**Ruling 1641**

Chapter 1641

When Shelly left to go to the patio, Mark completely lost his patience and said to Saoirse, “We won’t be developing any further. My aunt’s the one who’s been arranging all of this of her own accord.”

Saoirse remained silent for a moment before she smiled intimately and said, “I know, you’ve just divorced your ex-wife recently and it’s normal for you to be unable to fully accept it for the time being. However, I’m willing to wait. Furthermore, you don’t have to worry about the matter between us affecting your collaboration with my father since they’re two completely different matters. I can see that you’re in a rather foul mood today, so I won’t interrupt you any further. I’ll see you again next time.”

After she said that, Saoirse got up and left. Before she left, she did not forget to bid farewell to Shelly, who was on the patio.

Mark quietly sat for a few seconds before he got up and returned to his bedroom.

Saoirse was definitely not as innocent and gentle as she seemed. On the contrary, she knew how to keep her emotions in check and would only say things that were appropriate for the situation. Her subtlety was undoubtedly exceptional.

Mark was never worried about his collaboration with Saoirse’s father being affected by her in the first place; Shelly was the only one who thought that she would be able to force him to do her bidding with that plan. Clearly, Shelly had overestimated the importance of the McKinseys. Saoirse’s father would not be so foolish as to stop collaborating with Tremont Enterprise because of that when there were so many others who were looking for a chance to be able to collaborate with Tremont Enterprise.

Shelly knew that there was no development in her plans the moment Saoirse left. She was a lot more impatient in wanting to make Mark maintain his distance with Arianne since Arianne would be returning to work at Tremont Enterprise once the holidays were over. When that happened, all her efforts would be in vain.

She fished out her phone and pulled up the photo that she secretly took before. The photo clearly showed Saoirse's face, but only a little of Mark's side profile. However, based on the photo, it could be seen that Mark was not happy with the situation. Would Arianne go on an angry rampage if she were to see the picture? Since Mark was not willing to say it himself, Shelly could only try to make Arianne leave Tremont Enterprise of her own accord and disappear from Mark's life once and for all.

Shelly did not just send the photo alone, but sent Arianne an earnest text message too. 'I'm sending you this photo not because I have any ulterior motive, but because I want to tell you that there isn't a man that wouldn't have a change of heart. Now that you and Mark are already divorced, he's got another girl with him. Furthermore, she comes from a well-off family and is compatible with Mark. Therefore, you should stop while you have the chance instead of using Smore to come up with some plan. If you do that, it'll only end up very badly for you. I doubt Mark has told you about this, has he? That's because he feels guilty towards you, yet he can't control his own emotions. I'm telling you all this because I think you're quite pitiful, but there really isn't any point in you continuing to stay in Tremont Enterprise anymore. With that said, you should resign and leave the company. Also, if you're willing to leave Smore with Mark, I could persuade him into paying you a sum of money as compensation. Why don't you give it a good thought? It may seem like I was going against you in the past, but if you look at it from another angle, I actually have your best interests at heart. Think about it, if Mark truly loved you, would he agree to the divorce so easily?'

When Arianne received Shelly's message, she was out shopping with Smore.

Each line of the text message seemed to take Arianne's breath away. She stared at the photo for a very long time until it seemed like Saoirse's face was almost going to be engraved in her eyes.

“Mama, you’re hurting me…”

Arianne immediately gathered her thoughts together when Smore suddenly raised his voice. She panically released Smore’s hand and knelt in front of him before she said, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to do that to you.”

Smore’s head turned sideways as he asked, “What’s wrong, Mama?”

Arianne suppressed the sadness that was welling up inside her and forced a wry smile. “It’s nothing. I’m not feeling well and can’t continue shopping anymore. Let’s go home.”

When she arrived home, Arianne went to the bathroom before opening up that photo again. Aside from being stunned, she did not manage to get a good look at the photo when she was outside. ‘Mark really has another woman now…’

As Arianne took a closer look, she realized that although Mark did not seem to look unhappy, the cigarette he had between his fingers was proof enough that he was actually annoyed to be there since he would only smoke when he was feeling irritated. Therefore, he was actually forced to meet the woman and was irked by it.

Arianne knew that she should not believe Shelly’s words, but she could not help but feel sad by it and let her imagination run wild. Then, Arianne blacklisted Shelly’s contact in a fit of anger.

Chapter 1642

The thought of asking Mark what the actual circumstances were did cross Arianne's mind, but she stopped herself in the end. She figured that if Mark truly did care for her, he would tell her about it himself.

However, after a few days had passed, that day did not arrive. In between, aside from Mark casually asking how she was doing, there was nothing else. Initially, Arianne would still reply to him, but that all stopped after a while. Mark had no intention of coming clean… He did not even ring her.

When the holidays were over and it was time for her to return to Tremont Enterprise, she was still slightly reluctant to return. What was she supposed to do if she met Mark? Was she supposed to ask him directly or keep quiet and pretend as though nothing had ever happened?

