung up right away.

The Smiths' main venture used to be transportation and freight, which was a lucrative business because it allowed both lawful and less-lawful business to be conducted. It also enabled the Smiths' more underground business to be conducted with relative ease, too.

Then, the Smiths turned their focus to finance, but they still had not given up their transportation business and remained one of this domain's largest and most experienced companies in the country. It was more than suitable enough to cooperate with the Tremont Enterprise.

In other words, Mark called off the deal because of Alejandro, did he not?

Chapter 1334

Alejandro licked the corner of his lips before an indecipherable smile took shape. "Jett, ready the car. We're heading to the Tremont Enterprise."

He was going to get that contract done—of that, he was certain!

Jett thought his ears were deceiving him. "Excuse me, but did you say… Tremont Enterprise? Where Mark Tremont is?" he blurted out. "Aren't you trying to evade him, sir? Why are you showing up right on his doorstep now?"

Alejandro flashed him a sly smile. "There was a legitimate reason in the past to evade him, but now, I have nothing to fear. There's no need to hide anymore. Let's go."

Jett glanced at the baby in his arms. "Are we bringing the little miss with us? Is… Is that appropriate?"

He waved in dismissal. “Bah, take her with us. It’s not like we have anywhere else to place her.”

They reached the Tremont Tower soon enough, and since they did not schedule an appointment beforehand, Alejandro was expectantly barred from entering the premises.

Alejandro was not at all perturbed. Calmly, he gave a call to Mark. “Hey, I’m at the entrance to your esteemed company, and I just want to ask, you sure you don’t want to see me? By the way, I heard that my sister-in-law isn’t at home lately. She has requested for a week-long-break, if I recall correctly—”

Mark blew up before Alejandro could finish his sentence. “Spare me your incessant bullcrap. If you’ve got anything remotely of worth to talk about, then be a man and show your face here.”

Not even two minutes after that phone call, the security by the door allowed Alejandro to pass. The speed of his access shocked Jett, who began to wonder if Mark had always been so… negotiable.

Halfway through the elevator trip, Melissa suddenly began to cry inconsolably. Jett tried to mollify her, but even after he turned red in a frenzy, the child would not stop. Alejandro, however, took the child from his arms and cooed quietly. “Hush now. Dad’s got important business to do.”

They reached the forty-sixth floor. The first thing they saw after exiting the elevator was Davy. He walked toward them and opened his mouth, but Alejandro shut him down with an icy glare.

Davy returned to his seat, bummed. If this unwelcome guest was not keen on changing into indoor shoes, then don't! Why shoot him that nasty stink eye when he was not the one who made the rules? In fact, this guest should take his shoes-changing grievance to the big man inside the office himself!

Alejandro did not knock, and since his hands were full with Melissa, he decided to just kick the door open before sauntering inside.

Jett's outreaching hand froze in midair before he could open the door for his boss. Anxious sweat broke out of him, and suddenly, he felt that it would be safer for him to remain outside Mark's office. Which of Alejandro's actions looked like he was here to strike a deal? All Jett saw was a petulant man with an ax to grind. If his boss kept this act up, it would take a miracle for any kind of deal to be made!

Mark was infuriated by Alejandro's attitude, and it showed in his increasingly stormy mien. "Gotten bored of life, have you? If you have anything to say at all, spill it. Then get out of my face."

Alejandro threw his butt onto the couch, decorum be damned. "What's wrong with bringing your niece to see her uncle, huh? Besides… I heard you've been looking to establish a new partnership with a transportation company. Why? Your previous partner falling short of your lofty standards? The Smith family's been dabbling in this domain for ages, oh brother of mine, so why won't you work with me? Is it because you are scared that I might stab you in the back? Hmph. Could you really be that much of a milquetoast?"

