Ruling 1521

Chapter 1521

Tiffany broke out into a sly giggle. “Shh, I’m out here without permission! He’s busy in his office right now, so he doesn’t know that I’m outside. Seriously though, I’m a perfectly normal, functional adult! Why can’t I go out shopping sometimes, huh?” she moaned, before adding, “Anyway, do you know how naughty Lil’ P has become the older he gets? He’s doling out migraines to Jackson’s poor mom non-stop through his shenanigans. We’re all starting to think that maybe he was better when he was still a little bean. Sure, that kid rarely stopped bawling, but at least he wasn’t running around like he is right now! God, trying to catch him alone could take a few years away from your life!”

“’Sup?” Sylvain suddenly greeted as he approached the women.

Tiffany pouted. “Hey, this is a girls’ only, no-man-allowed conversation, mister! Anyway, have some roasted almonds. Freshly-made; it’s so good.”

Sylvain took a single almond from the pile and examined it, his eyes belying doubt. “Really? This small little thing? I don’t know, sis, I’ve never had one before. Sometimes, I have caught the smell of people roasting almonds, and yea, they smell palatable.”

Arianne popped some almonds into her mouth and said, “If it’s not as good as we claim, flick me. Go ahead.”

Popping one into his mouth, Sylvain savored it—and promptly fell in love with roasted almonds. He was so thoroughly delighted by his culinary discovery that he declared his intention to buy a few packets of them for Robin after work.

Mentioning Robin commanded Arianne's curiosity. "So, how're the two of you? Don't tell me y'all still can't live together despite being married."

Smelling gossip, Tiffany perked up on full alert and waited for Sylvain's answer.

Sylvain nodded helplessly. "Well, you nailed it. The way her mother sees me is still… I mean, it's neither here nor there. She doesn't seem to like me, but she also doesn't seem to hate me to the core or something, either. Well, at least her dad's alright. But don't think I'm worried; I'm not. I know we'll see the light at the end of the tunnel—just gotta hold on and be patient."

'Just gotta hold on and be patient.' Truer words had rarely been spoken, Arianne thought.

Arianne grabbed a handful of roasted almonds and rose to her feet. She intended to share them with Mark, too.

Tiffany was quick to grumble, "Traitoooooor! Mister before sister! I bought these for us, hon, and all you think about is your man? Pffft! Besides, do you really think Mark 'Royalty' Tremont would wanna eat plebeian stuff like roasted almonds? This ain't some highfalutin food, ya know."

Arianne cocked her brow in confidence. "Oh, he eats everything I bring to him… even if it could kill him."

A shadow suddenly crossed Tiffany's face. "Wait, hold up. Then why does Jackson always say no to any food I make, huh? Is it because… he doesn't love me?!"

Arianne had an answer for that, but she knew better than to say it out loud and hurt her friend's confidence: as a legitimate master chef, Jackson had reasons to suspect Tiffany's questionable cookings as biohazards.

Arianne returned home with Mark by evening, and on their way home, she bought some sweetened roasted almonds. They were even tastier during this season, though Mark turned out to not like them as much as she had imagined.

The first thing that Arianne saw upon reaching home was Helen standing in front of the entrance.

Her appearance made Arianne stop and ask, "Why weren't you waiting inside?"

She looked a little reticent. "I don't think I need to. Just wanted to wait till you're home from work so I could tell you goodbye. I'm bringing Aery abroad for her recovery."

Arianne had imagined the ultimate farewell between her and her mother so many times that it was not hard for her to hide her emotional responses from Helen. "Okay. Have a safe journey. I wish her a speedy recovery."

Helen opened her mouth, as though she had something to say, and closed it again. Maybe this was where the two of them stood now—they simply had nothing more to say to one another. A mother and a daughter should have had one of the closest bonds of all human relationships, yet for these two, they ended up just as estranged as they were before.

If two people were not meant to be close, then they would never be—even if physical distance forced them so.

Chapter 1522

Arianne went into the house after Helen left and gave Mary the sweetened roasted almonds she bought. Mark, who came in after he parked his car, asked, “Was she here to say goodbye?”

Arianne feigned nonchalance. “Yeap, but she was gonna leave sooner or later anyway. I happen to hold the opinion that this is the best ending for the two of us. This way, we don’t have obligations to care for each other anymore; we’ll be just like strangers. I’m good, I’ve been like this for years now. It doesn’t bug me one bit.”

Mark smiled and ruffled her hair. It was less for comfort and more as a doting gesture. “I’m gonna take a shower.”

……

In the Cox family’s house, Sylvain and Mr. Cox were watching TV together.