Before Arianne could figure out what she should do, she bumped into Mark the moment she arrived at the company's entrance. He walked towards her as though nothing had happened. "You don't look well. Did you not sleep well last night?"

Arianne did not know why, but she actually felt a little hurt by Mark's gentleness. "No. Good morning, Mr. Tremont."

Mr. Tremont? Mark slightly frowned when he heard Arianne addressing him as such. However, he did not say much when he noticed that there were many staff around them. "Let's go."

When they entered the elevator, there were many others rushing inside as well. However, there was quite a large space around Mark and Arianne since no one dared to squeeze in near them. No one in the company knew that they were divorced, so Arianne was still Mrs. Tremont to them.

Arianne quietly turned her head to look at Mark, who was merely looking forward expressionlessly with a stern and mature look on his face. There was also an aura around him that made people keep their distance from him. When Arianne inhaled, she noticed that Mark's scent had changed into the faint smell of roses. Mark had never used body soap or shampoo with a flowery scent. He would not even use cologne in the past…

While Arianne's mind was in turmoil with various thoughts in her head, the elevator arrived at the floor where her office was. Then, she calmed her nerves and followed the others out of the elevator. Unexpectedly, someone grabbed onto her collar. She unhappily turned around to glare at Mark. "What are you doing?"

Mark had a sly smile on his face. "Don't go. Come with me to my office."

Arianne did not like the smell of roses on Mark. She pursed her lips and swept his hand away. He thought that she was afraid of letting others see them, so the sly smile he had on his face became even more obvious.

When the elevator came to a halt again, Arianne quickly walked out. "Is something the matter, Mr. Tremont?"

Mark wrapped his arms around her shoulders. "There's no one else here, so do you still have to call me Mr. Tremont?"

When he approached her, his body odour became even more intense. Arianne instantly pushed him away. "Please control yourself and say whatever you wish to tell me. Today's the first day back at work, so I still have a lot of tasks to look into."

It was at that moment that Mark realized that something was amiss. “What’s with you?”

Arianne did not know how to tell him, so she thought she might as well stay silent and see how long Mark was going to hide the fact that he met Saoirse in his house. Regardless of whether Shelly was telling the truth or not, it was a fact that Mark had allowed for that woman to enter Tremont Estate for a chat.

Chapter 1643

Mark stared at her for a moment with a slightly nervous expression on his face. “We haven’t met for a few days, yet you’re throwing a temper at me the moment we meet again?”

Arianne could not stop herself from mocking him. “That’s right, weren’t you occupied with something for the past few days as well?”

Mark frowned and asked, “What do you mean?”

Arianne turned her head to the side so as not to look at him. “I don’t mean anything. It’s a fact that we’re already divorced. Therefore, I will not care what you choose to do, but you shouldn’t say anything about me meeting other men as well. We shouldn’t be bothered with what the other person does whatsoever. If there’s nothing else, I’ll be leaving now.”

Suddenly, Mark was hit with realization as something came across his mind. ‘Could she have found out that Saoirse and I met the other day?’ Mark did ask Shelly about the matter, but she merely told him with a straight face that no one else knew about it…

Suddenly, Davy appeared out of a corner. “Mr. Tremont, you’re here already? You’re right on time. Mr. McKinsey has been waiting for you in your office since early this morning and has been waiting for quite some time now.”

‘Mr. McKinsey? Could it be Saoirse’s father, Steve McKinsey?’

Mark was slightly troubled and felt guilty at the same time. “Arianne, why don’t you head back to your work first? We’ll talk again later.”

Only a moment ago, Mark had been so insistent on not letting Arianne leave, yet he was asking her to go so easily now? Arianne instantly felt unhappy, and she wondered why she should be so obedient and listen to everything he said. In the end, not only did she not leave, she even walked towards Mark’s office.

Mark stroked his forehead and quickly followed behind her. When he entered his office, he was stunned to see that not only was Steve inside, but Saoirse was with him as well. What he had feared the most had come to pass in the end.

Both Steve and Saoirse had a surprised expression on their faces when they saw Mark and Arianne entering the office together.

Women have always been more sensitive beings, so when Arianne saw Saoirse, she immediately felt uncomfortable. Of course she would be able to recognize that the woman before her was the same person as the one in the photo that Shelly had sent! Saoirse instantly forgot to breathe when she saw Arianne staring at her expressionlessly with a hidden dark glimmer in her eyes.

“Mr. McKinsey, is something the matter for you to visit me so early in the morning?” Mark was the first person to break the silence in the room.

Steve smiled back at him. “It’s nothing important. I’m here mostly about private matters, and I wanted to discuss some business matters as well while I’m at it. Are you available at the moment, Mr. Tremont?”

Mark nodded his head. “Yes, I’ve got nothing important to attend to this morning.”

Saoirse got up from her chair and walked towards Arianne. She then reached out her fair-looking hand and smiled gently. “How do you do, Ms. Wynn? My name is Saoirse McKinsey.”

