Ruling 1461

Chapter 1461

Aery gritted her teeth and growled, “No, I’m not going! My foot still hurts so I need to stay here for recovery! If you wanna leave, fine by me, but as for me? I’ll stay. I hurt myself in an attempt to save Smore, right? Mark and Arianne can’t turn me away!”

Helen, in a fit of rage, raised her hand, ready for another wallop. Aery quickly cowered, wrapping her head with her arms—a response that convinced Helen to push back her impulse. “Hey, Aery, if Arianne manages to piece out the truth about your injury—that you deliberately fell off the stairs while taking Smore with you—I swear, she’ll tear the life out of you!”

Aery froze. Her lips thinned as she stared at her mother with wide eyes filled with fear. She knew better than to deflect Helen’s accusation with sophistry, especially since the latter had made it clear that she had already seen through Aery’s scheme. To her mother, the girl’s guile was as see-through as a toddler’s lie.

Aery’s reaction was the last fuel to Helen’s fire. “Y-You! F**k! You’re a stupid, bloody leopard that can’t change her spots!”

Widely regarded as a couth, sophisticated woman, Helen rarely lost control over her language. But now, any rein over her conduct had been vaporized by her white-hot rage.

Aery did not interject her mother’s jeremiad with rejoinders nor rebuttals. She was scared that if vexed enough, her mother might bring up the truth to Arianne.

A while passed. After Helen let out enough steam to recover a semblance of control over her emotions, she demanded through gritted teeth, “What else have you done, brat? I want you to tell me right now—and by that, I mean everything. My patience has a limit, Aery, and I hope you don’t think yourself so clever that no one would ever find out about your stupid schemes. ”

“Look,” Aery began skittishly. “Dad never sent any of those packages.”

Helen whipped her head toward Aery a split second after her admission. “You say what now?!”

So worried that Helen would hit her again, she shielded herself with a yank of her bedsheet. “D-Dad never sent you any packages, alright? I heard that he was out of prison so I thought I could, um, scare you into doing things by pretending to be him. I want to return here so bad; I had no other way to make you! S-So, I sent Arianne a package to frighten her b-because I know you would do anything for Ariann, including going back to the States! B-But I needed to keep up your fear, so I kept sending these packages to you at intervals. But Mark’s people started this manhunt against Dad, so I had to send him overseas so that he could evade them and, well, I thought a trip to a foreign place could give him some good…

“The truth is… Dad didn’t know anything about all of this. I told him only before he was about to go abroad. He actually didn’t want to trouble you anymore after being freed...”

Helen laughed scornfully. “Wow, you’re such a meticulous, detailed planner, aren’t you? Lord, I am so proud to have such an ingenious and attentive daughter! Hahaha! No wonder another one of those packages came to us so soon after we checked into that hotel. I wasn’t the one who told Arianne about it, too—it was you! Then, because Arianne pitied us, she invited us to stay over in the Tremont Estate. Everything’s according to your masterplan, isn’t it? Tremendous win, Sweetie, simply exemplary!” she lauded sarcastically. “What did you think I’d say after all that you’ve done, Aery Kinsey? You’re not fooling me with this whole ‘I wanna go home’ excuse. You just want to stick your face around Mark Tremont! Ha, as if you’re good enough of a match for him. Just look at yourself. Are you really that blind to how much filth you’ve tainted yourself with? For God’s sake, can’t you please—for once!—forget your history with Mark and turn over a new leaf? At the very least, understand that he’s now your brother-in-law!”

Aery broke down in tears, sobbing. “But I can’t! I love him; I love him so much, I wanna be with him and watch over him all the time! You only see him as your uber-rich son-in-law, right? Arianne and I are both your daughters. It doesn’t actually change what Mark means to you if I end up with him!”

This was the moment that cinched Helen’s conclusion—Aery Kinsey was a basket case beyond the realm of reason. Helen had never once cared if her “powerful, rich” son-in-law brought any tremendous influence into her personal life, yet here Aery was, accusing Helen of being a money-hungry, status-worshipping woman.

Helen did not live up to this point without gaining some wisdom about life, and right now, the very same wisdom was telling her that Aery’s current love-possessed mindset was the same extreme confusion Helen herself once had.

Nevertheless, hearing Arianne’s name filled Helen with a deep sense of shame. She could not stay in the Tremont Estate any longer. Immediately, she marched toward her suitcase and began to pack up swiftly. “We’re leaving tonight, Aery Kinsey. I’m not giving you the satisfaction of staying here for even one more second!”

Chapter 1462

Aery put just as much force in her voice when she rebuffed, “No! I’m not going! You wanna leave? Leave on your own!”

Exasperated, Helen grabbed the closest clothing article her hand could reach and hurl it at Aery’s face. “Goddamn it, Aery, I’m telling Ariane and Mark about everything you have done!”

