Ruling 1541

Chapter 1541

Shelly trembled in fury. She stormed out of the room and slammed the door on her way out.

Arianne plopped down on her bed and let out a long breath that she had been holding. If she were to be honest, Shelly raising her hand at her had been a pretty terrifying moment. Had that woman went through with it, this debacle would immediately escalate beyond a simple tiff right there and then. Being the middleman, Mark would then face one of the most knotty quandaries in his life yet.

It seemed that the only reason why Shelly stopped herself was to save Mark from the storm her action would have incurred. In a way, it proved just how much Mark meant to Shelly.

Aunt Shelly's absence during breakfast the next morning was conspicuous.

Arianne ordered their babysitter to check on her upstairs, but the girl came down alone a few moments later. "Mrs. Leigh said she's skipping both breakfast and work today. Um… her eyes are kind of puffy, Mr. and Mrs. Tremont. I think she might have just recently cried."

Worried, Mark was about to check on the woman himself when Arianne said flatly, "She came to my room last night and started a fight. That's why."

Mark was taken aback. "She's looked for you? But didn't I tell her not to disturb you—God, what did the two of you talk about?"

Arianne sighed. “She has this conspiracy theory that I’m only married to you to exact some kind of overarching revenge,” she began. “Jeez, she actually thinks that the way I call you by your name—instead of using some kinda cutesy, lovey-dovey nickname, I guess—and how the Tremont Enterprise is now legally under my name prove her conspiracy. It’s honestly amazing how protective she is of you and the lengths her thought processes have gone in the name of caring for you. Heck, to her, I’ve become an outsider rather than part of the family! It makes me wonder, do I look evil? And if I were only around just for revenge, does anyone really think that you’d be so dumb, you couldn’t figure my plan out by this point? Christ, if I hated you so much, would I have offered the rest of my life to you as your spouse and bore you a son? Seriously, is this the world’s dumbest way to exact revenge or what?!”

The corner of Mark’s lips quivered slightly. “Alright, alright. I’m sure it’s a misunderstanding. I’ll talk to her about this now. You go ahead with your breakfast.”

He climbed upstairs and knocked on Aunt Shelly’s door. A very gaunt woman greeted him with a forced smile, saying, “Oh, Mark. Why aren’t you having your breakfast, dear? I’m feeling a little under the weather today, so please, excuse me for skipping work. But don’t you fret about me, dear...”

Mark hesitated for a beat before replying, “It’s okay. If you aren’t in the state to work, then it’s okay to take a day off. Lie down on your bed if you’re feeling sick, Aunt Shelly. But I do have something to ask of you.”

The woman returned to her bed and sat next to the headboard. “Go ahead.”

Mark chose to be forthcoming. “Arianne told me all about last night. The two of you fought, didn’t you? Aunt Shelly, I remember telling you not to disturb her at late hours, didn’t I? But that’s not the point. The point is you’ve misunderstood her, big time. Nothing she did was out of vengeance. You see, after hearing the truth behind the plane crash, her way of lashing out was to run away and avoid me—and I swear to God, it was the darkest, bleakest period of my life. To have her come back to me after all of that… It had been a grueling undertaking. But after that, she risked her life to bear me a son. Surely this can’t be something a woman out for blood would do, yes?

“As for why Tremont Enterprise is now legally hers, it was a decision she made predicated with the belief that I’d died. If her goal were to avenge her father, then that would have been the perfect time for her to do nothing and watch the Tremont legacy crash and burn. But that wasn’t what she did, was it? No, she worked tirelessly and poured in all of her soul into keeping the legacy going, driving herself so hard that she was nearing collapse. She protected the Tremont Enterprise with all her might until I returned. I… I love her. The expanse of our deep-seated love for one another—you can’t begin to imagine it at all, Aunt Shelly. But at the very least, please stop doubting her like this.”

For a moment, Aunt Shelly’s only reaction was to stare glassily into space, as though in a trance. Then, quite suddenly, an air of abject moroseness befell her.

“I… see. Perhaps I really have misunderstood her, after all. I… I was just so worried that she’s out to get you, Mark. I don’t mean to be so extreme, b-b-but I… I can’t! I can’t stop myself from going there. You want to know how my life was before? Here’s the truth. I didn’t want to divulge anything back then because I don’t even want to think about it. My marriage was unhappy. No. That’s an understatement. It was a f**king nightmare.”

Chapter 1542

“I didn’t feel a tinge of sadness when my husband died. In fact, I just felt elated; I was emancipated. There’s nothing I wanted more than to flee there, and I stopped for no one and nothing until I finally made it home. But then I realized something—I can’t stop hating him. He’s dead already, and yet I can’t cease to hate. Hell, I wish I had defaced him and crushed his bones into powder. And that’s when I learned, you can’t dissolve and let go of real hatred so easily; it’s nigh impossible. So, how could Arianne stop hating you? How is it possible for her to not only transverse hate but to come to love you? I don’t understand. I don’t believe it…”

By this point, Shelly seemed to have lost control over her emotions, devolving into a crying mess.