It did not matter what was on the television; Sylvain’s attention was not on it. Instead, his mind was pouring all over whatever Mr. Cox could say, so he could promptly dole out an answer after the latter asked anything. Sylvain always became high-strung whenever he was at Robin’s place.

Right now, Robin was working in the kitchen with her mother. It bereft Sylvain of her companionship, thus exacerbating his nerves, but visiting the Coxes was a duty he must carry out every few days in a week. Honestly, Sylvain thought that periodically subjecting himself to a high-stress environment like this was quite a torment to his mind.

His phone rang suddenly, allowing him an excuse to leap from the couch and pick it up.

He had hoped that whatever reprieve he had from answering the call would be enough to unwind his nerves, but the voice from the other side managed to draw even more distress to him. Hearing her voice brought out a subtle change to Sylvain's expression as he blurted out, "—what?"

"I said, Syl, I'm right outside your gate!" Ursula repeated. "You're not at home right now, are ya? Then get back here as soon as you can and open the door for me, would ya'? I'm divorced, I got no place to be—but hey, you're my son! There should be no problem for me to stay at my son's home for a few days, right?"

Sylvain shot a glance at the kitchen before answering in a low, resigned voice, "Fine, fine. I'm going now."

He did not "go now", per se, because he spent some time dilly-dallying about how to break the news to Robin and Mrs. Cox after hanging up. He knew that the women were almost done with dinner, which meant that if he left right now, Mrs. Cox's impression of him was only going to reek even harder.

In the end, he decided to inform Mr. Cox alone that he had an emergency and had to leave. He only called Robin and told her his situation once he was outside the house.

By the time Sylvain reached his villa, Ursula was already there with a scowl that shrieked impatience. She lugged a sizable suitcase after her when she approached him, demanding, "Why are you only home now? Jesus, do you have any idea how freezing cold it is at night? I was almost frozen numb, boy."

Sylvain opened the door to his villa and carried Ursula's luggage inside. "Well, why didn't you inform me earlier that you were coming? I was outside when you called, you know; I got here as soon as I could. But anyway, what now? What's your next step?"

Ursula plopped down on his couch and kicked off her heels. "Urgh, my feet hurt from walking so much, like you wouldn't believe it… What's my next step? What other next steps do I have other than enjoy being taken care of by my son? I mean, it was your fault that I got into this terrible mess. Thanks to you and your stone cold heart, I'm divorced without any money or assets to my name. I've got nothing! In fact, all I have now is you. But I shouldn't worry that you'll turn your back on me, right? You're totally wealthy enough to support me."

Words failed Sylvain. How was all of this his fault?

He willed his exasperation from spilling out before replying, "Please, your divorce has got nothing to do with me. There was no reason why I must succumb to your arrangement, was there? You haven't been in my life all these years—you did not raise me to be who I am today. Now, you think you can just come back to dictate my life? Please, I have a good grip over my life and how it should be. A very, very solid grip.

"But of course, I won't turn my back against you, for at the end of the day, you're still my mom. But don't think I'm gonna support you forever, or that this support starts now. You brought me to this world, and I'll repay that favor by being there for you at your twilight years until the end of your journey. But as of right now? You're capable of working and taking care of yourself! You should get a job for yourself while I get you a nice place to stay. Until the day when you finally cannot live on your own, then I'll come to you and fulfill my duty as a son. That's all."

Chapter 1523

Ursula was very miffed with his attitude. "You can frame it however you want, but the fact is, I'm your mother. Without me, there's no you. And right now, I think you've got an awfully nice place here; I see

no reason why you gotta spend money looking for another accommodation for me. And also? I just got back here, okay? Everything here is new and strange to me, and, well, I haven't worked any job all these years. So, how on earth do you think I can now? Where? I don't have any experience at all—there's no way I can work, no frickin' way… Speaking of which, aren't you married to that Robin Cox? Where is she, then? Shouldn't she come to me right now and say hi to her mom-in-law or something? Seriously, what kind of daughter-in-law wouldn't come out here and greet me now that I'm here, huh?"

Sylvain frowned. "She isn't staying with me at the moment—but really, can you lay your hands off our relationship, please? I honestly think she has no obligations to see you, anyway. You're poised to lord over me, but you can't do that to her."

Seeing Sylvain acting so defensive of her only fanned Ursula's displeasure. She hated Robin more and more by the second. "What's this? I can't even criticize her now, Big Boy? I've heard folks warn us moms that our son will treat us like strangers once they've got their wife, and I guess these people weren't exaggerating after all. Don't tell me you see your own mother as less than some random woman out there!"