“You know what? I don’t think you will,” the girl mustered enough bravado and defied. “To rat me out is to implicate yourself as guilty by association, which means you’ll lose what little dignity you have left to see Arianne. Isn’t your dream to have Arianne forgive you for abandoning her in the past? You’ll have no chance to make that dream come true if you tell her what I did. She’ll hate you just as much as she hates me.”

Helen drew a deep breath and scoffed scornfully. “Well, well, you’re at least spot-on about that. Yes, I’m scared. But it doesn’t mean I don’t know how some people commit the same sin over and over again, Aery. Nor am I stupid enough to sabotage my reconciliation with Arianne just because I want to protect you from your well-deserved comeuppance. If I let you get away with this, I’ll feel so ashamed of myself that I could never look at Arianne for the rest of my life,” she declared. “Leaving here right now is the morally superior thing to do, Aery, which means I don’t care if you don’t want to go. You will eventually, and I’ll see to that. You either choose to leave with me right now and preserve what little dignity you have left, or you could get personally kicked out by Mark himself. Your choice.”

Aery was not at all unfamiliar with Helen’s character, so she knew when she had lost. Reluctantly, she dragged her bandaged foot off the bed and began to pack. “Alright, Mom. You win. I get it, I’ve done wrong, okay? I know I can’t ever win you, but I really want to stay home and not live abroad! Look. I was joking about starting over with Mark just now, okay? The truth is, I’m just happy to see him every day. Can we please not go abroad? Please, please—”

Helen shut her up with a glare. “Stop dreaming about the impossible. Here, I’ll spell it out for you: I. Don’t. Trust. You. All these little schemes you’ve done is proof of your problems, showing that all you ever wanted was to be with Mark no matter what—heck, didn’t you just admit to that earlier?” she rebutted. “I can’t believe I have to tell you this, but here we are. I don’t give a damn who’s my son-in-law. I don’t care if it isn’t Mark, and you know why? Because never once did having some uber-rich, powerful son-in-law mean anything to me. I’ve never even wanted to capitalize on Arianne’s status! Now, I’ll be frank with you—I’m only giving you this last shred of leniency despite the transgressions you’ve done because you haven’t yet caused a severe storm with your little trickeries. Had Smore gotten hurt, though—oh, you bet your bottom that I’d tell Arianne every single thing. And then I’d fold my arms and watch you deal with your just desserts.”

The thought of Arianne and Mark’s combined wrath made Aery cower. Those two would not show her mercy if they knew what she did.

Aery had worked so hard to capitalize on her father's release so that she could come back to the States, but against her expectations, Helen saw right through her in such a short amount of time. Thanks to that, she implicated not only herself but also Jean. Truly, Aery was hosted by her own petard.

Helen dragged her suitcase down the stairs with a very coerced Aery following behind with her hand holding onto the rail. Every step forward was a step deeper into a mire of unwillingness now pooling in her mind. It came to a breakout point where Aery was seriously pondering on staging another fall again.

That was when Helen suddenly warned without any prior sign, "If you're gonna try throwing yourself down these steps again, Aery Kinsey, I'll happily let you proceed all the way to the morgue from there. It's not hard for me to pretend I never had you as a daughter, after all."

Aery inhaled sharply. How did Helen know—could she read her mind?

Mary, who had not retired to rest yet, noticed Helen bringing her suitcases with her as though she was going somewhere and said, "Mrs. Kinsey, it's very late now. Where are you going?"

Helen flashed Mary a polite smile, so well-executed that it made detecting the former's real feelings impossible. "Well, we feel we've been disturbing the Tremonts' peace for too long now, so we decided to leave tonight. I'll be informing Arianne and Mark after I've settled down my suitcases. In the meantime, could you help Aery out? Her foot still stings, so please don't let her move around so much."

Mary gave Helen an okay that said she understood and helped Aery into the living room couch.

Chapter 1463

Helen made sure her emotions were in-check before climbing up the stairs, this time for Arianne.

Arianne was just about to fall asleep when quick rapping on her door stopped her. Groggily, she opened it and stared right at Helen before asking, “What’s the matter?”

Helen appeared transfixed on the woman for a second too long, her eyes grave. Then, a quiet current of yearning broke through her gaze, and she finally said, “I’m leaving, Arianne. We’re flying tonight. Jean… He isn’t going to trouble you anymore. I also don’t know when the two of us will meet again in the future, so until then, promise me that you, Mark, and Smore will live happily forever.”

Hearing her words chased away at least half of Arianne’s bleariness. “Why so sudden? And in the middle of the night, no less! Can’t you wait until tomorrow?”

‘But if we wait until tomorrow, who knows what could happen?’ Helen countered in her mind. Outwardly, however, she merely replied, “It’s alright. We have to leave sooner or later, anyway; I’m only here to inform you. You may now go back to sleep. Goodnight… and goodbye.”

