**Ruling 1431**

Chapter 1431

Zoey broke into a grin. “All thanks to your guidance, brother dear! Aren’t you just the luckiest to have someone as good as Mark as your brother-in-law, Harv?”

Harvey lowered his head, visibly embarrassed. He hated it when his parents went into buttery-flattery-mode. He was also deeply ashamed of the things his parents had done. Somehow, they always managed to find the most shameless things to make him feel burned.

As it was a festive day today; Mary and Henry joined the Tremonts and Wynns for lunch. It started as good as one could hope until Harris raised his glass ostensibly to toast in Mark’s name. “I would like to thank you for taking care of my son Harv so well. We didn’t even know he was working under you until I read his payroll and saw your esteemed company’s name on it! Come, let us drink to that!”

Arianne worried that Mark’s past grudges with them would spur him into ignoring Harris out of spite, but her worry turned into relief when her husband raised his glass cooperatively.

Seeing Harvey remain seated without showing any sign of answering his old man’s call, he chided under his breath, “Well? Get up, kiddo, we’re toasting to Mark! Do I really have to remind you what to do?”

Harvey opened his mouth, as though in protest, and then closed it again. In the end, he raised his glass and stood obediently.

Strangely, Harris did not return to his seat thereafter. His voice took a sudden steep into pathos and lamented. “Oh, we used to have the fortune to live comfortably, but we threw that opportunity away and just… Sigh. Every time I think of what happened in the past, I feel terrible! I know you people are

nothing but merciful and benevolent—I mean, why else would you be so kind and unreserved in helping our little Harv? Now, look at him at the start of his career! He's gonna date a pretty sweetie before you know it, and then there will be marriage, buying a house, whatchamacallits. Sadly, his mom and I are incapable of supporting him… So, well? We know we've done wrong, but we have repented, and ah, I hope my family could lend him a much-needed hand for our son. He can't possibly buy a house by himself."

Before Mark and Arianne could react, a very fed-up Harvey blurted out, "You told me this is just a family-to-family visit! You didn't say anything about mentioning… well, mentioning any of this! I never said I'm dating anyone—or looking for anyone, for that matter. And even if I do wanna buy a place for myself, it's my own business. I can make money for that by myself; I don't need to open my palms pleading for money like a beggar. No one here has any obligation to give us anything just because, period. You're embarrassing me, Mom, Dad. Stop it!"

Zoey tugged Harvey by his arm. She said nothing, but the implication could not be any starker—this was something the parents had cogitated behind their son's back.

They were Arianne's relatives, Mark thought, so he resigned to silence and let his wife handle it.

Right now, the woman in question shared Harvey's shame. Arianne felt her cheeks burning in overwhelming embarrassment! She never at all expected Zoey and her spouse to be so thick-skinned that they would ask her for money at a moment like this. She really overestimated their decency.

Still, Arianne would not want Harvey to feel even more embarrassed, so she put on her most cordial smile and tried to make peace. "C'mon, Aunt Zoey, Uncle Harris. Harvey has shown multiple times that he's a really capable go-getter. Those concerns that you voiced? I have no doubts that he can achieve them all by himself without me giving him any crutches. I mean, did you hear what he said just now? That was so cool and responsible. He's a grown-up now, so you guys should probably discuss these things with Harvey next time, okay? You gotta' respect your son."

Zoey let out another one of her buttery, coy chuckles. “Oh, no, better not mistake his youthful foolhardiness as anything more, yea? Youngsters like him are so uppity; they don’t even know how expensive a house costs in the Capital! How long is he gonna work his butt off just to get enough for his marriage? He might never earn himself a house even if he works all his life! But anyway, there’s nothing wrong with a little advance planning, right? He’s currently working in the Capital, and his career and life are very likely to start here. Right?”

“If the two of you really were planning for the future, then you would know better than to cast away your dignity for money,” Arianne countered, a little icily. “Anyway, let’s put a stop to this. Let’s eat.”

Chapter 1432

Zoey did not say anything more, but her husband, pretending to be drunk, murmured under his breath, “Wow, they treat their workers so well, but their actual relatives? Nope, that’s too much! Jesus, I get it, we aren’t related by blood. But Zoey’s still your aunt and deserves your respect, too.”

Mark abruptly hurtled his fork and spoon to the table, got up, and stormed upstairs. Henry and Mary—dragged into the fray out of the blue—simultaneously put down their utensils, their food untouched.

Arianne forced the flames flaring inside of her from spilling out to the open. “Here’s what you’re missing, Mary and Henry aren’t just “some workers” to me. They are the family who watched me grow, which means they’ve been in our lives way longer and more significantly than my supposed aunt and uncle. When Mark went missing and we were in a very dark place, where were you two, huh? But when he’s back, alive and well, you come right back, wagging your tails and showing your faces! Humor me this, what would happen had I looked for the two of you for support during the early days after the accident? Would you have helped me at all?”