Saoirse was obviously hinting “I know that you and Mark are already divorced” when she addressed Arianne as “Ms. Wynn”. However, Arianne’s face immediately turned pale when she realized that Saoirse had the exact same rose scent on her as Mark’s. ‘It seems that Shelly was telling the truth. Saoirse has definitely become Mark’s woman.’

Arianne looked at Mark, hoping to be able to receive an explanation from him. However, Mark avoided her gaze, although whether he had done it intentionally or not was unknown. At that moment, Arianne seemed to have become clear of the situation. Her heart sank as she casually shook hands with Saoirse. “I’ll leave you to it since you’re inconvenienced at the moment.”

As she said that, Arianne turned around and left. She heard Mark saying to her from behind, “I’ll come look for you when I’m done.”

Arianne did not acknowledge him and kept walking away without even turning back.

Chapter 1644

Steve had a deep, meaningful smile on his face. “I can see that you’re a sentimental person, Mr. Tremont. You’re still able to be on such good terms with your ex-wife despite being divorced and even allow her to continue working in your company. I’ve seen many divorced couples who see each other as enemies.”

Mark glanced at Saoirse before changing the subject. “Let’s get straight to the point. What’s the purpose of your visit today?”

Steve paused for a moment before he said, “I heard that your aunt intends to matchmake Saoirse with you. What do you think about that? Seeing how we’ve been working together for so many years now, I’m willing to leave my daughter to you with ease.”

Mark’s eyes slightly darkened. “She’s merely my aunt. She’s in no position to interfere with my personal matters.”

Mark’s intentions were very clear in his statement.

Steve and Saoirse looked at each other for a moment, the former finding it slightly hard to maintain his composure. “Mr. Tremont, is there something wrong with Saoirse? Regardless of family background or personality, I’m sure that Saoirse wouldn’t lose to your ex-wife. Moreover, she really does like you, which is why I’ve been paying quite a lot of attention to the development of your relationship. So, Mr. Tremont… Do you not have any feelings for Saoirse?”

Mark walked to his desk and sat down on his chair. “I dislike discussing private matters in my office.”

Saoirse shot Steve a look before he sighed and changed the subject. “I’ve placed the agreement on your desk. Have a look.”

Mark casually said, “Alright. If there’s nothing else, why don’t you go back to your work? I’ll send someone to return the agreement to you once I’m done with it.”

Mark was obviously asking them to leave, and Steve definitely understood what he meant. “Alright, then we’ll be leaving now.”

When they left Mark’s office, Steve asked Saoirse with a sunken face, “Didn’t you say that there was a chance for you and Mark to be together? Why don’t I think so? Even if I were to personally help you with this, there’s no way he would accept it. Mark isn’t the kind of person who would be threatened easily, let alone by a third party. There’s no way he would be as naive as to be with you because of our collaboration. Furthermore, there’s even a chance that I might have just blown our collaboration because of this. Look at how embarrassed you’ve made me appear.”

However, Saoirse did not think so. “His aunt told me that he merely has lingering guilt for his ex-wife. Furthermore, his son is still with his ex-wife, so he can’t act hastily for the moment. You saw it as well—his ex-wife is still clinging onto him by staying in his company, so of course he wouldn’t dare to discuss our matters here since rumors might spread. Mark’s character has always been strange, but at least he didn't outright reject me. I really love him, father. I don’t think there’s going to be a problem, not when his aunt is on board with us. I’m able to give him some time since his ex-wife has been with him for so many years now.”

Steve sighed again. “Do as you please. If you’re able to attain his heart, we’re going to have a very easy road to riches ahead. You should buck up and make sure you don’t lose to Arianne, who can’t even compete against you.”

When it was after lunchtime in the afternoon, Mark sent Arianne a text message. ‘Come down, I’m waiting for you downstairs.’

Arianne quickly replied, ‘No.’

She refused to be a woman who was at his every beck and call. It was fine if he did not intend to explain about the new woman he had with him, but he still wished to continue their nonsensical relationship and be an outright scumbag. Therefore, Arianne would most definitely be out of her mind if she actually played along to his tune and allowed him to be a scumbag towards her.

When Arianne took out her phone to order some takeaway, Mark suddenly appeared behind her and reached out his hand to snatch her phone away. “What are you looking at? Why are you ignoring me?”

Arianne raised her head and looked at him coldly. “Are you that oblivious to the reason why I’m ignoring you? We’re already divorced. You should behave as such so that there aren’t any misunderstandings with others.”

Mark looked to his surroundings and grabbed ahold of Arianne’s wrist when he realized that there were still others around in the office. He brought her to an office and said, “Alright, could you please enlighten me? What's the reason that I should be obvious to? Have you lost your mind?”

Arianne could not hold it in any longer. “She’s already come to your office to look for you, even bringing her father. Furthermore, both of you have the same rose scent on you. Isn’t it obvious enough? When we were together in the past, we both used the same shower products, so we would smell the same. Do you really think I have no idea what’s going on? Even if I don’t, your aunt would definitely make sure that I know anyway. I heard that that woman is a daughter from a well-off family and is much better than me, who’s an uneducated orphan. Truthfully, I’m able to accept it. You don’t have to feel guilty about it.”