A soft glint of forlornness crossed into Arianne’s eyes. “No, wait. I’ll get Mark so we can drive you two to the airport. Aery’s broken foot would make taking care of these suitcases a very demanding chore, so I can help you with those. Wait for me downstairs. I’ll be with you after I get changed.”

Helen's eyes faintly reddened. She did not reject her offer. She wished she did not have to hide the truth about Aery’s action—the guilt was chipping away what courage she had left to look at Arianne in the eyes. And yet, at the same time, spilling the truth was a surefire way to engender an uproar.

To prevent that from happening, Helen could only choose to silently bear the secret and take Aery away from Arianne, as far away as she could. It was the only way to foster peace in all of their lives.

The journey to the airport saw Helen and Aery in the backseats, Arianne in the passenger's seat, and Mark behind the wheel. Occasionally, Mark would exchange small talk with Helen, their topics as mundane as taking care of one's safety while in a foreign country, etc.

At a superficial glance, it looked like a scene right out of an ordinary family, one where two of its members were about to be separated for their overseas travel. It would have been a somewhat fuzzy, contenting trip to the airport, too—if one discounted the storm of thoughts quietly waging within all four minds.

They reached the airport soon enough, and Mark helped Helen bring all of the suitcases out of the boot. As the four bade their farewells, Aery's eyes were trained entirely at Mark.

Arianne was not blind nor an idiot. She saw everything.

Neither talked on their way home. When the pair returned to the Tremont Estate, Arianne went straight to bed.

Honestly, it was not because she was tired or eager to sleep. She was looking for a space to be with her thoughts.

Mark laid beside her on his side and combed her hair with his fingers. "What's on your mind?"

Arianne caught his hand in mid-action. “The way Aery looked at you. It was like she wished she could tear off your clothes and get it on with you right there and then,” she murmured. “I’ve already guessed it, you know. Smore didn’t fall off the stairs himself—Aery staged it so she could stay here longer. It’s infuriating, and if I could have it my way, I would tear that woman into pieces with my bare hands. But then Helen was there and I… I don’t want to make her feel terrible. Honestly, Smore being unharmed is the only reason why I could turn the other cheek; otherwise, not even Helen could stop me from exacting my wrath. God, the moment Helen suddenly wanted to leave in the middle of the night like that was when I knew what had happened. But I couldn’t tell her that I already knew because she didn’t look like she wanted to air the truth out, either…”

“Hey, hey. Listen to me, it’s alright. They’re gone now, okay? Don’t think about this too much,” Mark comforted. “Both of you are her daughters. That means no matter how she looks at it, your mom is trapped. Even if she told the truth and needed to make a show of punishing her, what else could she do other than, well, a stern lecture? The main point is that Smore’s fine and unscathed, and that’s enough grounds to give them some leeway. Agreed?

“Besides, if you really think about it, I don’t think your mom’s going to return this readily after this debacle. That means it’ll be even more difficult for you to see her again in the future,” he added, “Back then, she was the one who had abandoned both you and your dad without reservation and considerations outside her own. Now, the same man—Jean Kinsey—and the daughter the two of them produced have become Helen’s punishment. She’s trapped in a hell of her own making, doomed never to escape, isn’t she?”

Mark had a point, Arianne realized. Helen’s life at present had been one of strife and ceaseless tribulations.

Chapter 1464

The next morning came, and Arianne went to work with a well-adjusted mindset.

It was in her nature to do that. No matter how spoiled her mood was during the day before, the effects only lasted for a night, tops. She was indisposed to trapping herself with negative feelings for far longer than the problematic issue warranted.

The first thing that greeted her in the office was Sylvain, who wore one of his most mopey looks ever. “What the heck, Sylvain? It’s a bit too early for that look… Couldn’t wake?” she teased.

Sylvain leaned against the back of the office chair with his “kill me please” expression. “Oh, worse than that, ma’am. It’s way, waaaaaaay worse.”

Arianne guessed. “Gosh, has a calamity has befallen your relationship with Robin?”

“Bruh, would it kill you to generate positive thoughts for me?” Sylvain reparteed sourly. “I’ll have you know that ever since I met her mom that one time, Robin’s mom ceased being a problem for quite a while. I even get to go out on dates with Robin infrequently, so we’re fine for now, thank you. The problem—sigh—is my mom… this time. Looks like someone hit her head one day and made her remember that her son exists, and now, she’s come to see me.”

That tone alone was enough cue that she was looking at yet another case of anharmonic parents-children relationship. Arianne sat down and began tidying up scattered sketches on her table. “C’mon, no mother would forget their kid, so where’s this yammering about her ‘suddenly remembering her son’s existence’ coming from? If you’re in the mood of telling me, then spill it. If you don’t, suck it up and get on with your job because your attitude is not conducive to my work right now.”