Mark leveled him with a dangerously biting scowl. "Aww, so you're here because of that, hmm? Heh. I'm not going to pass a partnership of utmost importance to a scoundrel like you; I'm neither blind nor suicidal. I'll be frank, I don't at all trust you to understand the sanctity of contractual honor and integrity—hell could freeze over before a single sheet of paper can keep your 'conscience' in check," he sneered. "Now, if you have nothing else to squander my time, then piss off. Oh, and one final thing: spy on my life one more time, and I'll have you gone from this world."

Chapter 1335

Alejandro understood Mark immediately and chuckled in response. “O-ho, all I know is that Arianne isn’t in the Capital for the time being. Why is the pot, who also spies on me regularly, so mad at the kettle?”

He was not wrong. Both Mark and Alejandro had their eyes on each other’s every movement at all times. Mark was not in the mood to refute him or continue giving him attention, so he turned to the document in his hand.

Unfortunately, Baby Melissa’s incessant bawls were so shrill and grating that it became a challenge just to stay focused. Frustrated, Mark looked up and snapped, “Can you shut your kid up? I can’t believe someone like you could live long enough to become a father. It’s like God wasn’t watching the world at all!”

Alejandro frowned. “Wow, do you kiss your wife with that mouth? What, I can’t be a father too? Even if I don’t deserve to be one, well, I am one now; what are you gonna do about that? Besides, you’re just as ill-deserving of fatherhood, yet here you are!” he retorted, before adding, “Why is she crying? I tried to coax her out of it, but she wouldn’t stop.”

Mark harbored not a lick of pity nor solicitude for his half-brother, but he could not bear to see the baby girl’s voice turning hoarse from her crying, either, so he relented a little and reminded Alejandro. “Look, is she hungry? If not, check if she has defecated or urinated, and then change her diaper. For Christ’s sake, if you don’t know any of this, then why the hell did you bring her out here? Look at her—she’s a fragile newborn! You’re utterly obtuse about even the basics. God, her survival at your laughably incompetent hands should be hailed as a miracle!”

Alejandro placed Melissa on the couch and undid her diaper, examining. “Oh, she did pee-pee. So you were crying because of discomfort, weren’t you, sweet peas? Daddy will help you change now.”

Mark was losing his mind. “Can—you—not—do—it—here?!”

Alejandro replied in a heartbeat. “Nope, and also, I just remembered something. I don’t know how to change a baby’s diaper. But you do, don’t you? Well, come over here and help the poor girl out. We may have bad blood between us, but the child is innocent, right? She’s your niece, you know.”

Mark crumpled a contract he happened to be holding as he imagined tearing Alejandro into pieces with his bare hands. “This is your f**king game plan, isn’t it? You’re here to aggrieve me as much as you can! You don’t even have the most fundamental idea of caring for a newborn, but you still brought her here. Well, good luck getting yourself a deal because you aren’t getting it from me! It is final, and nothing you say will change that fact!”

“Tsk tsk, don’t get your feathers ruffled, man,” Alejandro said. “If I were unconfident with my ability to secure a deal, then I wouldn’t have come here at all. If you’re really that worried, then add a clause in our contract that says every ‘unforeseeable accident’ during transportation—barring the occurrence of natural disasters—would automatically be under my responsibility. That’s good enough for you, right? If not, well, let’s continue this back-and-forth dance of ours and see who tires first.”

His words triggered Mark’s suspicion. “You crawled out from under your rock and came here… just for this deal? What the hell are you planning in that black heart of yours? I don’t recall you being someone who would sacrifice his pride for money, so spill it: what do you want exactly?”

Alejandro looked as though he’d never had anything to hide. “Oh, but I’ve always been that kind of person. It’s a good business deal, this one. Naturally, I need to go all-out to get it before it falls into someone else’s hand. You know what this one guy said? ‘When in no doubt, get your relatives.’ You agree with that, don’t you?”

Mark turned the idea over and over in his head for a good while before sighing. The most significant persuading factor was Arianne's safety—Mark was worried that Alejandro might have a shady scheme to hurt her if the deal did not fall through. But more importantly, Mark realized he was not necessarily barred from other options just because he partnered with Alejandro's company. In addition to that, he could always delegate the least important cargos to the Smiths' transportation company; that way, even if something befell these goods, the cost would still be manageable.