Chapter 1645

Mark was instantly startled and had mixed emotions running in his mind. In the end, Shelly had still lied to him and told Arianne everything. Mark took a deep breath. “Don’t be ridiculous. There’s absolutely nothing going on between me and Saoirse. How could I possibly do such a thing? So what if we have the same scent on our bodies? My aunt’s the one who changed all of my body soaps and shampoos; you should know that I have never been bothered with that. Fine, I swear to you that if I really have something going on with Soairse, I’ll be struck by lightning. Is that enough? My aunt’s the one who arranged the matchmaking, and we’ve only met once, so the meeting in the office this morning would be the second time we’ve met each other. What have you been thinking this whole time?”

Arianne glared at him. “Why would you be meeting her father if you weren’t willing to? Does Shelly have something on you to be able to threaten you again this time? Then, if she threatens you into remarrying next time, would you agree to it? It’s possible that Shelly’s playing a big part in your current predicament, but that doesn’t mean you’re completely innocent either. If you really want to do that, then stay away from me instead of continuing this farce. Honestly, I don’t mind it at all. If you aren’t feeling guilty about it, why have you been hiding it from me? We haven’t met ever since I left Tremont Estate the other day, yet you didn’t even bother to ring me, did you? Shelly may have stopped you from seeing me, but she definitely didn’t stop you from calling me, so who are you lying to?”

‘She doesn’t mind at all?’ Mark was so angry that he was lost for words. “So, you don’t mind it, you say? If that’s the case, why are you still questioning me now? Saoirse and I are together now, is that fine? Are you happy now? Have you completely forgotten everything that I said to you when I agreed to the divorce? How long has it been? I couldn’t have found someone else in such a short amount of time even if I wanted to, could I? Can you not have a little more faith in me? I may have been threatened to meet Saoirse, but I’ve clearly told my aunt that I will never be with her. Plus, my aunt has promised me that Saoirse will be the last one and will never bother me with something like that ever again!”

When she noticed how Mark had raised his voice to be even louder than hers, Arianne reached out her hand and pushed him. “Why are you being so fierce? Am I the one in the wrong now? Have I gone out and met another man? How could you possibly still be so self-confident at this moment?”

Mark frustratedly reached out his hand and grabbed his tie. “I haven’t done anything wrong, so how can I not be self-confident in myself? There’s no way I’d feel guilty of myself when I haven’t done anything wrong at all!”

Arianne was so angry that she ended up laughing instead. “Fine, you aren’t guilty. Instead, I am. Are you satisfied now? There’s nothing else for us to talk about now!”

Mark desperately wanted to shut her mouth. ‘How can such seductively red lips say something so irritable?’

In actuality, he did just that. Once again, he tasted the fragrance in her mouth, which made him aroused. Just as he was deeply indulging himself, he felt a sharp pain on his lips and hissed in pain before letting her go. “Are you a dog?”

Arianne wiped the edges of her lips. “Yes, I can’t help myself from wanting to bite you to death! Don’t touch me if you’re afraid of the pain.”

Suddenly, Mark laughed. “My God… Are you really… not going to drop the case? I already told you there’s nothing between me and her, truly. Haven’t I texted you even if I didn’t call you? You’re the one who’s been ignoring me, so I thought you were occupied with something. Additionally, weren’t we already going to come back to work soon? It’s nothing urgent anyway, so wouldn’t you find it annoying if I were to keep calling you? A thousand phone calls can’t be compared to meeting up face to face. Let’s go meet Smore in the afternoon; I’ll drive you.”

Arianne's voice was muffled as she said, "Are you asking me to skip work on the first day back in the office? Are you insane? Are you not afraid of letting Shelly find out? Is that why you insist on meeting Smore in the afternoon? You might as well not meet him if you have to do it so secretively. Smore's living quite happily even without you. Further, he'll be attending kindergarten soon and will have a lot more friends. When that happens, he'll definitely forget that you're his father."

With a righteous tone, Mark said, "The divorce agreement clearly states that you can't stop me from seeing Smore. Are you trying to go against the agreement now? It isn't skipping work when I'm the one taking you out? Also, you won't have your salary deducted, so it's settled. Let's go, I'll take you out for lunch before we go back to your place."

Arianne seemed to have acknowledged him since she did not object to his suggestion.

Mark habitually reached out his hand and placed it around her shoulder, but Arianne was instantly angry when she smelled the scent on his body. "Do you have to use whatever shower products Shelly gets you? Don't you find it very gayish for a man to be using rose-scented soap? Stand there and don't move!" As Arianne said that, she took out a bottle of perfume from her bag and sprayed it on Mark over and over again until the rose scent could no longer be smelled. Only then did she stop.

Chapter 1646

Although Arianne disliked using perfume, a woman can't go without having a bottle of perfume with her, even if she doesn't use it.