Mark took a piece of tissue for her. “I understand now, Aunt Shelly. It’s alright, trust me. I’ll talk to Arianne about this, and she’ll definitely understand you—she’s very rational,” he comforted gently. “Aunt Shelly, you should let go of the pains of the past. I know it’s a history of agony and trauma, but you’ve escaped that nightmare already. You’ve stepped out of the abyss and are now safe in a place where light doesn’t die. So, please… Discard the beliefs you have formed while you were in a very dark place and refrain from being unnecessarily allergic, okay? Because I can assure you, your life is on the right, positive track now. Even if you can’t find it in you to trust Arianne right away, you should still endeavor to know her better. I’m confident that time reveals everything… as it will to you.”

Shelly nodded. “Please help me tell her I’m sorry. I was the one stepping over lines last night, and I almost… I almost hit her. I truly want you to live happily ever after, Mark. I have no other family and children, so I see you as though you’re my own flesh and blood. I will not let any harm come to pass,” she said. “I might not be able to accept her right now, but I promise you, I’ll work on it. All I hope is that she truly loves you and wants to spend the rest of her life with you. Now, I’ll admit that I have some… uh, minor psychological problems. It’s easy for me to go down a slippery slope into the extreme, but I’ll try to control myself as best I can and not start a fight with her. Perhaps today, I should seek a therapist and begin treatment as soon as I’m able. I don’t want to cause any more trouble to you.”

“I see. To be honest, I can tell—your mental state might need some help,” Mark replied, nodding. “I bet it was the effect of the trauma in your past. If that’s the case, I’ll drive to work myself today and leave Brian at your service. You’re not in a state to drive right now, so I think it’s better if you let him take you anywhere you need. Oh, and may I ask you one last thing?”

Now that much of her emotions had been allayed, Shelly was finally able to crack a small smile. “Knock yourself out..”

Mark took a deep breath. “Have you… ever had a feud of some kind with my mom?” he queried. “Why had you stopped me from telling her about your visits? Why didn’t you ever talk or contact either of us all these years while overseas?”

Her smile froze into an uncanny curve on her face.

Mark's first thought was that he had said something insensitive, but he thought against the idea upon quick reflection. There was nothing in his question that sounded hostile or wrong, right? All Mark did was ask a legitimate and reasonable question. Could this mean that there was, in fact, some apocalyptic bad blood between Aunt Shelly and his late mother?

As though realizing her response's unnaturalness, Shelly's eyes darted away from Mark, choosing to land somewhere else instead. She tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. "What? That's preposterous; you see things that aren't there. Your mother was my big sister, Mark dear, the two of us were… well, practically besties. There was nothing between us that could make me hate her to this day."

Mark could tell almost instantly: she was lying.

She had not dared to look into his eyes when she answered him. That sudden gesture of personal grooming, too, was just an unconscious attempt to cover up her disquietude.

Piqued, Mark followed up. "Then why did you remove my parents' wedding photo? The only few people who could enter my study are Arianne, myself, and you. Before you came here, the wedding photo had been there, virtually untouched… Look, I'm not mad or anything about it being gone. I'm only curious as to why you did what you did."

Shelly sank into momentary silence. Notably, she did not deny her hand in the wedding photo's disappearance.

When she spoke again, her voice was one of sorrow. "If it wasn't for your bastard of a father, how could your mother end up becoming so extreme and irrational that she orchestrated that plane crash that

killed them all? My sister had devoted her life and spirit to the Tremonts. How much despair did she feel at the moment of her death? Their wedding photo pissed me off all the time—your father, that… son of a b*tch! I might have lived my life in Germany all these years, but I know what happened to my family well enough within those periods, too."

Chapter 1543

Mark let out a sigh of relief. "Oh, so that's why! In that case, it's fine. Go ahead and rest. I'll be off to work."

Everything added up—Shelly's fib about her buddy-buddy relationship with his mother excluded, of course. Everything else made enough sense, and if Mark was being honest, he did not care to dive deep into the age-old drama between his mother and his aunt. Whatever that was, it was a feud of a generation before him. There was no need to drag it out from under the dust.

Besides, what sort of catastrophic enmity could possibly be bred between an ordinary pair of sisters like them?

En route to the Tremont Tower, Arianne asked while in the car, "So, what did your aunt tell you? If it involves anything that I'm not supposed to hear, you could skip that part."

Mark turned to face her. "Why do you think there'll be such a thing? You're entitled to hear everything, Arianne. Anyway, it turns out that her capriciousness and predisposition for extreme actions are all products of her past trauma. She's legitimately mentally-unwell, so I've left Brian to drive her to the therapist today. The gist? Her actions are born out of her mental illness. She also wanted you to know she's sorry she can't really control her behavior. I honestly don't know just what sort of hellish nightmare her last marriage was, but to warp her mind to this degree alone is pretty… well, spine-chilling," Mark recounted, "And finally, the wedding photo. She destroyed it out of an intense grudge toward my father and pity for my mother's fate. It's why she couldn't stand looking at a piece of memorabilia that reminded her of their union."