Every cell and fiber in Sylvain's body was protesting against the very act of talking to the termagant in front of him. The decision to not let Ursula stay in his house was a convincing one, too. Since Robin visited him frequently, this would mean Ursula was going to see her just as often, and boy, would that be the recipe for a series of ugly disasters. And Sylvain would be stuck in the excruciating position of a middleman.

Unfortunately, knowing Ursula was here in Sylvain's villa only prompted Robin to come over and greet her. Robin reasoned that, as their relationship status had changed, it was nigh-impractical for a daughter-in-law to avoid her mother-in-law all the time.

Try as Sylvain might, he could not convince Robin otherwise. He could feel himself on a tether as he imagined what would happen between the two women. He could basically kiss his sanity goodbye.

A while later, Robin arrived by opening the door to Sylvain's house with her keys. Ursula's mind immediately compared that to how long she herself had been standing outside the gate under the nipping gale before the door was opened. The contrast got onto Ursula's nerves enough that she allowed the full expanse of her bitterness out on her face whenever she looked at Robin.

The docile woman, however, did not let Ursula's attitude get on her nerves. Suppliantly, she greeted, "Good evening, Aunt Ursula. You haven't had your dinner yet, right? I, um, ordered some takeouts for you. I think it's on the way to us right now. Sylvain wasn't able to have dinner before he left, too, so I ordered for two."

"I never deign myself to takeouts, girl. Their sanitation is less than satisfactory, and you can get sick from it," Ursula moaned, before adding, "Syl, dear, you haven't eaten, have you? Come on, let's go out and eat."

Robin, disconcerted, bit her lips in abject silence.

Seeing her dismay made Sylvain angry. "No, I'm not going," he declared, his tone taking a turn into prickly. "If you wanna go so much, you're on your own. I'm tired; I just wanna rest."

Of course, his idea did not sit well with Ursula. "Hello? Do you remember the fact that I'm actually new here? How on earth would I know where to eat? If you're not going with me, then I'm gonna have to borrow Robin for a guide!"

Robin walked forward and tucked on Sylvain's sleeves. "Let's just go."

Sylvain had hoped that she would grow a spine when push came to shove, but he knew that it was in her nature to cave in so easily. In the end, he had no choice but to go with Ursula's wishes.

When the trio reached a restaurant, Ursula took her seat first before instantly telling the waiter, "Just two sets of utensils, please."

She stared at Robin after that with a nonchalant remark, "I mean, you've already eaten, haven't you?"

Robin nodded, her heart sinking. She could understand Ursula hating her, yet she could not understand why her malice ran so deep. Everything the woman did was entirely out of spite—not even her mother had treated Sylvain this badly before.

Chapter 1524

Sylvain's patience was approaching the end of his tether. The impulse to storm out of the restaurant with Robin was ballooning within him, but still, he pressed it back as hard as he could.

Ursula, however, took Sylvain's lack of outward reaction as a victory. Beaming a little, she continued, "Now, I heard from Syl that you two aren't living together. Why is that? Aren't you married to him? Or are you such a homebody that you can't bear to part with your family, huh?"

Robin was hardpressed to answer her, but she was well aware that she could never divulge the truth. She could not possibly tell her that one of the Coxes were not exactly approving of Sylvain, could she? Admitting to that was like begging for Ursula to hate her even more. "Um, it's not that…"

Sylvain took note of her misery and rescued her by answering his mother himself. "It's because her place is closer to her office, alright? Honestly, does it matter where we live? I'm gonna have to ask you again: lay off your hands from our business. You should put your focus on your own."

Ursula raised her voice. "Excuse me for being your mother, boy! What's wrong with me asking for my son? As your mom, I have the right to ask about every single little thing about you and your life, wouldn't you agree? Back to you, Robin. Sylvain's got a very lucrative career, doesn't he? So what about your job? How much do you earn in a month?

"Imagine still living with your parents just for that meager sum of salary... Pardon me for asking, but how is the way you live no different from not being married? Also, Sylvain is old enough to have children. Are you two telling me that you're not considering posterity? Pfft. You really need to think beyond yourself, you know, Robin?"

Robin was stung into biting her lips. She sank into yet another bout of silence.

Sylvain, however, was livid. "Goddamn it, what's a man gotta do to have you shut up? I repeat myself: this is between the two of us! It's got hell to do with you! Yes, you're my mother. So what? This, right here, falls under my private affair; you simply have no right to control it! For your information, I don't give a damn how much money she makes because if she's happy, I'm happy! Besides, you flap that trap ranting about Robin staying with her parents, but if she did move into my place, what's that same trap gonna say? You're only gonna find even more things to trash-talk her, and you know it!"