Sylvain shot Arianne a muted scowl. “Well excuse me, princess. Have you forgotten the fact that I’m like, sorta-kinda your mentor? Could you, therefore, spare such a person from your merciless tongue-lashing, hmm? Or has my handsome existence been a deleterious distraction to your work and inspiration?” he

riposted. “But anyway, yeah, my mom and I aren’t really talking. See, after Dad shed his mortal coil, she wasted no time marrying another guy. I was still quite young, and my grandparents were the ones who took care of me. At first, she still remembered to send us alimonies for the first few years, but ya know, not too punctually and at intervals, but that’s at least something, right? Then, slowly, she stopped altogether. Not even a penny. Fast-forward me becoming a fine young adult. It was my grandparents’ turn to kick the bucket, and I’ve been living alone ever since. Christ, all these years… I almost forgot she exists. I just don’t understand—why look for me now?”

“Well, if you don’t know why, what’s stopping you from asking?” Arianne interjected. “What’s the point of guessing in the dark to yourself?”

The corner of Sylvain’s lips twitched for a second. “How about ‘because I hadn’t had the chance;’ ever thought of that? I don’t know how she managed to get my contact details and everything, and now, she says she wants to see me. I don’t know… I don’t even know if I should say yes. I mean, my life’s been pretty damn good by all accounts. I even braced through the worst all by myself, no thanks to her. She’s never done much of her maternal duties despite who she’s supposed to be, so I don’t even know if I should smile at her or show her a pissed-off frown,” he admitted. “Is this meeting even necessary? Why can’t we just live our separate lives and, I don’t know, keep our hands off the other’s peace?”

Arianne’s thoughts turned to Helen, and after mulling it over for a while, she replied, “You could probably start by asking yourself: do you hate her? Do you want to see her? It’s just one meet-up—what’s the big deal? She’s your mom, for goodness’ sake. She remarried after your dad died, which wasn’t wrong of her to do. Besides, you’re getting it way easier than me. My mother’s still alive, yet the one who raised me was Mark, who’s completely unrelated to me in any way…”

Sylvain sighed. “Huh, touché. Fine, if a meet-up is what she wants, then I’ll answer the call. Still, it kinda strikes me as a bit awkward, since we haven’t seen each other for so long… Hey, wanna go with me?”

Arianne could not believe him. “Why do you want me to tag along? You’re meeting your mom, Sylvain. How am I suitable for such an occasion? If you’re feeling iffy about this, then bring Robin with you.”

Sylvain shook his head firmly. “Nope, nope-non-nein. I don’t wanna let Robin know about my family problem just yet. Please, be my companion this once, okay? Just a nondescript lunch that doesn’t take much time. Your cred would be ‘Sylvain’s friend.’”

Sylvain was a master of coaxing, and after a relentless round of persuasion, Arianne gave in. Of course, she made sure to inform Mark about it beforehand, lest a certain someone erupted into a jealous tantrum again.

Chapter 1465

It was lunch break. Despite her reluctance, Arianne was dragged away by Sylvain to the restaurant his mother had picked.

The destination alone was enough to clue Arianne in about who his mother should be. It was a high-end fine diner, the sort of place where a meal could burn through a hole in an average person's wallet. To choose a place like this meant Sylvain’s mother lived a pretty comfortable life after her second marriage, which made her abandoning young Sylvain even more baffling.

Sylvain and Arianne arrived first. Ten minutes of waiting later, Sylvain’s mother finally came, along with a hard-hitting first impression.

She looked like a rich housewife who had gotten used to a life of privileges and comfort. An air of shrewdness followed her, probably emanating from her cream-colored business suit designed by an international household name, her permed, wavy curls, and a pair of gilded-rimmed glasses. Whether it was intended as a fashion accessory or for actual sight-corrective purposes, Arianne could not tell.

She seemed to have taken great lengths to maintain her youth since she looked at least ten years younger than her supposed age. However, the most striking observation was how much she resembled Sylvain—it was so palpable that one could not mistake the two's relationship.

The woman did not seem to feel awkward at all. Immediately upon arrival, she greeted cheerfully, "Wow, aren't you two early! Apologies for my tardiness. What would you like to have, Syl? Just order whatever you two fancy, sweeties; no need to restrain yourself. Speaking of which, who's this young lady over here? Aren't you going to introduce her to me, Syl?"

Sylvain was caught off-guard by his mother casually addressing him with an affectionate nickname despite their estrangement. "Uh, this is my friend. Look, we should probably order something first."

Ursula trained all of her attention on Sylvain with not even a glance spared for Arianne. "Sure, sure. Oh, Syl darling, it's been a long time, hasn't it? You're so big! You used to look like your dad, but now that you're all grown-up, you look like my son instead, heh heh. Oh, I heard that your career's gaining impressive momentum lately—working for the Tremonts, are you?"