With his decision finalized, Mark brought Davy in to help prepare the contract. Before Alejandro could put his signature on it, Mark offered stern words of caution. "You got what you came here for, so if you continue tormenting me, then don't blame me when I hit you back. Might I remind you that my patience is very limited? You'd do best not to think I can't ruin you."

Alejandro looked at him with a half-smile. "Oh, I heard you loud and clear. As long as I don't do anything shady, you won't do anything to me, right? Question is: am I shady now? I stand before you today as Alejandro Smith, not Ethan Connor. What's so spooky about that?"

Chapter 1336

After signing the contract and changing the baby's diapers, Alejandro left. He didn't stay a minute longer. However, Mark felt a sense of gloom.

"Are you sure you want to work with the Smiths?" Davy asked carefully. "Isn't it a big risk? He's been going against us ever since his arrival in the capital. He's fought with us over property countless times. I'm worried that he might have an ulterior motive."

Mark took a deep breath. "I have a plan. That's all."

Alejandro was in a great mood when he arrived back in the car. Jett felt that it was an early celebration. “Sir, aren’t you worried that Tremont Enterprises might find a different transport company? That wasn’t an exclusive contract. Wouldn’t that contract be wasted then?”

Alejandro wasn’t worried at all. “I’d love to see which transport company would have the balls to pick a fight with me. I’ve considered everything that you could think of. Let’s go home.”

He knew that at this very moment, Melanie was with Tiffany.

It was lunch break and the two women were in a restaurant discussing the menu. It was an amiable discussion, but both women’s eyes would peak and try to probe into the other’s thoughts from time to time.

After ordering the food, Tiffany asked, “Where’s your daughter? Are you alright with leaving her at home?”

Melanie smiled. “Alex has gone to the office. He loves our daughter more than me. She’s a daddy’s girl, as they say. It must be true.”

Tiffany couldn’t help but notice the subtle meaning in her words and said, “How could he possibly love your daughter more than you? He loves both of you. He loves his daughter because he loves you. She’s a product of your love. How could you think that? Am I right?”

Melanie picked up her tea cup and took a sip. “Probably. But I have a feeling that Alex has someone else on his mind. We didn’t establish a foundation when we got married. Not even I believe in how much he loves me.”

Tiffany secretly rubbed her hands in panic. She knew that Melanie had kept in contact with her because she knew of her connection with Alejandro. All she needed to do was point it out. This hypocritical show of chatting like best friends gave her a lot of pressure.

Noticing her unease, Melanie changed the topic. “Tiffany, I don’t want to feign ignorance anymore. I’m at my wit’s end. I know that Alejandro is in love with you, and he’s loved you for a very long time. You met each other not too long ago, and I found out about this right after I got together with him because I saw your picture in his wallet. I’m sorry for approaching you with an ulterior motive. But I don’t mean any harm. It’s just that I have this thing on my mind, driving me into this, telling me to get to know you, wondering what kind of woman you are, to make him pine for you.”

Tiffany smiled awkwardly. She didn’t expect that Melanie would be so blunt. “Don’t overthink it, you’ll drive yourself crazy that way. He and I are in the past, it was ages ago. Don’t let it disrupt your married life. Honestly, there’s no need. We don’t contact each other anymore. I met him to make things clear between us. I won’t cheat. I love Jackson West, and only Jackson West. I haven’t thought of any other man since I got together with him. So you really don’t have to worry. I don’t care if you had an ulterior motive in approaching me because I see you as a friend.”