Ursula herself was so furious that her chest was puffing. "Sylvain Trudeau, how dare you! Everything I do is wrong, isn't it?! Everything I say is wrong and needs your immediate correction, doesn't it? I am your mother. I have all the authority in the world to point out your wife's every folly! But you, oh, you jump right into defending her, all the time, like she's some damsel that needs your dashing heroic saving!"

Sylvain tugged on Robin's wrist. "Come on, we're leaving. Let her have her precious meal alone."

His intention sent Ursula into a panic. "Sylvain! What the hell is the meaning of this? Are you… Are you gonna abandon me here all alone?!"

Sylvain leveled her with his most frigid expression yet. "That's right. I mean, what are the other options, I wonder? Stay here and listen to your spiteful, malicious harangue against the woman I love, hmm? On what basis do you have the rights to do any of that? You can trash me however you like, but you can't touch her. Honestly, if your last marriage went into the gutters, why can't you just go and hunt some other poor schmuck to marry, then? I mean, you look young enough to do that again with zero problems, don't you?

"Here's what my thoughts are: you've never appeared in my life before, and I want that back. I wish for the two of us to remain in our separate ways!" he proclaimed.

In his anger, Sylvain went a little too harsh on his word choice, and it showed in Ursula's mildly-reddened eyes. "You… You dare talk back to your own mother for some woman? Sylvain?!" she cried, her voice trembling out of fury.

Sylvain clenched his jaw. His stance could not be any clearer.

"Sylvain, p-please, don't go that way, okay?" Robin coaxed under her breath. "H-How about I go home? You can stay here and keep your mom company."

He gave no reply but left the restaurant with her instead.

Sylvain was not some child who could not tell the line between reason and otherwise, and he refused to put up with her petulant attitude just because she was his mother.

Once the two returned to the villa, Robin espied the clock on the wall. “Hey, I gotta get back now, okay? When your mom’s back, please have a good talk to, um, iron things out for a bit, alright? No fighting, Sylvain,” she comforted. “My mom treats you terribly, too, but you’re strong enough to endure it. In the same vein, I’m strong enough to endure the way your mom treats me too. All we need is time. In time, we’ll see the light at the end of the tunnel, right? For that, all of these little tribulations are nothing.”

Sylvain suddenly lurched and pulled her into his embrace, hugging her so tightly that one wondered if he feared that she would slip past his grasp.

“Stay with me, please?”

Chapter 1525

Robin patted his back gently. “Shh, hey. I can assure you, I’m fine. I can’t find it in me to fight her because I know why she acts this way. She blames me for sabotaging the chance of you getting with her stepdaughter, and now, I guess she thinks I ruined her marriage. Of course, it was well within your choice and no fault of ours,” she comforted. “All I know is that I married you, and I’ll gladly live the rest of my life with you. I don’t care about what other people think; their opinions are trivial. But I think that’s enough for a day, agreed? Have a good night’s sleep, and tomorrow is a fresh, new start. I’ll come over and keep you company for the weekend. How’s that sound?”

Sylvain tightened his embrace, not letting go. “But I don’t want you to go. Please… stay with me, Robin. We want a kid of our own, don’t we? If you’re pregnant, maybe your mom will stop making you live with them, and maybe… I… Sigh. I just want us to live together, you know? A life of two. I don’t wanna be

alone anymore. And I definitely don't want to be with my mom; she's gonna do a number on my sanity, I can feel it!"

Watching him in such abject dismay made Robin's heart ache. "Silly Sylvain. A woman can't just get pregnant just because she fancies it, you know. We need to start slow and plan for it. I… I know you must be in a terrible dump now, but… she's your mother. What else is there left for us to do?"

Sylvain drove Robin home after that, but he did not return to the villa straight away. Neither did he accept Ursula's call—he was just too mentally-taxed to care about anything. Ursula was going to make herself comfortable in a hotel somewhere, he reasoned. She must have enough money to take care of herself, from food to accommodation to the basic things in life.

He dared not allow his heart to soften, not even once. "Once" was all Ursula needed for repeated offenses, and then everyone could kiss their peaceful lives goodbye.

He spent contemplative hours in his car until it was midnight. He drove home—and to his shock, he found Ursula Siebeech waiting for him once again at the gate. She bore the look of a woman who vowed to live by Sylvain for the rest of her life.

He ignored her and opened the door. She followed in, tears welling in her eyes.