Sylvain took the menu a waitress passed to him and thumbed through the pages. "Yeah. Tremonts, yep," he intoned absent-mindedly.

Ursula waited until the orders were made before finally going straight into the topic. "Now, sweetie, I wanted to see you today not just because I missed you and wanted to talk to you, but also because of another important business. What do you think of… going big, abroad? Your stepfather has just started a fashion designing company, and we think that a name as renowned as yours would be the perfect boon this startup needs. Of course, I'll have to be frank—your reward won't compare to the one Tremonts Entreprise's giving you for now. But when the company gets big, well! The fruits of its success would be the family's to share!

“And by the way, the only heir your stepfather bore is a stepsister who’s a year your junior. I encourage you to see her as your little sister, hon. But of course, she will be married off to someone else in the future… I trust that you know what I’m hinting at, hmm?”

Arianne was stunned into silence. Was the woman trying to steal Tremonts Entreprise’s talent right under her—whose husband was the company’s CEO—nose?

Still, as the woman was Sylvain’s mother, Arianne was not in a position to interject. She could only observe Sylvain’s response.

All of the nervousness and reservation the man initially experienced died down the longer Ursula talked. “Wait. You’re telling me that you came all the way here, from overseas, just to use me as a pawn to further the good of your current family and husband? If I weren’t some ‘renowned designer,’ you wouldn’t have remembered me, would you? You made it sound so rosy, but who on Earth would bequeath their family business to some rando who isn’t blood-related to them, huh?” Sylvain rejoined, his face slightly pale. “What you’re trying to do is to make me work for your husband for free. You want me to be his ghost-designer or something. Well! I could give this offer a thought, but only if you can pay me more than my current salary at the Tremonts’. One thing’s for sure, and it’s that I’m not staking my entire future on a nebulous ‘personal bond’ between us.”

The smile on Ursula’s face froze for a beat, but she returned to her erstwhile aplomb in the next second.

“Syl, honey, listen. I know; you must be angry with me for not coming back to you in the past, aren’t you? But try to understand, Mommy had her own set of personal woes too. Moreover, think about it—had I not allowed you the free reign to flourish on your own two feet, would you have been able to achieve the heights and plaudits of today, hmm? You know what they say: some flowers bloom in the face of adversity—and you’re that sort of flower, Syl. Besides, I’ve never shirked giving you alimonies now, have I? You can’t possibly have forgotten that I was the one who paid for your studies, yes?” she countered. “Now, can we all put those unhappy memories behind and live in the moment? We’re here today to have lunch and talk about career prospects. Your stepfather is a very affluent man; I’m telling you, giving up your position working for the Tremonts is the wiser choice. But you’ll have to evaluate

these things yourself, I suppose. You're a grown-up now. I know you'll slowly come to an epiphany on your own."

Sylvain looked like he was either going to erupt into laughter or burst into tears. Indeed, the "smile" he cracked would have been more accurately termed "pained grimace."

"Okay then," he said, enunciating every word a little too unnaturally. "I guess I'll think about it."

Chapter 1466

Suddenly, the atmosphere in the room changed, making Arianne feel extremely uncomfortable. She knew that arriving with Sylvain would cause an awkward situation but she never thought that it would be this awkward. Breathing alone felt like a huge effort for her.

Sylvain's mother seemed completely fine on the surface. When the dishes were served, she chatted with Sylvain over daily household things. She even mentioned that she would introduce him to his stepfather's daughter one day so that they could get to know each other. Sylvain suddenly put down his knife and fork and icily replied, "No need. I do not need to establish any form of relationship with your current family. No need to put in the effort. I have no interest in your husband or stepdaughter, nor you."

Sylvain's mother finally displayed a sense of awkwardness, probably because Arianne, an outsider, was around. "Syl, don't be so crass. It's normal for you to feel conflicted now. I will wait until you feel calmer."

Sylvain couldn't stay any longer. He called the waiter for the bill, then dragged Arianne away from the restaurant.

Back in the car, Arianne wasn't sure of what to say. Sylvain looked ready to eat someone alive. Seeing as Sylvain did not start the car, she meekly said, "Uh… We haven't eaten a thing. I'm kind of hungry. Want to find somewhere else to eat?"

Sylvain turned around and looked at her, then suddenly smiled. "How can your mind be filled with thoughts of food? I'm sorry, I had no idea that she was here to undermine me. It must have been awkward for you to be dragged along with me. However, I had no intention of going before. I still had some hope for her before we met. Now, I don't want to have anything to do with her at all. You've heard it yourself. Her current husband has a daughter of his own, just one year younger than me—which is also to say, after marrying him, she helped him raise someone else's kid while happily abandoning her own. She even had the nerve to bring up that insignificant amount of daily expenses and education fees she gave over the first few years after her departure. I would have given in if she were living a horrible life; I wouldn't hate her. But she's clearly doing very well, and only thought of me when I became useful to her. It's so disappointing."