“Come on, it’s not like there was anything we could do to help substantially. If we could do something, you know we would!” Zoey protested meekly.

Arianne was so vexed that she laughed scornfully. “Oh please. Save your breath and quit pretending. At the very least, can you two stop embarrassing Harvey and mocking his dignity? For Christ’s sake, the only reason why the two of you were even allowed in this house is that we respect and value your son. If it weren’t for him, you wouldn’t even be here dining with us!” she sneered. “God, you can’t even have lunch without pissing people off. I guess this is goodbye, then. Pardon us for not wanting to see you off, but you know why. Oh, and by the way, Harvey? Please don’t take this personally. It’s got nothing to do with you and plenty to do with your parents being a colossal failure at decency. Please don’t be offended, mmkay?”

Harvey nodded sheepishly, and after a quiet mumbling of apology, he left the table. His parents, too, knew they could not stay any longer and fled the house looking defeated.

Arianne turned to Mary and Henry. “I’m so sorry about what happened. They are vile to the core, I’m afraid, so please don’t let them get to you.”

Mary frowned. “Dear child, Henry and I aren’t mad about this at all. All we feel is pity—pity that you have the misfortune to be related to someone like... well, that. I don’t get it, how is a swell young lad like your cousin a spawn of that horrid couple, huh? Ah, either way, I think you should go convince Mr. Tremont to come back down for lunch. I noticed that he didn’t touch anything on his plate—must have been so flamed by those nimrods that he couldn’t eat.”

Arianne did as she suggested and climbed up the stairs. There, she saw Mark sitting on his chair, looking out of the French window in their room while puffing his cigarette. As he smoked, his coughs worsened even more than before.

Arianne dashed forward, snatched the cigarette away, and put it out. “What do you think you’re doing, mister? Do you want your lungs or not? You know how bad your lungs have become; how could you still think it’s a good idea to smoke?”

Then, she softened her tone and added, “God, that was a mess. I’m sorry, I didn’t know it’d turned up this way. I wouldn't have let them join us if I knew. Please don’t be mad, okay? Come downstairs and eat.”

Mark held her hand and gave a gentle pull. “I wasn’t mad at you; I was just baffled at how… hard they failed at being decent people with standards. If I were Harvey back there, I would dive straight into any bottomless abyss if it meant that I could hide from those big imbeciles. Honestly, can’t his parents at least think about how their kid feels? How difficult it must have been for Harvey to sit through all that cringe!”

Of course, Arianne could imagine how she would feel in her cousin’s shoe—she would probably resign to helplessness, she predicted. “What can we do? You can’t make a leopard change its spots. But that doesn’t mean we’re letting these people ruin our Easter, are we? So come on, Mark… Pwetty pwease with a cherry on top?”

He stood and pulled her into his embrace, planting a kiss on her cheek. “Christ, the way you look when you’re being cute like that—so adorable, I wanna eat you!”

Arianne curled her lips into a teasing smile. “Hold that thought, Romeo, lunch first. And a word of advice: no more smoking for you from now on, you hear me? I don’t want you to follow in Eric’s footsteps and go before your time. You must live long for me and Smore’s sake! Live as long as you can, as much as you can. Don’t forget, you’re older than me by a decade, so you need to work really hard to live longer than I do. You’ve done enough to hurt me when I grieved for you,” she said. “Last but not least, I need to be the first one to go, okay? That way, it’ll be your turn to be crushed by grief and sadness. Frankly, I don’t think I can endure it a second time if you die before I do, you know.”

Mark lifted a few loose strands of her hair and let them slip through his fingers. “You’re forgetting the fact that I won’t be able to endure losing you before me, too.”

It was then that Mary's voice blared from outside the door. "Can the two of you please set aside all this nonsense about who dies first and come back to lunch? The food's getting cold, dearies. Even Smore has finished his portion!"

Chapter 1433

Arianne and Mark both broke into giggles. The two took each others' hands and descended the stairs back to their lunch.

Feeling his hand in hers filled Arianne with an immense sense of security and a desire to bind her fingers with his forever, never to part. She loved the smell emanating from him. She loved the warmth spreading into her hand from his palm. She loved how his warmest, gentlest, and kindest self was always only reserved for her.

She loved everything about him; the good, the bad, the whole.

After their meal, the family relaxed in their yard, though Mark was busy making calls. Judging from the content of his conversations, Arianne judged that they were all work-related.

A part of her watched Smore as he played with his slide, but most of her attention was on Mark. Ever since his return, Arianne realized that her eyes would always drift to his visage given any chance. His gestures, motions, all of his expressions—they never ceased to enthrall her. It was as though there was a sempiternal quality to him that forbade Arianne from ever getting bored of watching him.