Chapter 1337

Melanie’s eyes brimmed with tears. “I know, I can feel it. That’s why I can’t seem to hate you. But he can’t forget you. What can I do? I knew when he risked his life to save you that I’d lost. Grandfather has passed away anyway, so I’m not afraid of saying this. It was grandfather—he tried to kill you. Grandfather hoped that Alejandro would dedicate himself to me and support the Smith. He was worried that you might become an obstacle, so that’s why he made that decision. At the time, I was the only one who knew about this, aside from grandfather. I didn’t want you to be hurt because of this, and Alejandro would be affected too so I told him about it. I didn’t expect that he would risk everything just to save you… I took care of him, whose legs were inconvenienced by that accident, for so long after that accident, but I was hurting the entire time because it was all for you…”

Tiffany felt upset. She was completely unaware of this. She was moved when she found out that Alejandro had risked his life to save her. She had always considered him a selfish man, claiming that he wanted to make it up to her simply to placate his conscience. But why did he have to do that? He had risked his life… It was completely selfless.

After taking a deep breath, she spoke soothingly, “Melanie, please don’t be upset. He owed me that. That’s why our debt is now clear.”

“He owed you?” Melanie stared at her apprehensively. “How much does he owe you? What happened between you? I want to know. Can you tell me?”

Tiffany did not want to reopen her heavy wounds and simply asked, “What if Alejandro isn’t the Alejandro that he used to be? What if he’s someone else? Would you still love him?”

Melanie lowered her gaze, paused, and replied, “I’ve always loved him, so it doesn’t matter to me if his real name is Alejandro or not. So… he’s not really Alejandro Smith? I’ve only ever suspected it. I didn’t think that it would be true. Grandfather knew everything, but he didn’t tell me everything. Probably because this was a Smith family matter, and I’m a Lark.”

Tiffany smiled helplessly. “He really isn’t Alejandro Smith. The real Alejandro Smith is dead, and he was forced to become Alejandro Smith while Don Smith had to treat him like the real Alejandro. His name is Ethan Connor. We dated in college for three years… And I ended up badly hurt because of it. Three years, and he never loved me then. He ruined my entire family and tried to make up for it later. But it was too little too late. Actually, now that I think about it, it’s really thanks to him that Jackson swooped in to save me, back when he put me into the most difficult time of my life. Jackson helped me when my father needed money for surgery. Because of that, Jackson and I got involved, and we sort of developed from then on. I guess you could call it destiny, written in the stars. That’s why I don’t hate him so much. What’s the point? When will it end? I just want to live out my days with the man I love, and I hope that he’ll let go too and take care of you. After all, I can tell that you love him. You deserve to be treated well by him.”

“You’re the only one on his mind,” Melanie mumbled. “How could there possibly be space for me? I’m exhausted. Sometimes, I just want to give up, but I can’t do it. Thank you for meeting me. I feel much better after talking to you.”

They had already revealed so much anyway, so Tiffany didn’t mind divulging a little more. “It’s good to let it out. Don’t keep it all in, or it’ll drive you nuts. There’s one more thing you may not know, but Ethan… His surname was supposed to be Tremont. He’s a Tremont. He’s Mark’s half-brother. Their lives are wildly different, which is how Ethan ended up on the wrong path. It’s not entirely his fault. It’s best to pretend that Ethan Connor is dead and see him as Alejandro Smith instead. Don’t mention these sensitive issues to him.”

Melanie was shocked. “What? Are you saying… that Alejandro… is Mark Tremont’s half-brother? You must be exaggerating. How much did he have to go through to turn into Alejandro Smith?”

Tiffany sighed. “Too much. I’ll never be able to summarize it clearly for you, so it’s best that you have a rough overview. It hasn’t been easy on him or on everyone else. So it’s best for things to stay the same. He’s slow to warm up, so you’ll have to be patient. He’ll remember those who’ve been kind to him. He’s not made of rock. I believe that his longing for me simply stems from the fact that he remembers those three years when I was good to him. That’s why he feels so guilty. He hadn’t learned how to love back then, no one taught him…”

Chapter 1338

Just then, the waitress served the dishes. Melanie nodded. “Please, eat. You have to get back to work later, don’t you? Enjoy your food, then go back to work. I’m going to meet Alex at this office. I hope that we can still be friends.”

Tiffany smiled in a carefree manner. “Of course, we’ve always been friends. It’s good that it’s now out in the open. I’m not a petty person. I won’t think the worst of people.”