"So this is it, huh? You find no stab of conscience in turning your back against your mother for the sake of some woman. Fine! I'll shut up and not say a word about her anymore, okay? You happy with that? But before you go celebrating this, know that I'm never gonna treat her kindly either," she proclaimed. "You are married. That means nothing I say matters anymore, does it? But it's fine. All of this, I can accept. But poor, deary me. Never would I have thought my son would be a man who treasures a mere outsider more than his dear biological mother."

Passive-aggressivity stung like a knife. It was artistry that hinged on feigning humility and relent, just so one could up the ante and aggravate their attacks. It hurt.

So, Sylvain snickered. “You nailed it. You mean less to me than she does. To me, you’re the outsider.”

Ursula was stunned. In a split second, her emotions rebelled against her control and exploded out of her. “Me—an outsider to you!? Sylvain Trudeau, have you any conscience at all? At least, I took care of you for quite some years even after I married someone else—and I did that while your father abandoned you and died early! I’ve done my duty as a mother, whether you believe it or not! What, should I have boxed myself as a widow at that young an age just to be a good mother in your eyes, huh? Living the miserable, melodramatic life of caring for a young boy and his grandparents?”

Sylvain could only feel the onslaught of an excruciating migraine. He wanted her to stop. He did not want another unfruitful fight with her anymore.

No, he never blamed her for marrying another guy after his father died. No, he did not even mind her abandoning him halfway through. All he wanted was for Ursula to stop interfering with his life, just as he had never interfered with hers.

It was all he wanted.

The next morning, Sylvain woke up to Ursula jarringly returning to the act of a loving mother, lavishing him her breakfast as though last night had never happened at all.

Worryingly, the migraine Sylvain had since last night was not at all relieved even after a night's sleep. Losing his appetite, he neglected breakfast and quickly scrambled to his office.

He arrived at the Tremont Tower and found himself stuck in a jam-packed lift. Endless streams of susurrus blared from around him, assaulting his ears before joining in the escalating ringing in his skull.

Signs of maladaptive reactions began to show from his body. His vision blurred.

When the lift finally reached the top of the tower where his office was, he clambered and stumbled to his desk. One of his colleagues, noticing his worrisome state, stepped up and asked in concern, "Whoa there, Sylvain. You alright? You look… nasty."

Sylvain's answer came out as a weak and fatigued plea. "Can you please… pour me a cup… of warm water?"

Chapter 1526

Just then, Arianne walked over. "Sure, I'll pour it for you. What's up with you? You look terrifying. You're all pale. Are you not feeling well? You should see a doctor if you're not feeling well. Don't push yourself."

Sylvain was in too much pain to speak. He threw himself against the office desk, desperately trying to hold it in.

He finished his warm water, then finally regained some semblance of vitality after a long pause. Arianne had been observing him. When she saw his pallor return to normal, she finally asked, "What's wrong?"

He shook his head. “I don’t know either. It’s probably because I didn't have a good night’s sleep last night, so I’m having a bit of a headache. It hurt really badly this morning. I’m fine now, it’s alright. We use a lot of brains as fashion designers, probably too much. This isn’t the first time. I’ve had a lot of headaches previously, but this one’s a lot worse. I just need a good rest.”

Arianne was still worried. “When was the last time you had a medical check-up? You should get one done. Don’t belittle the smallest signs from our bodies. Don’t think that you’ll be fine, just because you’re young.”

Sylvain didn’t have the time to even think of that. “When will I ever have the time to do a medical check-up? My mom’s come looking for me after her divorce. Ever since her return, she’s been nitpicking at Robin. There was such a huge fuss last night that everything was a mess. We’re fighting all the time; it’s probably because she has angered me. I won’t ignore her, since she’s my mom. But I certainly don’t want her anywhere near my life. Days like this are torturous.”

Arianne was immediately enlightened. “Oh, then that headache must be coming from frustration. I do get headaches sometimes when Smore makes me too angry. However, it’s not as bad as yours. You get some rest. Get back to work when you feel better. If you really can’t carry on, take the day off. Fashion designers like you have to maintain quality. Quantity isn’t important.”

At noon, Arianne went to Mark’s office to go for lunch together, only to find out that he wasn’t at the office. According to Davy, he left long ago. Apparently, he had received a call and quickly ran out.

Arianne was apprehensive. Based on Davy’s tone, she could tell that that phone call was a personal matter, not business.

She called Mark, but the call wouldn't connect. This rarely happened. She couldn't help feeling even more suspicious.

Mark didn't return to the office, even as it neared the end of the work day. However, he did return her call. It turned out, they had a guest at home and he asked her to come home early. He had driven the car, so she would have to take a cab on her own.

No guest had ever had such a huge circumstance, that Mark would attach such importance.

She skeptically called a cab and went back to Tremont Estate. She saw a white Lamborghini at the gate, on the side of the road. It probably belonged to their guest.