Arianne had thought that, given how attentive he was to his calls, Mark must have been oblivious to Arianne's unblinking goo-goo eyes. However, contrary to her expectation, the first thing Mark did was to

turn to her and say, “Alright, what’s with you staring at me like that? You looked at me throughout all half an hour of my conversation! Is there something on my face?”

Two luminescent reddish blushes tinged her cheeks as Arianne looked elsewhere. “Uh, n-no. I just, um, noticed your outfit today is very becoming of you. Your hair too; um, you look several years younger than you are…”

Mark was puzzled. “But I’ve always worn my shirts this way. And my hair has grown a little longer, I guess. I just haven’t bothered to tidy it because I’m not going to work… Hmm, maybe I should go and take care of it some time.”

He was right; his hair had grown longer. He usually kept it tidy and neat—not a strand out of place—so he looked mature and wise beyond his years. Today, however, Mark had let his hair down over his forehead, which allowed his air bangs to make him look so much younger. Some of the strands even reached his eyes, which only ascribed an entrapping depth in his pupils.

God, he had the look of a teenage girl’s first crush. And that was precisely the sort of aura Arianne found irresistible.

Streams of sunlight survived the overhead canopy of verdant foliage as little golden shards scattered all over Mark’s chiseled nose. The light dazed Arianne into a hazy recollection of the first time she came to the Tremont Estate. She had gazed at Mark and immediately assumed he was an angel.

He was just an eighteen-year-old young dude, a steely man hiding a warm heart behind his cold façade with melancholic shadows residing in his eyes. He had looked down at her like a king to his subject back then. His thoughts had been unfathomable to her…

Arianne was so lost in her mind that she did not know she had been staring at Mark again. It took the man pinching her jaw to rouse the daydreaming woman back to reality, who quickly offered, “Hey, do you want to, uh, take a nap? This weather is kinda hot. Look at Smore; he’s drenching in his sweat already.”

Mark's eyes seemed to have darkened a little at her suggestion. His Adam’s apple moved suggestively when he answered, “Alright.”

Tired from his frantic activities, Smore let Mary give him a quick shower before she serenaded him into his nap.

Arianne and Mark, too, returned to their bedroom. The woman’s napping suggestion turned out to be bona fide, but Mark’s answer was not. He loomed over her at the very next second after she laid.

She stared into his eyes blankly, her heart racing, and waited for his kisses to rain on her.

Nothing came. Instead, with playful twinkles in his eyes, Mark teased, “You’ve been dreaming about this, haven’t you?”

Arianne was a little dumbstruck. “W-what?”

Mark wrongly interpreted her question as a deflection. “Come on, you’ve been staring at me the entire time just now with your cheeks flushed. You sure you weren’t thinking about something crazy? You know, stuff like what we’re about to do?”

Arianne finally understood him and rebutted. “Hang on; n-no! I just… I just couldn’t stop thinking to myself about how handsome you are…”

He cocked his one brow. “Oh? But I’ve always been handsome, haven’t I? But you never stared at me like that before. Hell, it used to seem like you would do anything just for a chance to not look at me. What changed?”

Chapter 1434

Arianne no longer wanted to suppress her feelings for Mark. “I don’t know what exactly happened, either. All I know is that I suddenly realized how much I love you. It’s so overwhelming, so strong, I feel—no, I yearn to be beside you at every moment. We don’t even have to do anything; just watching you is enough. But most of all? I’m mortified at the idea that you might disappear all of a sudden, and then I remember how that almost happened—how you almost completely vanished from my life—and my heart… It feels crushed. I feel a weight on my chest; I can’t breathe. I… I wonder, Mark, do you know how that feels?”

Arianne did not have to wait for long, for her awaited answer came in the form of a swift, firm kiss.

Of course, Mark loved her the same way as she did him; he always had. He loved her so much that he could not bear to be separated from her. All of the wiles and trickeries and labors he had done, just to make her stay! It used to be one-sided, and he had to resort to intimidation and force to bind her. But now, she wanted to stay with him out of her own will. She finally loved him back.

The feelings she described were no strangers to him. No, how could they be, when he had harbored them for so, so many years? It took a long time, but the love of his life finally shared the full, unbridled intensity of his ardor. It was never too late for Arianne to reciprocate.

To Mark, the long wait was over.

This was the first time every fiber in Arianne's body relaxed. She welcomed him, complemented the dance on his tongue, and savored the totality of his kiss.

Kissing the person you loved was a marvelous experience. Doing it with someone you sincerely, genuinely loved was even more intoxicating—at least, that was what Arianne felt. She was rapidly losing her mind into a hazy trance; nothing else mattered to her other than him.