Mark choked on the strong scent from the perfume, which he did not like at all, but it beat having to be punched by Arianne if he were to hug her.

As they were on the way to the neighbourhood after finishing their lunch, Arianne asked one last time, “Are you sure that there’s nothing going on between you and Saoirse? Nothing will ever happen even in the future? Will you really not be threatened by Shelly into getting together with another woman?”

Mark raised one hand in the air. “I swear by it. Are you happy now? There really isn’t anything between us. I will never get together with another woman either.”

Mark was the one driving today, so when Arianne saw that he only had one hand on the steering wheel, she immediately said, “Both hands!”

Mark glanced at her with a confused expression. “Wouldn’t it be dangerous to have both hands raised? Then let’s wait until we arrive before I do it.”

Arianne said, “...I’m asking you to have both hands on the steering wheel, not swear with both your hands!”

When they arrived at Arianne’s house, the house was empty and it was not known where Mary had brought Smore to play. Arianne took out her phone to give Mary a call to bring Smore home. After all, Mark went through all that effort just to see him; she wanted to make sure the two of them got to meet each other. However, before she was even able to call, Mark snatched her phone away from her. “Let them come home when Smore’s done playing. I can wait…”

Arianne rolled her eyes. “You’ve come all this way to meet Smore. I shouldn’t be letting you wait for too long, should I? If you insist on waiting, so be it. I’m going to change my clothes now since I won’t be going back to the office anyway. It’ll be much more comfortable to get changed into my pajamas.”

Just as Arianne entered her bedroom, she heard someone's footsteps follow her inside as well. Instantly, she instinctively turned around and grabbed onto the door to block Mark from entering. "What are you doing? Wait outside!"

Mark boldly shoved himself against Arianne's body. "It's just the two of us now, and it would be a waste not to make use of the opportunity. Don't you miss me at all…?"

Arianne was bewildered by Mark's intimate gaze, but she still stopped him from approaching her. "No, we shouldn't be doing this when we're already divorced. It wouldn't be good if someone were to hear about it, so behave yourself. Frankly speaking, I'm currently feeling very insecure. I wasn't able to realize it before, but it felt like we were already divorced when it first happened. However, as time passes, I've gradually come to accept that our relationship isn't as it used to be. Furthermore, someone might come about in our lives at any moment. There's even a possibility that we'll go our separate ways when we meet someone more compatible. Honestly, aside from having Smore to link us together, I don't know where we even stand. What else is there between us?"

Mark was in no mood to think of anything else at that moment. "Where are you wandering off to with your thoughts again? In my eyes, you're still my woman, and I will never lay eyes on another woman in the future. Moreover, if you dare look for another man, I will have my own method of dealing with you. Our current status of being divorced is only temporary, so now that we've finally met again, are you really not going to let me do it with you?"

Chapter 1647

Arianne could not, for the life of her, leave Shelly be without a comeuppance for forcing Mark into seeing another woman.

She mulled over her options for a while before saying, "You're invited to enjoy me, but on one condition: you have to stay for the night. Do that, and you'll have me. If you can't, though? Oh, well. Your loss. Think wisely… Don't say I never gave you a chance."

Mark narrowed his eyes as he considered her, a cryptic half-smile hanging on his lips. “You’re rather vindictive, aren’t you? But… I’m happy to oblige. Tonight it is, then. Can’t see why I should be afraid when you’re not,” he teased. “Besides, my aunt is squarely in the wrong here, and there’s not even a shred of doubt of it.”

Shelly lied to him. She had promised him to never let Arianne know about his “meeting” with Saoirse, only to betray it. If Mark did nothing in retaliation, he would be setting himself up to an even worse future going forward.

They waited for almost two hours before Mary finally returned with Smore. She told them that they had gone to buy some groceries, and that Smore was kind enough to help her lift some of the lighter stuff.

The first thing Smore asked when he saw his father was, “Are you going to eat with us, Daddy?”

Mark nodded. “Mm-hmm. Daddy will be keeping you company today.”

Smore said nothing in return. No one could fathom the thoughts brewing in that little mind of his.

As the sky gradually darkened into dusk, Mark’s phone began to ring.

The more he neglected it, the more persistent the calls became. They irritated Arianne so much that she spoke up. “Just answer the damn phone. Tell her straight that you’re not coming home tonight because you wanna keep Smore company.”

Now that he had her permission, Mark finally answered the phone after he paced toward the window. “Hello?”

Shelly’s exasperation oozed out from the other side. “Why haven’t you been picking up your phone?! Where the hell are you? I’ve called the office and they told me you’ve left a long while ago! Are you with Ariane again? That disgusting b*tch! She charmed you into seeing her again, didn’t she?!”

Shelly’s barrage of screeching accusations immediately pushed Mark’s button. He was not some three-year-old toddler, and he had never been so bound and controlled in his life. Shelly’s behavior was quickly inciting his ire—in fact, he felt as though every single cell in his body was repulsed and revolted by her voice.