Arianne sighed. "I don't know what to say about that either, but she's still your mom at the end of the day. I wouldn't blame you if you wanted to turn around and leave with her. Don't worry about whatever happened today. I came with you as a friend, not your lady boss. Your mom hasn't exactly offended me, so I won't resent you."

Sylvain patted her on the shoulder. "Alright, let's go. I'll take you for lunch. I'll have to silence your mouth somehow."

Arianne giggled. If he didn't want her to tell Mark about whatever happened today, he should have just said so. Why beat around the bush? A meal wouldn't have been enough to silence her if she really wanted to tell him.

They returned to the office after lunch. Arianne found Mark sitting at her office desk. Sylvain nervously shot her a look. She nodded gently and walked up to him. "What are you doing, Mr. Tremont?"

Mark cast her a sidelong glance. “You’ve had a long lunch. What were you talking about, aside from eating your food?”

Chapter 1467

Arianne laughed. “Nothing much. You know that Sylvain went to meet his mom, so what else could we possibly talk about, aside from average family-related topics? We talked so much that we lost track of time. We aren’t late. What are you doing here, anyway? Don’t you have anything to do? Get back to work. Working hours are starting soon. I’ve got work to do too.”

“That’s right,” Sylvain played along. “What else could we talk about? I would have invited you along too if I’d known you’d be so curious…”

Mark didn’t reply. He got up, straightened out his clothes, and left the office area.

His attitude stumped Sylvain. “He couldn’t possibly have found out that my mom’s trying to weasel info on me, could he?”

Arianne felt apprehensive, but no matter how she looked at it, it seemed improbable. “I don’t think so? He doesn’t have supersonic hearing anyway. Besides, so what if he finds out? We don’t know for sure if you’re leaving, and he’s not going to abuse his power with you.”

Nevertheless, Sylvain still felt worried. Mark was responsible for pulling him out of his abyss, regardless of the situation. It would be ungrateful of him to leave Tremont Enterprises now. He just felt guilty.

That afternoon, after work, Arianne met up with Mark at the parking lot. When she got into the car, Mark suddenly asked, “Is Sylvain’s mother pushing him to expand his career outside the country?”

Arianne gaped, unsure of what to say. How did he know everything? Did he really have supersonic hearing?

Seeing her reaction, Mark helplessly explained, “I received mail from Sylvain’s mother this morning. Her intentions are clear—she wants Sylvain to leave with her. I didn’t answer. I believe that this matter requires Sylvain’s own opinion. He’s not a child. It’s not his mother’s right to make decisions for him anymore. I know what you were talking about during lunch today, so there’s no need to hide it from me.”

Arianne heaved a sigh of relief. “Actually… Sylvain was worried that you’d be uncomfortable with it if you found out about this. He hasn’t mentioned leaving anyway. He’s told me that he’ll never leave Tremont Enterprises, but I can’t guarantee that. After all, it’s his mother. If he really does want to leave, will you release him?”

Mark paused thoughtfully and replied, “If he leaves, it would be a huge loss for Tremont Enterprises. I’ve spent quite a lot of effort in order to clean his slate. He hasn’t earned enough capital for me yet. If he leaves, it would be a huge loss for me. However, our contract is very clear—he can resign whenever he likes as long as he pays a penalty. If he pays the penalty, I have no reason to keep him. I’ve never liked using force, so it’s up to him.”

Arianne was a little worried too. “You’re right. You put in a lot of effort to give Sylvain a clean slate, back when he first joined Tremont Enterprises. Who’d have thought that something as unexpected as this would have happened? His mom is a piece of work. Where was she when Sylvain was in trouble? Now that he’s all better, she’s suddenly making a play. Is something wrong with her? I’ve never liked people like her, running as far away as possible when something bad happens, then barging into someone’s glory when everything’s fine and dandy.”

Mark wasn't surprised at all. "Isn't that normal human behavior? There's nothing surprising about that. Besides, I've had someone do some research. Sylvain's mother's current husband's fashion company started out not too long after Sylvain got into trouble. They must have planned on bringing Sylvain in long ago, but he had a scandal not too long after, so they didn't act on it. Now that Sylvain's risen from the ashes, they're stepping out to lure him back. I've met plenty of insensitive people like these."

Arianne couldn't help feeling slightly enraged when she heard all of that. However, she did not plan on telling Sylvain about this. He would be thoroughly disappointed in his mother if he knew. She would be responsible for driving a wedge between them. Based on Mark's reaction, it didn't look like he planned on telling him either.

Meanwhile, Sylvain's car was flagged down at an intersection by none other than his own mother.

They did not leave on good terms this afternoon, so he refused to be nice to her and did not get down from the car.