When they began to embrace one another, her heart fluttered in ecstasy.

…

There was something about the afternoon air that inspired languidness in people.

Sylvain was happily napping on his bed when the sound of the doorbell woke him up. He opened the door and stared at the delivery boy with a bleary look. "Uh, you're probably at the wrong house 'cause I don't recall ordering anything for myself. What's even inside?"

The delivery boy checked the address before stating, "Nope, this is the right address, sir. It's Easter today, so you're probably getting something like an Easter egg, maybe?"

Easter eggs? Sylvain was not exactly a fan of getting Easter eggs that were not real eggs. Besides, it was not like his company had forgotten to gift him their complementary festive egg.

Suspicious, he received the delivered item from the boy and opened it, finding it to be, unsurprisingly, a basket of easter eggs. There was a card attached to it—it was from Robin Cox.

His lips curled into a smile. Even his own mother seemed to have cared little for him as soon as he left for the city, yet someone else cared. It did not matter if he liked what he got; the joy of receiving a gift like this was in the fact that someone remembered him.

He pulled out his phone and texted Robin. 'Thank you for the gift! I've just received it. It was so out of the blue; I don't even know what to give you back. What would you like?'

Contrary to the empty loneliness in Sylvain's home, Robin's was at its most bustling yet. Most people would visit their relatives during festivals like these, but her family took it up to the next level by having relatives of all kinds to celebrate together.

Right now, Robin was hiding in her room when she replied, 'I'm good, thanks. It's just a little present for you, so enjoy it.'

Sylvain's response to that was to invite her to dinner with him. She was just about to answer him when her mother yelled from outside her room, "What are you doing in there, Robin? You can't be hiding in your room when there are guests. Have you no acumen for social decorums? Get back here! Your aunt's got something to tell you!"

Robin answered her while her fingers deftly replied an “ok!” to Sylvain. After that, she put away her phone and assumed her tried and practiced role of a goodie-two-shoes. With a phony smile plastered on her face, she went outside to greet her parents.

She had barely made herself comfortable on the couch when her aunt held her hand eagerly, exclaiming, “Robin, sweetie! Look at how much you’ve grown! I heard you haven’t dated any boy yet, have you? I know a boy whom I thought would be quite the match for you. He’s a very spirited young man with a very stable and dependable income. So, are you interested in seeing him? Because I think a festive day like today would be just the perfect social opportunity to meet up. What says you?”

Robin loathed having a bunch of nosy relatives dictate her relationships, so she put on her best behavior and declined. “Thanks, but I’m good. To be honest, I kinda want to just focus on my career. I’m not in the mood for beaus and stuff. I mean, isn’t that the better thing for younglings like us? I’m thinking of channeling my energy into work for at least two more years.”

Chapter 1435

Mrs. Cox’s habit of dunking on her daughter kicked in automatically. “Please, you’re just an accountant. What’s all of that ‘energy’ going to change? On that note, how’s bookkeeping supposed to get in your way of a good relationship, huh? I fail to see your logic, sweetie. You should be grateful that your aunt has the best of your interests at heart! Especially when you know you can trust her wisdom in judging a man. That settles it, then—you’re seeing your suitor tonight! We’ll have dinner together.”

Robin’s face paled. Her mother had completely bypassed her opinion on this matter. This was no discussion; it was an order!

Even if she were a lily-livered pushover, Robin did not want one of the most crucial and significant events in her life to be dictated solely by her family without her say. Hence, she protested. “No, Mom. I happen to have my own plans for tonight. I won’t be having dinner at home, too. Let’s discuss this some other time.”

Mrs. Cox had gotten so used to Robin's unquestioning obedience that she could not take even the smallest of her dissents well. "What plans? I've never heard of this 'plan' of yours until now! Robin, it's Easter. What important business would require you to not eat with us, hmm? And what sort of things could a young lady do outside in the middle of the night, huh? Hedonistic things, I bet! No, you're not leaving the house tonight, and that's final. Do you understand me?"

Suddenly, Robin lost all strength in maintaining her phony smile. Her hand, too, slipped out of her aunt's.

Her aunt caught the changes befalling her niece, so she tried to mediate between the two. "Aww, Robin's old enough to have her own chums that she wants to hang out with, right? We parents really shouldn't be so controlling of our youngsters. If she wants to see him some other day, that's fine. I'll arrange that, no problem. To be honest, festivals or not, every day's a good day for a date."

Mrs. Cox, however, merely stared at Robin before hissing, "We need to talk."

Robin could read the writings on the wall and know that a fight was coming. She shrugged and followed her mother into her bedroom.