Nevertheless, he would not want Smore to be frightened by him raising his voice, so he tried hard to remain calm. “I won’t be coming home tonight, and no, please don’t bombard me with trite questions. I’m not a kid, and no one has ever controlled me to this extent before. You’re depriving me of my freedom, and I am genuinely disgusted. Is that clear?”

Shelly’s voice was trembling. “What are you talking about? We’ve always been good and cordial with each other! So, why are you suddenly—I knew it… F**king Arianne again! You must be at her place right now, aren’t you?! Only that b*tch… Only she can instigate you into throwing hurtful fits at me! This is the f**king reason why I do everything in my power to make you stay away from her! She’s too scheming, too calculating! I don’t care where you are, Mark, I want you to be back right—now—!”

Mark enunciated his every word in a firm, unyielding flourish. “I said: I. Am. Not. Coming. Home. Tonight! Remember that time when you arranged for Saoirse McKinsey to appear in my house, and you promised me that you wouldn’t break a word to Arianne? Well, why the hell did you do it anyway? Hell, why are you so dedicated to making us a thing that you even changed my shampoo and soap into the very same ones Saoirse uses? Your little schemes are just plain f**king asinine!” he bristled. “Ever since

you've forced yourself into my life, every day has been a fresh level of hell. I'm always stressed out; I feel like I'm always on the frontline, always in a never-ending war. Aren't you at all worn out? Because I am—I f**king am. And I'm so fatigued that I'm going to hang this call. And for the love of God? Stop—calling—me."

Mark hung up exactly as he said he would. He could almost picture Shelly hulking-out in his mind, but he was too disinterested to care anymore.

Just as anyone would have guessed, Shelly had, indeed, gone berserk. She had smashed her phone into an unusable smattering, and then moved on to reduce every other unfortunate, breakable object around her into a pile of shards and pieces.

Her unhinged temper was so well-known by the Tremont retinue that no one came forward to appease her. In fact, unless she quietened down, no one would dare even try to clean up the chaos her hysterical meltdown was making.

Chapter 1648

It took Shelly a long time to finally calm down, but immediately she perused the landline to call Saoirse.

Again, she switched into her alter ego—a soft-spoken, kindly older woman who was just the most pleasant person to be around. "Good evening, Saoirse! Had your dinner?"

The young woman on the other side was just as courtly as Shelly was. "Good evening! I'm afraid I haven't. What about you, Mrs. Leigh? Is there anything I can help you with?"

Shelly paused for a moment before cutting to the chase. “As a matter of fact, I do. It’s about your budding relationship with Mark,” she began. “Arianne Wynn has made up yet another excuse to take Mark away for herself again. She even incited him to rebel against me! See, Arianne keeps getting Mark to do her bidding because she’s using their son as her ultimate leverage. This is despite the truth that Mark hasn’t felt any sense of affection for Arianne for a long time already! This whole situation… God, I worry that she’s gonna use more underhanded wiles to trick Mark into marrying her again. Knowing how soft Mark’s heart is to anyone he has struck a relationship with before, as well as the depth of his love toward his son, Smore, I can’t help… I can’t help but be concerned about where this is going…

“Sigh. It’s deeply troubling, Saoirse dear. Arianne’s still an employee of the Tremont Enterprise, and so every now and then, she could concoct some brand-new plot to toy with Mark out of God-knows-what agenda. I just… I’m so, so worn out by it…”

Saoirse knew the undertone in Shelly’s complain. “You… want my help in this, Mrs. Leigh?”

Any mention of Arianne instantly drew so much of Shelly’s ire that she started gritting her teeth. “That’s right. I don’t care what you do; know that Mrs. Leigh will support you unconditionally. Our end-goal here is to get Arianne kicked out of Tremont Enterprise. With her out, I’ll have an easier time watching over Mark, and I’ll make sure they never meet each other again. As for the child… Well, if Arianne loses her job, she loses her sole income, and she no longer has the means to raise her son. That will be the chance to have Mark fight for the kid’s custody!”

Saoirse kept quiet throughout Shelly’s monologue, her mind whirring with thoughts. She was aware that Shelly was looking for a proxy to act on her behalf and take someone out, and it honestly shocked Saoirse. Prior to this, Shelly had been careful to construct an affectation of harmlessness, so now, it was downright jarring to see how gruesome and calculating she could be. Shelly might oust Arianne this time, but who could promise Saoirse that it would not be her next?

Inks of doubt began to smear the young woman’s trust. Was Arianne really as vile as Shelly had painted her out to be? If Arianne was as easily disposed as Shelly said, then why did the woman not remove Arianne by herself? Why the effort in talking Saoirse into being her proxy? It seemed that even Shelly

balked at potentially drawing Mark's wrath—then why should Saoirse shoulder an undertaking that not even Shelly dared take up?

Yes, Saoirse liked Mark a lot. But her infatuation was far from being so all-consuming that it had expelled rationality and heedfulness out of the young woman's head. Right now, she knew better than to hurl herself into dangerous waters without first understanding what laid below the surface.