Arianne sighed. “If that is the case, well… I sympathize, I really do. I understand where her actions are coming from. But damn, her personal issues have really spilled over to mine, you know. Ever since she came here, I felt like I’ve never had a day of genuine peace. And if she keeps this up, Christ, I think I’ll be the next one to see a therapist! But yea, I get it. She’s doing things for your sake, she’s worried that I’m out for blood—all that, I understand. But honest to God, I cannot stand her bare-faced rancor, and I seriously cannot tolerate the way she treats Mary and Henry.”

“There, there. I told her about that too, so we can expect a change in attitude from now on,” Mark replied reassuringly. “Don’t worry, Arianne. I’ll always stand by your side. No one who ever existed could bully my woman—not even my aunt.”

Arianne smiled. “Well, I sure hope you mean it. I’ll definitely hold this against you though, hee hee.”

Mark and Arianne went their separate ways as soon as they reached the office. Today, Alejandro, Jackson, and even Melanie had made their appearances. They were probably here for a meeting.

Tiffany, too, had tagged along with Jackson. But unlike everyone else, she was only here for casual banter with Arianne, who quickly set her work aside and brought her guest to the break room.

With a cup of hot tea in hand, Tiffany began, “So… Mark’s aunt has moved into Tremont Estate, huh? ‘Sup with that? Y’all good friends or what?”

Leave it up to Tiffany to always ask the wrong question.

Arianne shot her a mirthless, forced smile. “Damn, you have the instincts for the juiciest tea, don’t you? But yea, at this rate, I seriously envy your relationship with Jackson’s mom. Of course, it helps that Summer always treats you very kindly; she sees you as her own daughter, after all. But Mark’s aunt? Ha, she’s the polar opposite. She’s always so annoyingly wary of me. Hell, she labels me as an outsider and believes that I’m gonna avenge my dad’s death by… harming Mark or something! My God, she’s gonna drive me nuts through all of these torments!

“Here’s the thing, I genuinely believe my life to be pretty damn near perfect. I have a happy, content family, for Christ’s sake, so why would I entertain ideas that could take all this happiness away from both myself and others, huh? What, she doesn’t think I’ll take my son’s life and future into consideration?… But then again, Mark told me that his aunt had lived a very hellish life in Germany. It was so excruciating that it did a number to her mental health, and now, her actions and thoughts could sometimes drift to the extreme. Honestly, I understand and sympathize.”

Tiffany’s eyes widened. “…‘Did a number to her mental health?’ Whoa, whoa; that means she’s actually psychotic, isn’t it?! But she’s an employee of Tremont Enterprise too, right? As some kinda director of some department?— Oh my God, is it even ok for her to have this job…?”

Chapter 1544

Arianne scanned the room while gesturing to Tiffany to shut up. “Are you crazy? We’re in the office here! Don’t shout so loudly at a moment like this. What’ll happen if someone overhears you, huh?”

Tiffany’s sensibilities finally caught on, and she lowered her voice. “Oop! I was just a little too shocked, okay? Like, I was so surprised, I forgot to control my volume. But come on! Being together in a room with an aunt like that? It really is a brand new hell every day… Sucks to be you, girl. Guess no one could beat Jackson’s mom in being The Best Mother-in-law Ever, huh? She has never so much as raised her voice at me, let alone rage at my face.”

Arianne pursed her lips. “Okay, okay, I concede! Your mother-in-law is the best in the whole wide world! Honestly, all I’m asking her right now is to let me live every day in peace. I just want Mark’s aunt to stop

being so hostile with me, and let everyone carry on with their lives without any more fights. I really can't stand how much she loves to remind us that Mary and Henry are 'mere workers' and whatnot, or how she loves taking Smore away from me and not letting me play with my own son. Hell, last night, we even had this big row, and it probably resulted in her losing an entire night's sleep. And then she skipped breakfast this morning and had been caught with these puffy eyes like she'd been crying. She's not coming to work today, too—supposedly because she wants to see a therapist. Well, damn straight she needs one! Who can endure her crazies, huh?"

"Preach, sister! If you can't stand it, then I doubt Mark can endure it any longer," Tiffany chimed in. "On one hand, his beloved wife; on the other, an aunt he cares about—no matter who he sides with, the man's courting death either way. Originally, neither of you had any parent to please, so life's always been just the two of you. And then some random aunt suddenly popped into the scene, and now, you have a mother-in-law outta nowhere. Worse, this woman isn't even looking to be a good friend to ya', and now, I seriously cannot imagine the two of you living your life under the same roof every day. Not even your own mom had ever brought you this much trouble; the hell with a mere aunt pulling off all these craps, huh?"