His mother didn't seem to mind. She got down from her car and walked towards his car, then tapped on the car window. "Syl, shall we have dinner tonight?"

Sylvain winded the window down and replied, "No thanks. I have a date tonight."

His mother gave him a warm and cheerful smile, as if she were showing tolerance towards a sulky child. "With that girl, Robin Cox?"

Chapter 1468

Sylvain's expression changed. "Are you spying on me?"

His mother retained a straight face. "Don't say it like that. I just want to get to know you better. Isn't that the quickest way to go? I've always prioritized efficiency in everything I do. Since it's dinner with your girlfriend, you wouldn't mind having me tag along, would you? I'm your mother, it's perfectly normal for me to have a meal with her, isn't it?"

Sylvain didn't know how to reject her, so he didn't answer.

His mother immediately got into his car and told her driver to drive the car away without her.

Sylvain frowned as he drove his car to the restaurant where he and Robin were supposed to meet. "She's not my girlfriend yet," he reminded her before she got down from the car. "Don't you dare make unfounded remarks. Consider this a casual meal."

"Okay, don't worry. I won't make things difficult for you," his mother replied casually, as if she were very close to him. "By the way, your friend from this afternoon, why does she look so familiar?"

The thought of that made Sylvain very uncomfortable. "Of course, she is. She's my boss' wife, the wife of the CEO of Tremont Enterprises. Do you know how stupid you looked when you tried to poach me in front of her?"

His mother's expression changed but quickly returned to normal. "It's alright, she's going to find out sooner or later anyway. It doesn't matter when. Let's go inside."

They walked into the restaurant and found that Robin had already arrived. Her face lit up with glee when she saw Sylvain but seemed slightly stunned when she saw someone else with him.

Sylvain strode over and sat down, refusing to look Robin in the eye. "This is my…"

Robin immediately tensed. She stood up and said, "Uh… Hello, Mrs. Siebeech-Jaark."

"Don't be so modest," Syvain's mom replied, seemingly unrestrained. "Sit down."

Robin didn't expect for Sylvain to bring his mother along all of a sudden. She had expected to have some time alone with him. She didn't have time to dwell on her disappointment. Now, her tongue was tied from nervousness. She was wondering why Sylvain had brought his mother along, but she had no idea of Sylvain's thoroughly sullen mood.

Sylvain felt even more uncomfortable than Robin. He ordered their meal and went straight to the washroom.

The smile on his mother's face promptly disappeared as soon as he left. "Your name is Robin Cox, correct?"

Robin nodded seriously. “Yes, I had no idea that you’d be coming today, Mrs. Jaark, so… I didn’t actually dress up.”

Sylvain’s mom tapped her exquisitely manicured fingers against her glass of water. “No need to be so formal. Calling me Mrs. Jaark makes me feel like an old hag… How long have you been dating Syl?”

Robin had a feeling that this woman didn’t like her. Was it the way she addressed her? Sylvain was much older than her, so calling her Mrs. Jaark should be a form of respect. She was clearly trying to establish boundaries between them, but she replied soberly, “We’ve… known each other for a while.”

Chapter 1469

“I’ve heard that you’re not actually boyfriend and girlfriend yet,” Ursula Siebeech-Jaark calmly said. “What a relief. He’s going to leave the country with me, to expand his career soon. Things would be quite tricky if he really had a girlfriend in this country. Besides… You’re both from completely different social classes. It won’t end well for you, Miss Cox.”

Robin finally lost control and went very pale in the face. She wasn’t sure what to say.

Just then, Sylvain emerged from the washroom. Ursula switched to a warm, genial expression again. “Syl, what took you so long?”

Sylvain glanced at Robin and replied, “I was answering a call. It’s nothing.”

Robin bit her lip. The current situation made her feel as if she were sitting on pins and needles. It was obvious that she wouldn't be able to enjoy her meal now, so she got up and said, "I have a family emergency, so I've gotta go, Sylvain. Please enjoy your meal with M—I mean, your mom."

Sylvain wasn't sure of what had happened, but he knew that this was an inappropriate set-up. After all, he did not preempt Robin on Ursula's arrival, so her awkwardness was expected. That's why he didn't stop her. "I'll walk you out?"

Robin snatched up her bag and shook her head. "No need, I'll be just fine on my own."

She finally released the suffering on her face when she left the restaurant. Why was this happening? Did Sylvain ask her out today to say goodbye to her? Did he ask his mother to do it because he felt uncomfortable doing it himself?

Sylvain and his mother were left alone in the restaurant now. Ursula seemed to be in a good mood. She held Sylvain's hand, looking very heartbroken. "You've lost so much weight. You have to eat on time from now on, okay?"

Sylvain snatched his hand away from her grasp. "I was much skinnier as a kid, you just didn't see it. No need to put on this 'good mom' act in front of me; doesn't it feel gauche? One more thing, I'm not leaving with you. Give it up and stop wasting your time on me. Aren't you rich? What fashion designer can't you afford?"