Throughout the conversation, Saoirse supplied only a noncommittal "oh, I see" and "is that so" before finally hanging up the phone.

Should she throw herself into the ring or not? Well, before she made her next move, Saoirse was going to investigate the exact nature of Mark and Arianne's relationship.

Meanwhile, sitting across the dining table, Arianne could not keep the bubbling consternation in her mind to herself. "Hey, I confess that making you stay for the night instead of going home is just me trying to get even with Shelly. But, well… Shutting your phone down completely like this? Are you sure this isn't gonna come back and bite us in the butt?"

She had seen the lengths Shelly could go, and it made her anxious.

Any mention of Shelly instantly furrowed Mark's eyebrows. "Who gives a damn about her? Going back just as she wants me to do will only encourage her. It's as though she has a tight leash around my neck, and every once in a while, she yanks and suffocates me. I hate it. I don't even think I can tolerate her any longer. Frankly, I'm at the end of my patience."

“Lord, tell me about it! No one has ever put a leash on you, Mr. Tremont, since you were just a little boy! If you ask us, you’d know that you’re not the only who can’t tolerate that control freak—even we are just as appalled!” Mary chimed in with her two cents. “You and Ari were all sunshine and everything, and then she came along and split the two of you for no good reason. Then she thinks all that breaking up isn’t enough, so she goes snatching up the Devil’s job and torments everyone—it’s like she’s trying to force all of us into becoming nuts! Smore is just a little pipsqueak, for goodness’ sake! Does she not care about the lil’ kid’s happiness and his future at all? Only the Devil knows what’s in her head. I mean, what is she trying to gain from blowing things up left and right? Is she trying to make everyone hate her?”

Chapter 1649

Mary’s rant ended up showing the last piece of the puzzle in Arianne’s head.

“She’s trying to carve a unique place for herself in Mark’s life!” she proclaimed. “She wants to prove that only she can provide unique contributions to him, that she alone occupies a status and a niche that no one else in Mark’s circle can fill. That’s why she keeps trying to dictate his life. All of the things she experienced in her life forced her into despair that she ended up channeling her self-worth and reason to live into the child she was denied, thus creating and fomenting an obsession in her mind. Even if we let her do whatever she wants, it won’t sate her. In fact, it’ll only encourage her to up the ante, because what we’re dealing with isn’t just any kind of motherly impulse—it’s a hunger she had suffered for decades, and it’s impossible to fill.

“What is it that she really wants? It’s to make the whole world acknowledge that Mark is her son, and as her son, he must obey her every wish as his mother without questions. She sees Mark as a child who needs his mother to hold his hand and tell him what to do… Perhaps a craving that had grown from her never being there during Mark’s childhood,” she finished.

In truth, it did not matter what her reasons might be, as everything Shelly had been doing was beyond the pale, and Mark was earnestly revolted by it all. Yet, in the midst of his repulsion and disgust, there was, somehow, a weak, yet undeniable sense of guilt—from where and what it stemmed from, Mark was unsure. All he knew was that every time he clashed with Shelly, that guilt would surface and haunt him.

Ultimately, it might have been Mark's soft-heartedness that was tormenting him. He pitied Shelly, and that pity became a double-edged sword.

For the rest of the night, Mark was visibly uncomfortable. He hadn't stayed at Arianne's place in so long that he could not help but be pestered by anxiety. Was Shelly really going to let him stay outside tonight?

Seeing Mark fumbling around with a phone that had long been turned off, Arianne asked tentatively, "Are you sure you don't wanna go back there and check on her or something? Or at least switch your phone back on?"

Mark stubbornly clung to his decision. "No. I said I won't be bothered by her and I intend to stick to my words. See if she's desperate enough to bust through that door looking for a duel," he replied. "Either way, it's pretty late now. I'll take Smore to his shower. You take a break."

Arianne pursed her lips but said nothing. He was so obviously, irrefutably antsy, yet he stubbornly feigned nonchalance. Honestly, everyone knew that if Shelly did barge in looking to draw blood, no one was going to live through that unscathed.

It had been a long time since Mark had visited his family, so he gladly took every usual toddler-attending duty—bath time, tucking Smore to bed—from Arianne and completed them in one masterful streak. Arianne, in return, found it novel to be so free and unfettered by chores at this time.

Mark even seemed to have a unique technique in telling bedtime stories. Instead of telling Smore tales of adorable woodland critters like rabbits and foxes, or sheep and wolves, or any fairytale at all, Mark went for history lessons! Smore could not understand a single thing he said, and soon, he became so bored that his mind checked out.

Arianne was stunned wordless as she watched them. When she was on bedtime story duty, Smore would ask for, not one, but several bedtime stories altogether. The boy even had the gall to make her not repeat any tale she had told before!

Not only was Smore asleep by the end of his “historical story”, Arianne herself was starting to crack yawns, since the “plot” was just too hard for her to understand…

After making sure that their son was really asleep, and that he was not going to wake up, Mark closed the door carefully. “Let’s go. Time for bed.”