A few moments later, Melanie came to them, claiming that the meeting was coming to an end, and the men had begun moving on to some topics that she, as a woman, found inappropriate to listen to.

The first thing Tiffany said to her was, "Say, Melanie. Do you have troubles with your mother-in-law or something?"

The woman in question stared at her, perplexed. "Huh? N-No, of course not. Alex doesn't have parents, and his grandpa passed away, remember? He had been very kind to me before his passing, though. But now, it's just Alex, our daughter Millie, and me. No chance for any trouble with in-laws, huh?" she replied. "My parents lived all the way in Ayashe, and they never cared about how we lived. So... what's wrong? Don't tell me the two of you are facing that sort of problem right now. How, though? Can't be Arianne; she doesn't have in-laws. And it's practically impossible of you to suffer the tyranny of mothers-in-law, Tiffany! Everyone knows that Jackson's mother treats you like a daughter."

Little signs of Tiffany's schadenfreude were leaking out of her mien. "Oh, but you thought wrong, Melanie. Ari is the one who's in trouble! Her actual mother-in-law's gone, sure, but it turns out Mark has this long-time-no-see aunt who just recently came back and now lives in the Tremont Estate. Ari can do no right in that woman's eyes, man! It's like, lightning strikes from heaven without notice, right? And boy howdy, our friend's struck hard!"

Arianne wondered, 'How the heck did I end up having this woman as my best friend?'

Melanie broke into a brief smile. "Oh, I see now. Well, she's his aunt, so I doubt there's much to do about her. All I can suggest is to do your best not to start a fight with her. Oh, if that's impossible, maybe you can try hiding from her. She's just an aunt, which means she's the sort of relative you can choose to engage with or otherwise. So, if you don't interact with her that much in the first place, there will be fewer conflicts, yes? Alex doesn't like mingling with my family, which is kind of a good thing, personally. A lot of conflicts and fights arise when families live together, right? But if we all live separately, the distance between us can do wonders in glossing over their follies and flaws, amirite?"

Arianne understood what Melanie was suggesting, but how was she supposed to "hide from Aunt Shelly?" That shrew had declared herself to be a permanent resident of the Tremont Estate until the day she died, for Christ's sake, and Arianne could not even tell if Shelly meant it. If she was going to do as she said, then God help Arianne before she kissed her sanity goodbye!

Chapter 1545

Arianne only returned after having dinner with Tiffany and Melanie. By the time she reached home, it was slightly over nine o'clock at night.

Smore had been adamant about waiting for his mother and refused to sleep. Upon seeing her, Smore struggled out of Aunt Shelly's arms and dashed forward, shouting, "Mommy!"

Arianne picked the boy up and eyed Shelly instinctively, anticipating. This was usually when Shelly would declare time for Smore to go to sleep so that Arianne had no time to interact with the kid a second longer.

This time, however, Shelly did none of that. She did not seem out of the ordinary when she greeted her. “Home already, huh? Take a shower so you may rest early. Smore refuses to sleep before you come home, you know. I bet seeing you now gladdens him greatly.”

She nodded. “You should rest early, too. Anyway, I’ll bring Smore upstairs.”

Arianne might have only lived with Shelly for a while, but she felt like she had known that woman enough to conclude that she was, indeed, mentally unhinged—a rather severe case, at that. Shelly had turned a complete one-eighty from who she was last night! At times, she possessed an explosive, hair-triggering pugnacity, exhibiting a degree of asperity and a paranoid victimization complex. Other times, Shelly was nothing but beautiful, graceful, decorous, and genial. Was this not the hallmark of split-personality disorder? Surely no one could fake such distinct personalities this convincingly, right?

She conceded that an ordinary person might also suspect Arianne of secretly harboring desires for revenge against Mark. Still, they would certainly not express their skepticism in the sort of unfiltered and combative manner Shelly displayed. Only someone who was mentally sick would magnify every little trivial out of proportions, use them to fuel their paranoia, and exhibit an inability to keep their extreme thoughts under wraps.

Arianne returned to her bedroom after getting Smore to sleep. Mark was already lying down on his bed, though he was occupied with his phone rather than sleeping.

Seeing her, he asked, “Aunt Shelly had been waiting for your return downstairs with Smore, hadn’t she? Did she kick up any fuss?”

“So, all it takes for her to be normal again is to have her see the doctor for a bit?” she rejoined. “Well, she’s changed from last night, that’s for sure. But I hope she stays this way forever from now on because I’m too mentally-exhausted to play ball with her.”

“C’mon, she does not have any severe mental illness, you know. It’s more of a slight ailment, one that makes her a bit erratic,” Mark replied helplessly. “Some meds should aid her in adjusting her mental state, and she’ll be good as normal soon. Be patient.”