Her mother wasted no time to rant in her most acrimonious voice. "Tell me the truth, Robin. Who are you having dinner with tonight? It's that no-good ne'er-do-well Sylvain, isn't it? I've told you many, many times by now, young lady. Your career is now very much settled, and all you need is an apt match for your marriage. I've been through this process, Robin. I speak only for your best! Of course, everyone longs for a rosy-colored romantic drama and other illusions of grandeur when they're young and stupid. It's only with age and experience when you'll finally understand the value of tranquil stability in life!"

“You know I only wanted to steer you off the path of doom and destruction, Robin. Do you understand me? That Sylvain isn’t some good Christian boy whom you could trust. I’m not even gonna touch on his unsatisfactory character for now because all we need is to look at how fat his pockets are. He’s a rich, upper-class elite, sweetie; how could a man of that height even care for you? Do you know what rich, libertine young men like him do? They collect hearts! They toy stupid, naïve little girls like yourself. Commitment is never a part of their game. Don’t tell me you sincerely thought he was going to marry you in the end, Robin! I mean, take a look in the mirror—what’s so special about you? Stop imagining yourself as more than who you really are, young lady. You need to grow up and recognize. Your. Place!”

It was one assault after another to Robin’s heart. For what was allegedly said to protect her daughter, Mrs. Cox’s words sounded more disparaging than helpful.

Robin thought her mother’s judgment of Sylvain’s character was way off, and to hear her grossly mischaracterizing and demonizing him made her sick. “Stop it, Mom. Can you just—for God’s sake, please stop disparaging him like that, okay? Have you ever talked to him? Interacted with him? You don’t know him, Mom, so on what basis do you even have to judge? You said you’ve been through my life. Does that mean you’ve once dove headfirst into your own ‘illusions of grandeur’ before settling down with my dad? Sure, Dad’s a teacher, just like you. Same profession and status and all. Heck, he’s never raised a conflict or a single opinion that is against yours! This is what you called ‘stability’, isn’t it? Well, sorry to disappoint you, but I’m not going to repeat your mistake. I’ll never marry someone I don’t love!”

The quarrel between a very heated mother and her daughter was like the rumbling before a cyclone. Had it not been for their relatives' presence, their disagreement would have already escalated into a full-blown shouting match.

Mrs. Cox glanced at the door furtively and hissed under her breath, “Robin Cox, you listen to your mother right now. Your thought process has exposed you as utterly immature. But I can accept that, you know why? Because I know that you’ll come to see where I’m coming from in time. Your mother knows best and only wants the best for her daughter, and that’s a fact. Allow me to reiterate, young lady. You’re forbidden from going out tonight. You are going to stay at home like a good, mature girl and talk to the boy your aunt’s about to introduce to you.”

Robin said nothing, but tears welled up in her eyes.

A while after that incident, Sylvain sent Robin the GPS location of the restaurant he picked. Robin merely replied that she could not go out at the moment, but she would ultimately find a way to see him.

Sylvain was not at all surprised by this development, nor did he ask why. He simply told her he would wait for her.

Chapter 1436

Robin's potential husband arrived before dinner, along with his parents. Everyone was in high spirits, except Robin.

Everyone at the dinner table made every effort to matchmake them, but Robin stayed completely silent. She couldn't even pretend to smile.

This went on until 10PM, when her relatives and potential husband left, along with his own family. Robin immediately went back to her room and changed out of her clothes, then got ready to go out.

Mrs. Cox threw her clothes onto the ground. "What was that? That sulky look on your face? Does someone owe you money? Have you forgotten all your good manners? You're not to step out of this house today. If you leave, you can forget about ever coming back!"

Robin pulled out her ID and waved it in front of her mother. "How old do you think I am? I'm over twenty years old. Anyone at my age who's married early would have had independent kids by now. I'm

not a child anymore. Why do you have to control me all the time? You don't want a daughter, you want a prized puppet, a puppet that doesn't have her own feelings or opinions, isn't that right? That's exactly who you are to me! No matter how many times I try to fight back, you're always kicking up an unreasonable fuss, over and over again. I can't comprehend how dad tolerates you, but I've had enough! Did you know? I hate it when you criticize me and dad for not putting the toothbrush holder back into its place after we're done, every morning. You won't even leave it alone when it's even an inch out of place. I hate that you even control what dad and I have to wear. I hate it when you keep controlling every aspect of my life, citing the excuse—'it's for your own good'! We should be free to live our own lives. You don't have to revolve your life around me and dad. You should probably ask yourself what you like and what you'd like to do. Please, stop interfering with my life!"

Mrs. Cox pulled out her greatest weapon—crying. "Is that what you think of me? Am I a meddlesome, menopausal old woman to you? It doesn't matter what I've done for this family, I'm always unreasonable to you. I have a job of my own and my life, but I still put in the effort to take care of you and your dad's daily routine. After everything I've done for this family, I'm just meddling and interfering in your life, aren't I? Robin Cox, you really shouldn't be so unconscionable. I can't believe that I've spent more than twenty years raising an ingrate!"