The pair separated after lunch and Melanie drove to Smith Enterprises’ office.

She had a very grim look on her face when she left the house, with negative vibes swirling all over her body. Now, she looked radiant.

She felt guilty over her quarrel with Alejandro this morning, so she brought some desserts. She wasn’t sure if Alejandro liked desserts, but she believed that something sweet could always put someone in a good mood.

She found Jett watching over a sleeping Melissa when she arrived at the office. Alejandro was busy. She strode forward and put down the desserts. “Jett, I’ve brought some desserts for you and Alex to enjoy. Has the baby been a bother to him? I’ll take her away later, so you can go about your own business.”

It had been a while since he'd seen Melanie in such a good mood. Jett was taken aback. “Uh… Sure. Thanks, ma’am.”

Melanie smiled, gazed at the little one for a while, then looked at Alejandro, who was staring at her too. When their gazes met, they locked eyes for two whole seconds before Alejandro turned away. “I don’t eat dessert. You can enjoy them, Jett. Take them home if you can’t finish them.”

Melanie felt slightly disappointed but remembered Tiffany’s reminder. She opened up the dessert box and put one cake in front of Alejandro. “Give it a try. The desserts from this café are pretty good. It’s fine if you don’t like it. Just try. Maybe you’ll like the taste?”

Alejandro frowned and took a bite. “Yes, it’s not bad. Will that do? If there’s nothing else, please take the baby home.”

She scooped Melissa into her arms without hesitation. “Will you be coming home for dinner then? The baby and I will be waiting for you.”

Alejandro was beginning to wonder if she’d taken the wrong medication today. She was suddenly at peace and not as temperamental. He had to take a few more glances at her. “Yes… I’ll try to come home early.”

Chapter 1339

Melanie left after receiving his reply.

Jett and Alejandro stared blankly at each other when she left, obviously sharing the same thought—Melanie had most likely taken the wrong medication today. Jett cleared his throat. “Maybe she has cleared her head and isn’t depressed anymore. It’s good. Women tend to have a habit of doing that. They can change their minds faster than flipping the page of a book.”

“Is your wife like that too?” Alejandro asked apprehensively. “How have you managed to stay sane?”

“She isn’t,” Jett answered with a straight face. “Tanya’s pretty good. She has a great personality and has never sulked at me. We’ve never even had a fight.”

Alejandro curled his lips. “Alright, stop boasting. I don’t want much from Melanie, as long as she doesn’t start a fight with me for no good reason. I can’t stand it when women nitpick, like they have nothing better to do. One more thing, you can go straight home after dropping me off at the manor from now on. Things are different now. You have a family, a wife and a baby. It’d be inhumane of me to expect you to put me at the center of your universe.”

Jett was taken aback, then smiled with relief. “Okay.” This meant that Alejandro had completely lowered his defenses against him, probably because Don Smith had passed away. No more threat meant no need for vigilance.

Mark left the office early that afternoon because Arianne wasn’t around and no one could manage Aristotle. Hence, he was forced to take care of things on his own.

He gave Arianne a video call on the way home. Arianne was still busy, rushing around for the dessert shop. Having confirmed that she needed to move the dessert shop and reopen it in another location, she was in the middle of choosing a new location. He didn’t say much and usually remained completely silent throughout the entire video call. Arianne knew him well, so she went about her own business and talked to him on and off.

When he arrived at Tremont Estate, Arianne overheard the sound of Aristotle’s voice through the phone. She quickly aimed the camera squarely at herself. “Let me see Smore!”

Mark obediently lifted Aristotle into his arms. “Look at mommy.”

Aristotle stared at the phone screen for two seconds. Then, his tiny lips quivered and he burst into tears. “I waan mama… I waan mama…”

Arianne's heart ached. "Mama will be home soon. Very, very soon. Be a good boy to daddy for two days, okay?"