She walked to the door. Before she could go in, however, she overheard a woman's voice, followed by tinkling laughter. She hadn't seen the woman but heard her voice first. This woman had a musical voice… Jealousy flared up from within her. She frowned and pushed the door, then walked inside. No one actually noticed her arrival!

The noise came from the living room in front. She changed into her house slippers and walked over. Mark was carrying Aristotle, laughing and chatting with the woman. They seemed to be on great terms with each other. She had never seen him chatting so happily with another woman before. His gentleness was supposed to be reserved for her alone!

Chapter 1527

When she turned her gaze towards the woman, she was stunned. She was beautiful, so beautiful that she felt slightly inferior. Her only point of pride was probably her youth at this point. The woman carried the exclusive bearing of a mature woman. She was over at least thirty years old. She wore a tight-fitting top, her sleeves made of a half-transparent organza. There was an opening on her shoulders that exposed her pretty shoulders, making them seem particularly enticing. Her skin was fair and exquisite.

Her white, wide-legged pants made her legs seem extremely long. She was dressed in white, which did not seem too fancy, but one simply couldn't tear their eyes away from her.

The makeup on the woman's face was very light too. She used cold and dull tones. This was probably why the smile on the woman's face didn't seem warm enough, no matter how warm her smile truly was.

Before Arianne could react, Mark suddenly waved at her and said, "Come here, let me introduce you. This is my aunt, Shelly-Ann Leigh. She's been out of the country for more than ten years. Not even I remember how she looked, let alone you."

Aunt? Arianne was astonished. This woman didn't look that old. Why did that seem so difficult to believe? But based on the look on Mark's face, it seemed legitimate.

She smiled politely at the woman. "Aunt Shelly."

Shelly-Ann nodded at her in response, then got up and took Aristotle from Mark's arms before walking towards the dining room. "Let's have dinner!"

For some reason, Shelly-Ann felt overly cold and distant to Arianne, as if she were deliberately ignoring her. She consoled herself, thinking that perhaps she was overthinking. After all, they had never met. Shelly-Ann and Mark were related by blood. Logically speaking, she was an outsider. A sense of unfamiliarity was perfectly normal.

She went upstairs to change in her room. When she arrived downstairs, she found Shelly-Ann holding Aristotle and feeding him. She strode forward and sat down. "Aunt Shelly, Aristotle can feed himself. You don't have to feed him. Children shouldn't get too used to that."

Shelly-Ann briefly swept her gaze onto her face, then turned her focus back on Aristotle. “It’s fine. Why should kids grow up so fast? It’s my first time meeting him. I want to get close to him.”

Mark shot Arianne a look, telling her to leave it alone. That it was fine to coddle their toddler once in a while.

Arianne was unnerved. She had always been strict when it came to educating Aristotle. She would indulge him appropriately, but resolutely refuse to do so at appropriate times too. Mark was a man of principle too. Why was he so different in front of Shelly-Ann? Was it because she was a long-lost relative? Was that why he showed her more tolerance?

Shelly-Ann and Mark pretty much dominated the conversation at the dinner table. Arianne couldn’t get a word in edgewise. She had been left out for some strange reason. Based on their topics of conversation, Shelly-Ann really was Mark’s aunt, and a very close one too. Shelly-Ann was only a few years younger than Mark’s mother, but she looked very young, like a beauty from bygone days.

After dinner, Shelly-Ann asked to go shopping while familiarizing herself with her surroundings. She would be staying in the country for a longtime, and she lamented over the fast-paced developments in the country. This city was completely different from the last time she had left it.

Arianne was about to volunteer to go with her, when Shelly-Ann suddenly spoke up and said, “Arianne, you should rest at home. You must be tired from a long day at work. Mark can keep me company.”

Chapter 1528

Arianne immediately felt something faintly indescribably. However, she couldn't detect anything strange on Shelly-Ann and Mark's faces. Shelly-Ann maintained a gentle smile on her face the entire time, but her eyes showed no signs of a smile. They immediately gave off a sense of estrangement.

When Mark and Shelly-Ann left along with Aristotle, Arianne felt empty. She pestered Mary with questions on Shelly-Ann. "Where did this aunt come from? I thought there was no one left in the Tremont family…"

"The Tremont family members may be gone, but his aunt is from the maternal side of his family," Mary answered helplessly. "Both sides of the family can't possibly be extinct, can they? Honestly, I haven't seen her around that much. I met her once when Mr. Tremont was born, and twice before then. Honestly, humans are so different. She looks just as young as she used to be. It's been so many years since then, yet she doesn't seem to have aged at all. She's only a few years younger than the old Mrs. Tremont. Apparently, she got married and moved out of the country, not long after Mr. Tremont was born. She has lived outside of the country for so many years; it's good that she's back. At least, Mr. Tremont has another relative now."