Robin suddenly felt weak. She realized that no matter how she tried to negotiate with her mother, she'd never win. It was true that her mother had sacrificed a lot for their family and had suffered too. That's why she would be rendered pale and helpless whenever her mother cried and grumbled about her. She couldn't even retaliate. This feeling was suffocating to her. Every time she gave in, she would feel as if she were drowning in deep waters.

"I'm going out, no matter what." This was all she could say in the end.

Mrs. Cox wiped the tears from her eyes and sat down on the side of the bed. "Go then, and don't ever come back. You are no daughter of mine."

Robin ignored her mother's words. She stared at the clothes strewn all over the floor but didn't pick them up. She simply put on her clothes and walked out the door, carrying nothing but her phone.

On the way to the restaurant, she sent Sylvain a message: ‘Are you still at the restaurant? It’s late, I’m sorry. I had no choice.’

Sylvain quickly replied: ‘Yes, you really don’t have to force yourself. It’s perfectly fine if you can’t come out.’

Chapter 1437

By the time Robin arrived, the restaurant was closing up. Sylvain had just left the restaurant too.

They looked at each other. Robin tried her best to put on a smile. “I’m sorry for making you wait so long. Let’s have supper, my treat.”

Sylvain looked at her pajamas and felt a faint, indistinguishable feeling. It must have taken a lot of strength out of her to come to him. He stepped forward and stroked her head. “It’s late. You shouldn’t have come out. We can always have a meal together another day. I’ll take you home.”

Robin went into a daze when he patted her on the head. All of her negative energy disappeared into nothing. “It’s alright. If it’s no trouble, we can have supper first, then go home.”

Sylvain looked at her. “But if you go home, your mom will fight with you again. I don’t want you to be dragged into suffering because of me. You know that, don’t you? I knew that you wouldn’t be able to get out tonight. I didn’t really expect you to meet up with me.”

Robin glanced at the closed restaurant behind him. “But you’ve waited for so long.”

“Because you deserve to be respected,” Sylvain replied with a smile. “So, I would wait until I was absolutely sure that you wouldn’t be able to get out, then I would leave.”

Robin gathered her courage, took his hand, and walked to the car. “Let’s go, we’ll have supper.”

“Are you sure?” he asked uneasily. “Aren’t you worried that your house might turn upside down when you get home?”

Robin took a deep breath. “I’m not scared of anything as long as I’ve seen you. You give me courage; it’s always been that way. I don’t know why, but every time I’m with you, I feel more relaxed. I’d turn into a lifeless puppet whenever I’m home.”

Sylvain did not object any more. He took her to a 24-hour food truck. They sat on a nearby bench, feeling the cool, refreshing night breeze.

Robin ordered a carton of beer. She only wanted to enjoy this night. She didn’t want to think about anything at all.

The phone suddenly rang. Robin unlocked her phone to check—it was a notification from her potential husband. He had sent her a friend request on Facebook. She tapped “approve.” If not, she would suffer consequences later.

Sylvain noticed the slight change in her expression and asked, “Who is it?”

She smiled and shook her head. “No one, just spam.”

Unbeknownst to them, a car had parked on the side of the road, not too far away. Mrs. Cox furiously got down from the car and locked onto Robin’s figure with a single glance.

Robin only noticed her when she arrived in front of her. She rose to her feet in panic. “Mom? What are you doing here?”

Mrs. Cox glared at Sylvain gloomily. She didn’t say a word, but the look on her face seemed like she was ready to tear him to pieces. Her glare said it all.

Robin was close to a breakdown. “Mom, if you have something to say, we’ll do it at home, okay?”

Mrs. Cox sat down on the chair next to them. “You think I’m going to cause a scene here? Don’t worry, I won’t. Didn’t you say that I haven’t spent enough time with Sylvain, and that I don’t know him well enough? Now’s a good time. I’ll spend some time with him right now.”

Chapter 1438

Sylvain seemed very calm. He was well aware of Mrs. Cox’s disapproval of him. She had even scolded him on the phone once. He never expected to be sitting with her.

He ordered a few extra nachos from the food truck seller. “Would you like something to drink, Mrs. Cox?”

Mrs. Cox felt that he was being too calm and couldn’t help taking a few extra looks at him. “Mineral water will do. I’m not used to anything else.”

After completing the order, Sylvain smiled. “Mrs. Cox, please, speak your mind.”

“What’s your relationship with my daughter?” Mrs. Cox asked with a straight look on her face.

Robin was close to tears. “Mom, how could you ask such a question? How did you find me? Can’t I have a personal life? Must you get involved with everyone I talk to? Let’s go home, okay?”