Arianne elbowed him in the waist. “Who knew you’d be such a resourceful dad, huh? Had I known about this, I would have made coaxing him to sleep a mandatory chore for you since the beginning!” she teased. “Though it’s quite interesting, I think. Maybe blood relations do make people feel closer. Smore hasn’t seen you for so long, yet he intuitively clings to you. He just… automatically adores you.”

Mark shot her a side-eyed leer. “Please. Who else is he supposed to adore? Sure, I might not care for him as much as you do, but I’m pretty confident that he likes me better. If you don’t believe me, ask him when he’s awake.”

“Excuse me, mister! You’re always so busy with your stuff that you only occasionally give him attention! It’s always been me and Mary who’s caring for him—how could that translate into him adoring you way more?” Arianne rebutted skeptically. “If he did turn out to like you the most, though, well! I guess I’ll just die, then—before I have to hear that ungrateful little pipsqueak say any more ungrateful things to bring suffering to my poor, fragile heart.”

Chapter 1650

The couple continued their jest and banters as they went into their bedroom.

Arianne was surprised to see Mark's nightshirt in the room, which was prepared by Mary. The last time he left with no promise of coming back, Mary had washed his clothes and kept them safe. She had thought he was never going to need these clothes again.

As though he had read what was in her mind, Mark took up the nightshirt and stated, "I'm going for a quick shower. You… look forward to it on our bed."

It sounded awkward enough that Arianne rolled her eyes. "By the time you're done, I'll already be sound asleep."

He suddenly bent forward and breathed in her ear, "You promised me something else today, though. Are you breaking that promise? I've never taught you how to lie…"

The warmth tickling her ear and the magnetism in his dulcet voice became a double-whammy combination that turned her body into jelly. Immediately, she shoved him toward the direction of the bathroom. "Grr—just go already!"

Mark's exuberant, devilish cackle was only muffled somewhat because of the bathroom door.

Arianne rubbed her slightly burning cheeks in slight dismay. This was no good—he rarely flirted with her, but every time he did, she immediately became weak. Just the thought of Mark possibly doing something similar to that with some other woman, since they were divorced, was dispiriting.

Sometimes, in the middle of the quiet night, Arianne wondered if their divorce had been the right call to make. But every time she started wondering if she should have taken the concession path instead, Shelly-Ann Leigh leaped into her mind, and suddenly, all thoughts came to a halt. This, right here, was the biggest impediment. Because of her, Arianne could never try other methods. The feud between her and Shelly was simply destined to be unresolved and impossible to banish forever.

It was a long, silent wait, though occasionally, Arianne was reminded of what was to come and felt tiny moments of excitement and anticipating chills. Still, all she could do right now was listen to the drizzle of water escaping out of the bathroom door, so in her boredom, she turned Mark's phone on.

The standard start-up scene was promptly followed by endless notifications of messages and missed calls clogging the screen. It was just disquieting to see that they were all from Shelly alone!

How much more unnerving could this woman get? It would have been frowned upon for a girlfriend to watch their man to this degree, let alone seeing a woman do it to her son. With a mother like that, whoever ended up with Mark as a family could probably kiss their peace and quiet goodbye.

Mark came out of his shower, and she passed the phone to him meekly. "I'm sorry, but I got curious and turned your phone on. But dude, it's literally filled with missed calls and new messages, with the latest one coming in about twenty minutes ago. The freaky thing is, I can't even tell if that was the last of her messages. This is straight-up thriller stuff, Mark. You sure you don't wanna call her or something?"

Mark drew a shoddy breath before switching the phone into silent mode and casting it away. "Who cares? Caring only encourages her. I, for one, am seriously stressed out. Help me de-stress, won't you?"

Arianne was speechless. She punched his chest softly and replied, “Do I look like your pleasuring machine? If this is how you feel, then sorry, I’m out of service. Maybe you should go and play with yourself. You boys, er, know exactly what to do if you, um, have no one else to do it with, right?”

He wore a droll grimace. “Excuse me? ‘Know exactly what to do?’ You need to say it out loud, Ari. If you can’t even bring yourself to say it, then how am I supposed to feel comfortable jerking off in front of you? Besides, I hate finishing it myself. And who told you I see you as a pleasuring machine? God, I’ve been so patient and have controlled myself for so long… I don’t even care what you think. I can’t hold back much longer!”

With that, he lunged and suckled a hungry kiss on her neck.

Mm. Only she bore this specific scent that had captivated his craving and yearning for nights on end. It intoxicated him; he was so enslaved by it that he was unable to summon even a scintilla of interest to virtually any other women under the sun.

It was such an odd little quirk—throughout the years, no one else could touch his icy, unfazed heart… except her. He was never a libidinous man, except when the woman in his arms was this one.

Throughout the night, Mark had exhausted all that he had and knew, as though he was giving Arianne a demonstration on what “can’t hold back much longer” really meant. He kept going until the luminescent moon retired into the clouds, tired from hanging at its spot at the highest point in the dark sky.