Ursula sighed. "How could I trust an outsider more than my own son?"

Sylvain didn’t expose her. It wasn’t because she trusted him but that he was cheap. She was clearly trying to achieve the best profits with the least efforts. “I don’t care, I’m not leaving. I’m happy here.”

Ursula didn’t pursue the subject too long. Suddenly, she changed the topic. “You really like that girl, Robin Cox, don’t you?”

Sylvain frowned. “That has nothing to do with you. Stop butting into my business.”

Ursula looked wounded. “Syl, how could you treat your mother this way? I’m your mother. There’s no bond in this world closer than ours. I know that you resent me for neglecting you after all these years, but I had no choice. I was so far away, I didn’t even tell my husband that I had a son at first. I couldn’t even take care of myself at the time. I finally told him about you after many years. My husband didn’t mind. He even wanted to hire you as chief fashion designer in our company. I thought it was a good idea, but you refused to come. Do you have any idea how I feel after you rejected me? It’s been so many years, yet my husband and I have been unable to conceive another child. It’s because he doesn’t want to. Which means that if we divorce one day, I’d be completely helpless. Have a heart for your mom, would you? You’re the only one I can rely on now.”

Sylvain felt disgusted. He hated being manipulated like this. It felt suffocating. “Shut up. Whatever happens to you has nothing to do with me. Just like how you never cared when I was suffering. You shouldn’t have contacted me at all. I would have pretended as if you don’t exist. If you’re really doing this for my own good, you shouldn’t have come looking for me. You’ll only disrupt my life. Are you going to finish your meal? If not, please leave.”

Chapter 1470

Ursula didn’t dare say anything more, or otherwise, Sylvain would most certainly storm off.

Both mother and son did not enjoy their meal. They left the restaurant after the meal. Sylvain stormed off straight away, leaving Ursula all alone at the restaurant entrance. Ursula felt very unsettled. After all, Sylvain had actually offered to walk Robin to the door when she left. She resented how her position in her son's heart was nothing compared to that of a little girl. They say that mothers-in-law rarely liked their daughters-in-law—there was some logic in this statement. Regardless, she absolutely hated Robin.

Sylvain uncorked a bottle of wine when he arrived home and downed two glasses of it. That allowed him to suppress some of his unsettled feelings.

He pulled out his phone and called Robin. When she answered his call, he spoke in a slightly sunken voice. "Why did you leave all of a sudden during dinner? Was there really a family emergency? Or did my mom make you feel uncomfortable?"

Robin pursed her lips on the other end of the call. "No… I really did have a family emergency. Is something wrong? Why the sudden phone call?"

Sylvain lowered all of his defenses. "Can you come over? I want you to stay with me, talk to me," he murmured like a helpless child.

Robin's heart softened. She could hear the despondence in his tone. She wanted to go to him, but she remembered Ursula's words and held herself back. "I can't leave right now, so I can't go looking for you. When are you leaving the country? I'll send you off on the day you leave."

Sylvain sensed that something was amiss from her tone. "What are you talking about? Leaving the country? I'm not leaving the country. What did my mother tell you?"

Robin was shocked. She was confused. “Y-your mother told me that you’re leaving the country to expand your career…” She didn’t tell him the rest of what Ursula had said.

Then, it hit him. That explained why Robin had suddenly asked to leave. He was furious. “I’m not leaving the country. She wants me to leave with her, but that’s not happening! I’m picking you up right now. I want to explain this to you, personally!”

He ended the call before Robin could say another word.

Robin felt uneasy. It was late. Her mother would certainly nag her again if she left the house at this hour. But… She couldn’t refuse Sylvain. The word “no” seemed foreign to her whenever he extended an invitation.

She waited for her mother to get into the shower, then changed her clothes and snuck downstairs.

After a short wait, Sylvain’s car arrived at the side of the road. She opened the car door and slipped inside. “Hurry. Don’t let my mom catch us. We don’t have to go to your place. Let’s just take a drive and come back here. We can talk during the drive.”

Sylvain was on the verge of a mental breakdown. He had dreamed of his mother’s return to take him away since he was a kid. Later on, he realized that it was nothing more than wishful thinking. Now, the day had finally arrived, but it was different than he had imagined. A familial bond tainted with personal interest would naturally become ugly. Furthermore, he was really disgusted with Ursula for meddling in his personal affairs.

Robin’s deliberate display in placing a distance between them had undoubtedly become a fuse for his breakdown. He slammed his foot on the brake, pulled her towards him, and captured her lips.

A kiss mixed with pent-up frustrations would not be a gentle one. Robin was in shock and tried to push him away. Once she realized that it was futile, she surrendered. The weight on her heart felt even more intense than ever.