Mrs. Cox ignored Robin and stared squarely at Sylvain, waiting for his reply.

Sylvain paused thoughtfully and said, “We used to date, but we’re friends now. However, I’m hoping for us to get back together someday. I understand that you don’t approve of me, but that’s not important.”

His answer surprised Robin. Since she couldn’t escape, she was forced to surrender herself to God’s will. If worse comes to worst, they’d simply have a huge row.

Mrs. Cox surveyed Sylvain for a while, her eyes overflowing with disapproval. “Men with pierced ears look like street hooligans. Is this normal for you fashion designers? Look at your clothes; you’re from a completely different world than Robin. If you’re simply here for fun, you’re barking up the wrong tree.”

Sylvain took off his ear stud. “We’re all human beings from planet Earth. How are we from different worlds? If you’re not happy, I can change until you’re satisfied.”

Mrs. Cox scoffed. “Are all the previous reports online about you true?”

Sylvain’s gaze sunk. Robin grabbed her mother’s hand. “Mom! Stay in your lane!”

“He wants to date you, doesn’t he? Then I should interrogate him,” Mrs. Cox replied with a frown. “He shouldn’t have to worry if he’s innocent.”

Sylvain paused and said, “It’s fine, Robin. Let her ask. Those online reports… were true, but not all of it. I did not rely on women for my livelihood, but simply fell in love with the wrong woman. Everyone makes mistakes in their youth. You’re not going to pass judgement on me because of that, are you, Mrs. Cox?”

Just then, a food truck waiter arrived with Mrs. Cox’s order, including her mineral water. Sylvain opened the mineral bottle cap for her, then gave it to her. Mrs. Cox accepted it and took two sips. “Yes, I won’t judge you for that. Then let me ask you, what do you like about my daughter?”

Sylvain looked at Robin. “Everything about her attracts me. If you’re worried that this is only a fleeting interest, I’ll be frank with you. It’s been so long, but my feelings for her haven’t changed. They’re just as strong as ever. You should know how long it has been. If you’re not certain, you could start your calculations from the day you called me to yell at me.”

Mrs. Cox felt embarrassed. That phone call was a result of her momentary loss of self-control. She would never have yelled at a stranger whom she'd never met. It was a pure moment of rage after a huge quarrel with Robin. "Do you resent me?"

Sylvain shrugged. "No. You're older than I am, so why would I? We're all reasonable, decent people. Honestly though, Robin isn't a kid anymore. You shouldn't be too strict with her, Mrs. Cox. You'll suffocate her that way."

It was bad enough that her own daughter felt that way. Now that an outsider had pointed it out too, Mrs. Cox couldn't help feeling a little irritated. "What do you mean 'too strict'? I'm her mother. I'm doing this for her own good! You two are incompatible. I've also introduced a potential husband to her. We've just met at our house. I think it's time for you two to end it."

Chapter 1439

Sylvain stared at Robin inquisitively. Robin tightened the clothes around her and lowered her head. Is that what Sylvain thought of her? She had just come from meeting her potential husband before seeing him. She probably looked like a two-faced woman now.

"What? You didn't know? Robin got along really well with her potential husband. The man is from a good family and we know him thoroughly. If everything goes well, he's going to be my son-in-law," Mrs. Cox said after seeing Sylvain and Robin's reactions.

Robin couldn't take it anymore. "Mom! Stop it. I've never spoken to the man. You're the ones getting excited. What makes you think he's going to be your son-in-law? Have I agreed to that?"

Sylvain heaved a sigh of relief. “So, that’s how it is… Mrs. Cox, you must be hungry from your long search. Have some food while we discuss.”

Mrs. Cox shot Robin a glare. “And you’re drinking too. How dare you? Have you ever been allowed alcohol at home? Do you know what kind of girl you look like now?”

Robin didn’t answer. Her drinking alone had already received such a huge reaction. If her mother found out that she and Sylvain had already slept together, she would probably have a stroke.

Are a while, Mrs. Cox asked again, “Sylvain, what’s your education like?”

Sylvain answered her with the name of a well-known international college. “You’re welcome to check if you don’t believe me, Mrs. Cox. You’re in the industry, after all. It shouldn’t be too difficult. Aside from the scandal that you’re aware of, there’s nothing else for you to criticize. That much, I’m certain. Setting that matter aside, I should be far more superior in every other aspect than the potential suitor whom you’ve introduced to your daughter.”

Mrs. Cox was unrelenting. “That scandal alone is enough to soil my impression of you. What’s the use in being good in everything else?”

“Does a man not deserve forgiveness after making one mistake in his life?” Sylvain asked. “Besides, it wasn’t my intention in the first place. Your standards for others are a bit too harsh, Mrs. Cox.”