Arianne minced her words before asking, “What do you think happened in her marriage? What sort of torment could leave such a trauma? Did she let down her guard and tell you a little?”

“No, she didn’t want to. Honestly, even if I could investigate it myself… I would rather not. Just don’t think there’s a need to,” Mark replied, shaking his head. “Anyway, you should shower and rest.”

The next morning, the three of them went to Tremont Tower together. Per habit, Arianne parted ways with Mark once they reached the company, as the two of them were involved in different departments.

Shelly quickened her pace to catch up to her. “Hey, uh… About last time? I’m sorry. I was acting out of line. I’m sure Mark explained everything to you, and I think you now understand where my… opinions are coming from. Either way, we have a long, long life ahead of us, right? As long as you don’t harbor any malice toward him, I won’t give you a hard time. I… I wish to have us live harmoniously together from now forward.”

Arianne slowed down her steps a little and replied, “My thoughts exactly. We’ve got a long life ahead of us, and I hope we live together in concord.”

Chapter 1546

When she arrived at her desk, Arianne sat down and took a deep breath to calm her nerves. She still had quite a lot of outstanding tasks to be completed.

Sylvain had arrived earlier than her and was already buried in his work. Arianne casually asked, “How have you been recently? Has your mom not made you break down yet?”

Sylvain gave a wry laugh and said, “I’m doing alright, but I can’t seem to understand why Robin’s mom dislikes me and my mom dislikes Robin like they’re born to be mortal enemies. I put in so much effort and finally began to make progress with getting Robin’s mom to like me, then my mom suddenly jumps out and makes my life even more difficult. Everytime I think of how Robin and I still aren’t living together despite being married for so long, I can’t even begin to imagine when we’re going to be able to begin making plans for having a baby. I’ve got a really bad headache at the moment because of this. You’re a woman, I’m sure you’re more experienced with dealing with mothers-in-law. I can understand if Robin’s mom despises me because of my past, but why would my mom despise Robin when she’s such a nice girl? Can you help explain that to me?”

Arianne laughed uncontrollably. “How should I know? I’m really no better than you in this. I’m quite stuck in a sticky situation myself at the moment. However, I think things are still quite optimistic for the both of you. Robin’s still working together with you in the office, so there’s no need for you to meet each other in secret. As for having a baby… I’m sure you’d be able to get it done in secret as well. Once Robin’s actually pregnant, a lot of problems will be flushed down naturally, cheer up. By the way, why haven’t you been wearing your earrings lately?”

Sylvain rubbed his earlobes. “About that… Robin’s mom didn’t like them. She said I looked like a ruffian. I can’t be bothered to explain and I don’t even know if I’d be able to make her change her opinion of it, so I decided not to wear them altogether. It’s no big deal for me to abandon one of my hobbies.”

Arianne couldn't help but sigh. "Sometimes, we have no choice but to give up on our hobbies to accommodate others."

In the afternoon, after Arianne was done with her tasks, she and Sylvain discussed some techniques to help improve their designing skills over a cup of tea. Whilst they were in the heat of the discussion, Robin hurriedly ran towards them. "Arianne, something bad has happened…!"

Seeing how Robin had almost banged the edge of the table while in a state of panic, Arianne laughed as she said, "What's the matter? You should be careful, the sky's not falling down on us yet. Even if it is falling, we need to stay calm. Now, take a deep breath and tell me what has happened."

Robin took a deep breath and revealed some shocking news. "Just now, at the hall where the runway was being designed, the chandelier on the ceiling fell! Mr. Tremont was right underneath the chandelier at that time and Shelly-Ann Leigh managed to push him away, but she was hit by the chandelier herself. There's blood all over the floor. She's currently in the hospital, and we don't know how she's doing yet!"

Aunt Shelly had been hit by the falling chandelier in order to save Mark?!

Since the lighting requirement for the fashion show was much higher, the lights were bigger than usual. Whoever got hit by the lights would not be able to walk away unscathed; it's even possible that the injury would be fatal.

Arianne immediately rushed to the hospital. Shelly was still in the emergency treatment room and Mark was guarding by the corridor. From a distance, his face was very dark and his thin lips were pursed. He exuded a very cold aura as if he refused to let anyone approach him.

“Aunt Shelly will be fine…” Arianne walked towards him but did not know how to console him. Just recently, she had been in a heated argument with Shelly and had made it clear that the two of them were not compatible with each other. Therefore, no matter what she said, it would only seem to be crocodile tears.

Mark was in a foul mood; he looked at her without any expression on his face. “It’s fine, you should go back to the office. It’ll be enough with just me here.”

Arianne bit her lip. She paused for a moment, but then left. She did not want to leave, but only because it would make her look like an outsider. Would it not be normal for her to stay at the hospital at a time like this? Why did Mark ask her to leave? Did he not want her to stay at the hospital just for Shelly? Or was there something else?