Arianne let out a long sigh. "Alright then, since she's his aunt…" There was nothing for her to worry about, even though Shelly-Ann made her feel very uncomfortable.

At around 10PM, Mark and Shelly-Ann finally returned with Aristotle. The pair were laughing and chatting happily and bought quite a lot of things. Of course, they were all branded items, clothes, daily essentials, everything one could possibly need. It seemed that Shelly-Ann was going to stay at Tremont Estate for the time being.

Aristotle was exhausted from the shopping trip and was fast asleep in Shelly-Ann's arms when he arrived home. Shelly-Ann immediately took Aristotle up to the nursery. Arianne didn't get to touch her son at all today, not even a little bit…

When Mark finished his shower, Arianne sat on the bed, staring at him as she asked, “Is your aunt going to stay here with us?”

“Yes,” he replied as he wiped his hair. “Would that make you uncomfortable? She hasn’t been in the country for years, and everything’s changed. She’s not familiar with the place at all. She’ll stay here for the time being and move out when the time comes. I’ll arrange a position for her in the company.”

Arianne paused then said, “I’m not uncomfortable, she’s your aunt after all. I just… never heard you mention her. I had a look at your mom’s picture. They look very similar…”

Mark tensed just a little as he wiped his hair, then said, “She hasn’t been around in a very long time, so there was nothing to talk about. Anyway, now you know. I’ve never really met her, but I feel strangely connected to her. I’ve suddenly remembered that she visited twice when I was in elementary school. She would always visit me at school.”

Arianne was feeling sleepy. She pulled up the covers and lay down. “Hurry up and dry your hair off, then turn off the lights and come to bed. If you’re going to arrange a position for your aunt, you should arrange one for Robin while you’re at it. That way, she can spend some time with Sylvain. They’ve requested this long ago.”

“Mm,” Mark replied. He quickly got into bed and lay down, wrapping his arms and legs around her, as if she were a large pillow. “You’re probably not used to having an older person in the house, are you? It’s alright, she’s very easy to get along with. You’ll be fine once you get to know each other. It’s been so long since I’ve felt like this…”

Arianne didn’t close her eyes. She kept her gaze on the dark ceiling. She could vaguely sense the joy in his heart.

Chapter 1529

The next day, there was an extra passenger on the way to the office.

Shelly-Ann had insisted on going through normal procedures for a job offer in Mark's company and had refused nepotism. This was the complete opposite of Arianne's request to give Robin a position in the company.

Now, Arianne discovered that gorgeous Aunt Shelly was also extraordinarily capable. She was highly educated and experienced. She majored in many different things. She could easily get most jobs in Tremont Enterprises and didn't need nepotism at all.

On this day, all of Tremont Enterprises was abuzz—there was another woman by Mark Tremont's side! He even greeted her and sent her off personally.

"Who is that woman?" Sylvain asked Arianne, unable to help himself. "Why are you so calm about this? Don't you feel threatened at all?"

Arianne sat in her office chair and calmly replied, "She's his aunt. She looks thirty, but she's actually around forty to fifty years old. Why should I feel threatened? She looks exactly like his mom. What am I supposed to daydream about?"

Sylvain snorted. "Cr*p. I really couldn't see through her age at all. People are supposed to age with time. Has time forgotten about her? Either that, or she's had botox or a facelift. That's how the rich work. Next time, when I start getting wrinkles, I'm going to do the same."

Starting the next day, Shelly-Ann went to the office regularly. Of course, she carpooled with Mark and Arianne every day, as they were all going the same way. They didn't need to use separate transport. Previously, it was Brian in the driver's seat, with Mark and Arianne in the back. Now, it was Mark in the co-driver's seat, with Arianne and Shelly-Ann in the back.

Shelly-Ann was placed as the director of the strategy department in Tremont Enterprises. The company was huge, so she wasn't on the same floor as Arianne. They only saw each other when they went home together at night. Honestly, it didn't affect Arianne that much, but Shelly-Ann's overly familiar attitude towards Mark and Aristotle made her feel pushed aside.