Mrs. Cox curled her lips. “I can’t just believe in everything you say. One cannot judge a book by its cover. Your scandal caused quite a buzz; it must have greatly affected you. Your life must be a mess. How could you possibly plan on treating my Robin well?”

Sylvain rubbed his nose. “Well… You don’t have to worry about that, Mrs. Cox. I’m working for Tremont Enterprises now. The CEO of Tremont Enterprises himself signed me on. I’m much further away from the mess you’ve imagined. I’m sorry for disappointing you.”

Obviously, Mrs. Cox refused to believe him. “How could Tremont Enterprises possibly hire you after that huge scandal?”

Sylvain paused thoughtfully and replied, “You should have a look at some fashion magazines when you have the time, Mrs. Cox. My pieces are featured almost every month, along with my affiliated company. You’ll know if I’m lying once you’ve seen them. It’s getting late. Shall I take you both home?”

Mrs. Cox did not refuse. She got into Sylvain’s car along with Robin and went home.

Noticing how quiet Mrs. Cox was when they got down from the car, Robin carefully said, “Mom… You’ve met him now. He’s not so bad, is he?”

Mrs. Cox scoffed. “He’s good at talking, I’ll give him that. But he doesn’t seem like a good man to me. I understand that he’s in fashion design, but his style is too… fashionable. What kind of man would have pierced ears? Isn’t that equivalent to a street hooligan? You used to be in his industry, so why haven’t you changed?”

“Would I dare?” Robin replied helplessly. “I don’t even have pierced ears. Isn’t it all thanks to your strict demands? Fashion designers are supposed to be fashionable. What century are you in? You don’t have to hold onto such old fashioned thinking, do you? He really is working at Tremont Enterprises, and Mr. Tremont himself hired him, with a high-paying salary. Anyone employed under Tremont Enterprises

can’t be as bad as you think. Why won’t you believe him? The CEO of Tremont Enterprises is Arianne’s husband. I’ve met him before too. If you won’t believe me, you’re welcome to call Arianne and ask her yourself.”

Chapter 1440

For the first time ever, Mrs. Cox did not flip out. Instead, she spoke in an earnest tone. “Robin, you’re still young. Don’t choose the wrong path. Try to keep in touch with that potential suitor. At least, you’ll still have a backup if you and Sylvain break it off. I know I can’t persuade you, and I really can’t be bothered to do it anyway. The house will be in chaos if we end up fighting again. I’m exhausted too. I won’t object to you dating Sylvain, but I have one condition, and that is for you to stay pure. No hanky panky business with him, understand? From now on, no going out to eat in the middle of the night, and you have to be home by 11PM.”

Robin felt guilty but happy at the same time. This was the first time her mother had ever said something nice to her. “Okay! You’re the best, mom!”

The next day, at the company, Sylvain and Arianne began discussing the events from last night. “I met Robin’s mom last night.”

Arianne shivered at the thought of Mrs. Cox’s stern face. “Are you alright? Did she eat you alive? What a miracle!”

Sylvain recalled his feelings from that moment. “Honestly, I was quite nervous at the time, but I had to stay calm. Although, I’m not sure if her opinion of me has changed at all since our conversation, but at least, she allowed me to take her home. She was hopping mad at first, but she seemed a lot calmer after our conversation.”

Arianne was apprehensive. “How did you end up with her mother?”

Sylvain lowered his voice and replied, “She caught us when I was having late-night supper with Robin. I was so close to losing my shit…”

He wasn’t the only one. Arianne felt nervous just listening to him. “This is actually pretty awesome! But seriously, what’s the status between you and Robin?”

Sylvain mulled it over. “I guess we’re just friends, but I’ve made it clear in front of her mom that I want to date her.”

Arianne gaped. “Seriously? I’m kind of impressed now. If I were you, I would have lost the nerve to breathe.”

“Ahem, what are you talking about during working hours? Do you want me to dock your pay?”

Suddenly, Mark’s voice rang aloud from behind them.

Sylvain immediately buried himself in work. “Okay, Mr. Tremont, we’ll get right to it.”

Arianne glanced at Mark. He didn’t look stern at all. His eyes seemed to conceal a grin too. She stuck her tongue out at him, clearly challenging him. Besides, he enjoyed playing nepotism whenever it suited him. He was responsible for cultivating her boldness.

Her subtle action received a stern order from Mark. “Arianne, come into my office!”

She immediately got up and followed him, not afraid in the least.

Just as she had entered the elevator, Mark pushed her up against the wall. She shrunk back out of habit. There were surveillance cameras in the elevator. He may not be concerned with his reputation, but she was. Luckily, he was tall enough to shield her from the surveillance cameras.

The pair emerged from the elevator, hand in hand, but looking as if everything was completely normal. They walked past Davy and entered the office. Once the door was closed, everything spun out of control.