After a wasteful journey, Arianne returned to the office. Sylvain saw her slumped shoulders and knew that things did not look good. He asked, “How’s Mrs. Leigh?”

Chapter 1547

Arriane only shook her head, not wishing to speak.

Sylvain was slightly surprised. “Is she dead?”

Arianne rolled her eyes at him. “What’re you talking about? I just don’t know how she’s doing! When I arrived there, she was still in the emergency treatment room, so I don’t know the details. I came back because Mark told me not to stay there.”

Sylvain patted his chest. “You gave me a fright there. I thought that things were really bad. We don’t know how she’s doing yet, so there’s no need for you to pull such an expression, is there? She should be fine.”

Arianne grabbed her hair in frustration. “I’m not like this because of Mrs. Leigh. It’s because I don’t understand why Mark asked me to come back. Isn’t his aunt my aunt too? I feel so uncomfortable with the dark expression he gave me when he asked me to come back. It’s not like I’m the one who caused his aunt to run into an accident. I know that he’s in a bad mood, but he doesn’t have to vent it out at me…”

Sylvain was speechless and did not know what to say to her. Mark would be the only person who knew what was going on in his mind at that moment.

Mark did not return to the Tremont Estate for dinner that night. When Mary saw how down Arianne was when she arrived home, she curiously asked, “What’s wrong? Both you and sir didn’t come home for dinner tonight. You’ve even got a strange expression on your face.”

Arianne explained everything that had happened to Aunt Shelly that day. Shocked, Mary said, “So, that’s how it is. When sir called home a while earlier, his tone was very cold. He merely said that he wasn’t coming home for dinner tonight and hung up without saying anything else. I couldn’t even ask anything else before he hung up. Whatever it is, madam is approaching her 50’s already; she may look young, but age doesn’t lie. She must be in a very serious condition after such an accident.”

Was that how it was? Perhaps it was because Shelly looked young that Arianne had a very hard time accepting that she was approaching her 50’s. In that case, things really did not look good for the latter—the older a person was, the more fragile they became. Shelly had actually disregarded her own safety in order to save Mark. Was being blood-related really that magical? Arianne could not understand it because she had never arrived at that point with Helen. Her mother had almost cut off all ties with Arianne because of Aery despite Arianne being her real daughter.

Mark did not return home that night. Arianne waited for him until 12 AM before she laid in bed herself. She wanted to call him and ask how Aunt Shelly was doing, but she dropped the idea when she thought of his cold treatment of her that afternoon. Arianne thought that it would be better if she took a trip to the hospital tomorrow.

The next day when she arrived at the hospital, Arianne brought along some food with her. She had guessed correct—Mark had actually stayed at the hospital the entire night without even taking a nap.

Judging from Shelly's wounds, she did not injure her head and the upper half of her body was fine. The main injuries were to her legs, which were quite serious. She had both her legs strapped up towards the ceiling. The silver lining was that she was awake, which meant that she was not in critical condition.

"Aunt Shelly, I've brought you some porridge. Would you like to have some?"

Shelly shot a smile at Arianne. "It's quite inconvenient for me to eat at the moment. Would you mind feeding me?"

Arianne was slightly started. She looked at Mark and nodded her head when he did not say anything. Was she really that close with Shelly? Arianne thought that Aunt Shelly would have wanted Mark to feed her.

Chapter 1548

After Arianne was done feeding Shelly, the latter suddenly said, "Mark, you've been looking after me tirelessly the whole night. You should go home and get some rest. I'll be fine here, but I'll need your help with arranging someone to take care of me for the next few days, since I can't move around by myself."

Mark pulled up her blanket and tucked her in. “It’s fine, Aunt Shelly. I can’t be at ease if someone else takes care of you. I’ll let Arianne accompany you for the time being while I go home to get changed. I’ll be back later.”

Arianne suddenly said, “If you’re worried about someone else taking care of her, why don’t you let me do it then? I’m sure you’d be at ease if it were me, wouldn’t you? You can’t be away from Tremont Enterprise for too long, so you should leave the errands in the hospital to me.”

Mark swiftly scanned Arianne’s face and casually said, “It’s fine, I’ll do it.”

Arianne trembled—was he being defensive of her? Was he afraid that she would mistreat his Aunt Shelly? Did she seem like the type of person who would argue with her at a time like this?

Just as Arianne was about to explode in anger, Shelly said, “Arianne’s right, you should return to your work at the company. I won’t be able to return to work for the time being, so you’ll need to arrange someone to man the fort at the planning department during my absence. There’s still much to be done at the runway hall. I’ll be fine with Arianne here to look after me. Don’t worry.”

Mark was silent for a moment before he agreed. He requested to speak with Arianne outside the ward before he left. “In truth, I really can’t leave the company for the time being, so I’ll leave Aunt Shelly under your care. Could you not… argue with her please? You know how her mood tends to swing without warning, so just let her do as she pleases. The doctor says that her… right leg is heavily injured. It’s very likely that… she will never regain functionality of her leg again. I still haven’t dared to tell her about this yet. She’s a perfectionist like my mom, so who knows how she’d react when she learns about the truth… You shouldn’t tell her about it, as well, for the time being.”