Mark delighted in her dilemma. "Can't bear to leave him, yet you've still insisted on going so far away, and you're gone for an entire week too. Both the baby and I are suffering. Try to finish up soon and come home; leave the rest to Naya and everyone else. If Naya's too busy, tell the pastry chef to do it. The shop is closed and he has nothing to do anyway. I sent him, why should you worry?"

Arianne shot him a glare. "Is Smore the one missing me, or a certain someone? You sound a little whiny."

Mark stubbornly refused to admit it. "A certain someone isn't missing you. It's not like he'll die without you around. Stop parading like a peacock."

Arianne clicked her tongue. "Is that so? Then if Smore's the only one that misses me, it's not enough to convince me into coming home early. I'll hurry home when a certain someone starts missing me too. I've gotta go, I don't want Smore to kick up another fuss if he sees me again."

Mark checked his surroundings, ensured that no one was around, then quickly said, "A certain someone misses you too. Hurry up and come home!"

Chapter 1340

Arianne ended the video call with a smile, leaving Mark with a sniffling Aristotle, staring at each other. Both father and son looked like two pitiful abandoned pets—misery loves company.

Meanwhile, Alejandro had returned to the manor too.

Dinner was ready. Melanie was still wearing her apron. It looked like she had cooked everything herself. She smiled when she saw Alejandro and Jett. “Wash up, it’s time for dinner. I cooked everything myself today. Try it. Jett, please join us.”

She cooked? Was this the pampered Lark heiress? Alejandro frowned and said nothing. He went to the washroom straightaway.

“Uh… Madam, I think I’d better go home for dinner,” Jett said. “I won’t be staying here from now on. Goodbye.”

Melanie didn’t stop him. “Alright, you go on home then. Don’t let Tanya wait too long. It’s good to stay at home; it’s more convenient.”

At the dinner table, Melanie scooped dishes for Alejandro from time to time. None of the dishes were spicy, even though she favored flavorful dishes.

She had consulted Tiffany—Alejandro had a simpler palate and preferred minimal spices. He favored comfort food, and she was working hard to learn it.

The current atmosphere made Alejandro slightly uneasy. “We have a housekeeper, so why did you have to cook? Just take care of the baby. I don’t expect you to do anything else.”

The smile on Melanie's face stiffened. Then, she said, "Am I nothing more than a trophy wife to you? Do I have no good qualities? I can take care of the baby and manage a company. I can support you in both family matters and work. Don't put me in a corner. I don't like having nothing to do. I used to be able to hang out with my best friends in Ayashe. Here, I don't have any other friends aside from Tiffany."

Alejandro's expression sank at the mention of Tiffany. "Friend? When did she become your friend? You're not approaching her, purely to be her friend, are you? I may not understand women very well, but I know that you can't possibly be friends in your current position. I'm not an idiot. Stay away from her."

Melanie knew that he would react this way and calmly replied, "Believe it or not, but she and I are friends and we don't have anything against each other. Don't use your narrow-mindedness on our friendship. She has told me everything. We talk about everything. You once dated her, didn't you? It's fine. I'm totally fine with that because you both have your own families. She doesn't have feelings for you anymore, so why can't we be friends? I like her carefree personality; it's easy to get along with. I don't care what you think of her, but our conversations are amiable and that's enough. Even if you weren't in the picture, I would've been friends with her if I'd met her anyway. You're not an important factor in our friendship, nor will you affect us."

Alejandro stared at her. His gaze was wavering. "She told you everything?"

"That's right," Melanie nodded. "Including the fact that you're not the real Alejandro… But let's not talk about sad memories from the past. Please, eat."

Alejandro's heart was seized by a wave of emotions. "Seeing as you know everything, don't you have any questions for me? Doesn't it matter? Even if I'm not the real Alejandro?"

Melanie bit her lips. “I have a lot of questions, but I think it might upset you. So, I’m holding it all in, instead of asking. In regards to your real identity, I just want to know, would you ever consider going back to who you used to be, someday? When that happens, will our marriage remain valid? You married me as Alejandro Smith. If you go back to your real identity… According to law, we’re not related. Nothing else can prove that we’ve been together, except our baby.”