During the weekend, Arianne took Aristotle out for lunch with Tiffany. When the pair began to talk about Shelly-Ann in Johnny Spencer's barbecue restaurant, Tiffany spoke up with a strange look on her face. "You must feel slightly uncomfortable. It doesn't matter who she is; as long as she's pretty and has suddenly appeared by your husband's side, you'd feel uneasy, even if she's a relative. It's in a woman's nature. Besides, from what you're telling me, his aunt is so clingy with him, and you can't even touch Smore. I'd be annoyed too. After all, this woman has appeared all of a sudden and has disrupted your life. Forget about the fact that she's his aunt. Even if she were his mom, wouldn't it be perfectly normal for you to feel uncomfortable? I understand how you're feeling. You never had anyone else in your lives, so of course, it would be unnerving."

Arianne was depressed. "But she's his aunt. How can I feel uncomfortable? Yes, I'm not used to this. I've been living with Mark for so many years, and this aunt pops out of nowhere. But I have to get used to it. It'll be fine when she moves out. But at this rate, it doesn't look like she's going to leave at all."

Jackson called Tiffany before they could finish their barbecued meal. Tiffany was in a huge rush, so she inhaled her food and slipped away. She was currently the entire family's protected lamb, and Jackson was only afraid that she would spoil her diet if he didn't pay attention.

Just as Arianne was about to take Aristotle home, Shelly-Ann suddenly called her. “Are you outside? Would you like to do a facial together?”

This was Arianne’s first time receiving an invitation from Shelly-Ann. She thought it would be a good opportunity to get to know her, so she didn’t refuse. “Okay, but I’ll have to bring Smore along. Would it be inconvenient? Shall I drop him off at home first?”

“No need,” Shelly-Ann replied. “I’ll have Brian drive me to the beauty salon. He can take Smore out to play somewhere nearby later. A facial won’t take too long. I’ll send you the address. You can take a cab there.”

Arianne soon received Shelly-Ann’s address once the call had ended—it was a beauty parlor from a large franchise in the capital. For someone like her, who rarely did any self-maintenance, these kinds of places were foreign to her. The total amount of times she’d spent in a beauty parlor could be counted on one hand.

Chapter 1530

Brian took Aristotle away when they arrived. This was Shelly-Ann’s first trip to a beauty parlor since her return to the country. She applied for a card with ease; it was clear that she had done a lot of beauty maintenance when she lived outside of the country too.

Shelly-Ann frowned when they entered the private room. “Did you have barbecue this afternoon? The smell is a little strong.”

Arianne felt awkward. “Yes…” Her entire body was covered with the smell of a barbecue grill. It was a stark contrast to Shelly-Ann’s body fragrance. The barbecue grill smell on Arianne wasn’t bad. It was just that… she smelled like food.

When the pair lay down for their facial, Shelly-Ann suddenly asked, “How long have you been with Mark?”

Arianne was shocked. Didn’t Mark mention that? However, she had to answer, “We’ve lived together for more than ten years, but if you consider when we really started living together… It’s been a few years.”

Shelly-Ann paused then said, “I can tell that he really loves you.”

Arianne didn’t answer. This was so obvious, how should she frame her answer in a way that didn’t make her look smug?

Having received no reply, Shelly-Ann asked, “You love him too, don’t you? Your father would still be alive if it weren’t for his mother. How did you manage to fall for him, considering the circumstances?”

Arianne’s heart thumped. She instinctively opened her eyes and stared at the esthetician who was massaging her face. How could she answer a question like that so easily? And in front of outsiders, to boot. This was an extremely private matter. It was clear that Mark did not have any reservations against Shelly-Ann. She knew everything from the moment she arrived.

“Mark didn’t tell me that,” Shelly-Ann calmly explained, as if she could read Arianne’s mind. “I guessed it on my own. I kind of knew what happened when I received news of his mother’s death. It was inevitable.”

Inevitable? What did she mean by that? Arianne couldn't understand it. The current situation was inappropriate, so she couldn't probe any further.

After emerging from the beauty parlor, Shelly-Ann suddenly eyed Arianne and said, "I refuse to believe that you don't resent Mark at all. Since you hate him, why did you choose to be with him, get married, and have his son?"

Arianne was about to explain when Brian returned with Aristotle. Then, the group climbed into the car. Everything seemed fine on the surface, but a seed had been planted in Arianne's heart. A seed that was taking root and growing wantonly. Did Shelly-Ann suspect her of staying by Mark's side for untoward intentions? This wouldn't be the first time. She would have ignored her if she were some unrelated nobody. Unfortunately, she was an aunt whom Mark respected.

When they arrived back at Tremont Estate, Shelly-Ann took Aristotle and summoned Mark to the study. Apparently, it was to discuss company matters.

Arianne was left all alone in the living room, like an outsider.

At night, in the bedroom during bedtime, when she and Mark were all alone, she carefully said, "I don't think your aunt likes me very much."