Arianne frowned, not expecting it to be so serious. “I understand… I won’t tell her about it, but you do know that it can’t be kept as a secret for too long, don’t you? Did you refuse to let me take care of her because you were afraid that I would argue with her? Or is it because you were afraid of what I might do to her? Could it be that… you don’t trust me? I think whatever it is that’s between me and her isn’t a big deal. We’re both living under the same roof and we’re just about to get to know each other, so it’s quite normal for us to argue. It’s not like there’s some deep grudge or hatred between us. You don’t have to think of me like that.”

Mark raised his head and caressed her cheek, his face having calmed quite a bit. “I wasn’t thinking like that. I was just afraid that her emotions would be quite erratic since she’s stuck in the hospital and that might be of inconvenience to you. Why did you have to take up the responsibility yourself? However, what’s done is done. I hope you’re able to control your emotions when she’s in a bad mood, as there’s nothing else that can be done. I’ll be off now. Give me a call whenever you need me.”

After hearing what Mark had said, Arianne finally relaxed herself. She was being oversensitive and had been thinking too much. Perhaps it was because Shelly’s appearance was too sudden.

Back at the ward, Arianne did her best to take care of Shelly. She could understand how bad it must feel to be confined to the hospital bed everyday, so she consistently massaged Shelly’s lower body, avoiding areas that she should not touch. Shelly fixed her gaze and stared at Arianne. “Do you really not have any grudges against me for having to take care of me?”

Arianne remained focused on massaging because she was afraid she might hurt her. “Of course not, why would I? You’re Mark’s aunt and you even got yourself injured to protect him. Of course, I should be the one to take care of you.”

Shelly closed her eyes. “But, I still can’t accept you from the bottom of my heart.”

Arianne paused for a moment before continuing what she was doing. “Weren’t you planning to stay at the Tremont Estate permanently? What else do you have to be worried about if you’re there? There’s a saying that humans eventually gain feelings for one another after interacting for a period of time and will finally understand each other’s personalities. We’re just beginning to get to know each other; you don’t know me well nor I you, so why don’t we take it slow? I will definitely show you some respect based on how protective and kind you are towards Mark. If it wasn’t because of you, Mark would be the one lying here instead.

Chapter 1549

Shelly was silent for a moment, showing confusion when she answered. “How is that a big deal? I’m even willing to sacrifice my life if I have to…”

Arianne found her words to be quite strange. She thought that the feelings Shelly had for Mark exceeded that of an aunt who had not contacted her nephew for many years. It was normal for a senior to show love and care for the juniors, but it was really strange for her to show that many feelings for Mark. It was as if she treated Mark as her own flesh and blood.

Arianne had her suspicions but did not dwell further on them, since she was in no position to go wild with her imagination.

Later in the day, Mark returned to the hospital to visit. However, Shelly felt sorry for him and asked him to leave the ward after a short while. Arianne stayed at the hospital to accompany Shelly throughout the night. She might have felt tired, but Arianne knew that if she had not done it, Mark would be the one who would be tired instead. How could she let her own man suffer so much? The amount of work in the office was more than enough to annoy him already.

A normal person would not be able to handle Shelly, as she had a very strict and consistent lifestyle. Although she could not move around freely, she still insisted on keeping everything neat and tidy. For example, she would want her hair to be combed regularly so that it was neat. She would not even miss her daily skincare routine. Therefore, apart from feeding her and taking her to the washroom, Arianne

even had to be her beautician and do her facial for her—applying her cosmetics and giving her face massages. After that, Arianne had to wipe Shelly down.

It would be in the middle of the night that Arianne would fall into a deep sleep, slumbering on the visitor's bed, as she would be completely exhausted from all the energy spent on carrying out Shelly's daily routine.

In a daze, she seemed to hear Shelly speaking and thought that the latter wanted to use the washroom. Arianne wanted to get up, but the gravitational pull of her bed prevented her from doing so and she procrastinated for a moment. Suddenly, she could clearly hear what Shelly was saying. "I don't want to go… I refuse to go… Please… let me see him one last time. What have I done wrong, sis? Why are you doing this to me?"

Shelly's words completely awakened Arianne from her sleep. She was very sure that Shelly was sleep-talking. Then, Shelly tone shot up and her words were filled with hatred as she breathlessly said, "Die, just die! Every single one of you deserves to die! But if you're dead, how am I supposed to get back what belongs to me?!"

Just as she said that, Shelly awoke from her sleep, having unconsciously moved the lower half of her body. She cried out in pain when she pulled her injury.

Arianne hurriedly walked up to her. "Aunt Shelly, what's wrong? Did you have a nightmare?"

Shelly shot Arianne an odd look and quickly evaded the latter's gaze. "I-I… Was I talking in my sleep?"

Arianne lied. “No, you weren’t. I just saw that you weren’t able to sleep properly and I just so happen to be a light sleeper. Plus, I’m not used to sleeping in the hospital, so I woke up quite easily. Do you need to go to the bathroom?”

Shelly reached out her hand and tidied her hair, then said with a cold look in her eyes, “You’re free to go home if you can’t get used to sleeping in the hospital. You don’t have to stay here and take care of me.”

Arianne was having a headache. Obviously, Shelly was letting her imagination run wild and twisting Arianne’s words again. Arianne explained to her, “You’ve misunderstood. I didn’t mean it like that. I’m here to take care of you on my own accord. I haven’t got the slightest intention of leaving you here alone.”

When Arianne noticed that Shelly was sweating from the nightmare she had, she picked up a towel and helped wipe down her face and neck. Just as Arianne turned around to wash the towel, Shelly suddenly asked, “Did I really not talk in my sleep? If you heard anything, just tell me.”

Arianne was not that foolish. The amount of information that Shelly had blurted out in her sleep was too much. “Really, you weren’t. Why would I lie to you?”

Chapter 1550

Shelly sighed in relief. “That’s fine then.”

It was past 2 AM, but Shelly could not go back to sleep. Hence, Arianne stayed up and the two of them talked to each other for a moment before Arianne slept away due to the amount of fatigue she had. The next day, when Arianne woke up, Shelly was still awake. Shelly looked very pale because she was not able to get a good night’s sleep the night before. It seemed like she was really having a hard time sleeping properly.

Shelly had been given a sleeping pill that day in addition to her usual medication. Based on the situation she was in, it would not be helpful for her recovery if she was not able to get enough rest. After taking the sleeping pill, she dozed off into a deep sleep without talking in her sleep again.

When Arianne recalled what she had heard the night before, her mind was filled with curiosity. She was curious about what had actually happened between Mark's mom and Shelly for the latter to be stuck in such a deep abyss. Did she truly destroy that photo simply because she despised Mark's dad? Was it possible… she despised Mark's mom as well?

During the month that Shelly was hospitalized, Arianne tirelessly took care of her to the best of her abilities. When Shelly was finally discharged and the two of them returned to Tremont Estate, Arianne immediately went to sleep for an entire day before she regained a little of her energy. Taking care of the ill was really taxing on her body, and she had never tried to take care of someone for such a long time. Arianne was surprised as to how she had actually managed to complete such a feat.

Arianne had hoped that Shelly would change her opinion towards the former after that incident. However, the fact was that Shelly was not someone who was easily affected—her attitude towards Arianne was as cold as usual. The saving grace was that she would be less annoying towards Arianne when Mark was around, but she would immediately return to being cold when Mark was away. Shelly would even frown immediately the moment either of them were annoyed with each other.

Seeing how tired Arianne was for the past few days, Mark asked her to get more rest and stay at home, but she refused. "I'd better not. Aunt Shelly would be at home as well. Won't that mean I would have to continue taking care of her during my spare time? I'd much rather come to the office and relax."

After hearing what Arianne had said, Mark gave up on the idea and did not so much as mention that topic again.

After working in the office for the entire day, Mark and Arianne went back home. The moment they got home, they realized that something was amidst. Henry and Mary were standing by the main entrance of the house. After a quick glance, Mary seemed to be crying and Henry was trying to console her.

Arianne quickly walked up and asked, “What’s wrong Mary?”

Mary cried so much, her nose and eyes were completely red. “What else could it be? I’d rather not say… I’m sure you can guess it as well…”

Arianne looked at Henry, who merely sighed and did not say anything. Arianne immediately realized that Shelly was the cause behind all this—the latter has most likely done something to make Mary cry so much.

This was not something she could bring up casually, so she asked Mark to get to the bottom of it. “It’s fine now, Mary. You should get back to whatever you were doing and ignore the rest. You should stick to your job and ask someone else to do anything that doesn’t relate to you. It’s cold outside, let’s go in.”

After receiving Arianne’s “instructions”, Mark went in and immediately headed for Shelly’s room. Shortly after, the sound of items being smashed could be heard from her room, which was followed by shouting and sobbing. “If I have to live like this forever, I’d rather die! Is it true that I will never be able to walk again? Why did you hide it from me?!”

Arianne stood by the stairs and eavesdropped on their conversation. It would seem that Mark had truly understood Shelly’s character, so he had insisted on not letting the latter find out about the truth. However, now that the cat was out of the bag, Shelly was in a fit of rage. Arianne tried to recall—if her

memory serves, she had definitely heard Shelly saying that her accident was no big deal and she would even be willing to sacrifice her life for Mark if she had to. But now, she was unable to accept it when she found out the truth about her legs? Shelly was contradicting herself.