Ruling 1661

Chapter 1661

Arianne slumped against her desk in low morale. “How am I supposed to present my case? If it’s true, then my name is cleared. But what if we can’t get that substantial incriminating evidence that Shelly did it, hmm? It’ll become slander, and then what will Mark think of me? We’re divorced, man. Our relationship is a bit testy now; it’s just not as stable as it used to be. Honestly? I don’t dare stake the shaky remains of our current relationship for this,” she murmured. “Besides… I trust his capabilities. I’m sure he’ll uncover the truth through his investigation. And it’s gonna be a lot better if he finds out on his own rather than hear it from me, right?… God, if the suspect were literally anyone else in the world, I’d rat them out without batting an eyelash. But it’s frickin’ Shelly-Ann Leigh! I can’t afford to be rash and reckless here, and you know why, Sylvain. Guess I’ll just have to… endure this for now.”

A change came into the gaze Sylvain fixed on Arianne. “Huh. Gotta admit, that’s some impressive self-control you’ve got there. Most people would have broken down over this already, methinks. Doesn’t keeping your mouth sealed over a secret this big legit eat you inside?” he commented. “Though, you know what’s the thing that captures my curiosity the most? Well—why the hell does she hate you so much in the first place? Seriously, holy sh*t. Did you kill her parents with a gun the way Batman’s parents died or what?”

Arianne rose and made a show of swinging her lily-gentle arm in front of Sylvain. “Does this weaksauce hand even look like it’s ever held a gun before? Her issue is that I’m still within Mark’s social vicinity, and as long as that stays true, my existence will always pain her way more than if I killed her parents or pet dog or whatever with a gun,” she replied. “I’m practically a thorn in her flesh and a scourge in her side. Which is just… godforsaken irritating, you know? What’s her twisted psyche got to do with me? I’ve never crossed her before to deserve all of her ire.”

When it was time to go home, Arianne, with her handbag in tow, walked toward the building’s main entrance and found herself staring at Mark’s car parked by the roadside.

There was no way Mark would anticipate anyone else so publicly when he knew Arianne might see him, so there was only one person he could be waiting for. With that in mind, she approached his car matter-of-factly and asked, “Looking for me?”

He opened the door to the passenger seat for her. “Get in. I’ll talk to you on the way.”

Arianne had a nagging feeling that it was about the plagiarism scandal. Either way, she took up his offer and got into his car.

For a time, no one talked. They simply stole glances at one another and guessed what was likely on the other’s mind. In the end, Mark was the one who broke the silence.

“The designer who sued you? He seems to enjoy a rather pleasant reputation in the scene, and his laurel does appear to be stemmed from actual talent and capabilities. He’s also clean—there’s no record of him ever plagiarizing anyone’s work before,” he said. “His company has also never worked with Tremont Enterprise hitherto, and so it’s utterly inconceivable that he’s ever come across your work. And yet, the design he made that eerily echoes yours had been submitted three days prior to your submission. Do you know what that timing implies? It implies that we’re the ones who copied his work, not the other way around. I know you’re innocent, but… the situation isn’t shaping up to our favor.”

Arianne cast her eyes low. “I’m sorry. This is my fault. I’ve become your deadweight.”

Mark quickly reached his hand out to hold onto hers. “No, don’t say that. We are both past trading the label of deadweight among ourselves, okay? All I’m trying to do is to update you on our current situation, that’s all. Think back and think hard: before you finished your design, who else other than yourself ever looked at it?”

Arianne licked her drying lip in hesitance before finally confessing, “Well, there was Sylvain… And Shelly.”

The hand that held onto hers froze ever so slightly. “Sylvain Trudeau would never do something like that. But that leaves only my aunt… How? How did she even come across your work in the first place?”

Arianne quickly recounted what happened that day. Now that Mark was explicitly asking her about it, covering Shelly’s involvement was simply not an option. Withholding the truth would bring neither her nor Tremont Enterprise any benefit.

By the end of her account, one could see shades of conflict dancing in his mien. “You suspect my aunt to be the one behind it.”

She paused for a moment. “It’s not about my suspicion anymore, Mark. It’s more on how much you trust my suspicion. Again, only Sylvain and Shelly looked at my draft. Sylvain and I collaborate frequently—we discuss ideas and brainstorm together, and I know this is completely out of his character. But your aunt is a different beast entirely,” she replied. “Truth be told, I’ve suspected her meddling since the start. The only reason why I didn’t tell you about it is because I worried it wasn’t her in the end, and I wouldn’t want to accidentally charge her for something she didn’t do, right? I thought, well, no matter how much she loathes me personally, Shelly couldn’t possibly think it’s okay to drag the entire Tremont Enterprise into a hellhole, right? Either way, I’ve stated my case, and it’s up to you to decide what to do with it. I’m not gonna meddle in this affair personally beyond reaffirming my position again—I didn’t plagiarize anyone’s work.”

Mark nodded in understanding. “Duly noted. I’ll drive you home first, and then tonight… I won’t be seeing you tonight. I need to ask my aunt a few question.”

Arianne's hand shrank from Mark's grip. "Pfft. You made it sound like you coming to see me is all I look forward to every day."

Chapter 1662

He shot her a glance. "Don't open the door for me if you don't want to see me. Weren't you happy every time you saw me? When have I ever brought my own keys?"

Arianne choked as no words came out of her mouth because Mark's words seemed to be true; he did not have his own key and it would be Arianne who opened the door for him everytime. Mark had actually clearly remembered that detail.

When they arrived at Tremont Estate, Shelly was nowhere to be seen even after Mark had looked around everywhere.

Henry only said that he did not see her even when Mark asked him. Henry would usually be hiding somewhere far away from Shelly since she normally wouldn't look for him, so how could he possibly pay attention to her whereabouts?

After waiting for more than an hour, Shelly finally returned home after having driven out on her own. Her leg was mostly healed and would even be able to walk without relying on her crutches, provided that she did not move around constantly.

Mark purposely waited for her in the living room. "Where have you been?"

Shelly held up the few branded shopping bags she had in her hands. “I went out shopping with a few housewives that I met recently. I’ve bought you some shirts as well. Relax, I wasn’t walking a lot. I was mostly seated and chatting with the ladies. What’s the matter? Has the sun risen from the east today? Is that why you’re worried about me?”

Mark paused for a moment before he said, “Do you know about the plagiarism case in the company?”

Shelly was shocked. “What? Who’s plagiarised who? What happened? Has a designer in our company plagiarised someone else’s designs? Wouldn’t that affect Tremont Enterprise greatly? You’d better not be lenient on those kinds of people!”

Mark was instantly thrown into a dilemma when he did not find a hint of pretense in Shelly’s words, and he wondered whether she actually had something to do with it. He did not wish for her to be involved in the matter. He was also afraid that he might cause some sort of misunderstanding if he asked and found out that it wasn’t her. However, if he did not ask…

Shelly seemed to be panicking even more than Mark when she saw him remain silent. “Mark, say something. What’s happened? This is a serious matter. You must see to it that it’s resolved properly so that Tremont Enterprise’s reputation isn’t tarnished.”

When Mark still remained quiet, Shelly said in a cautious manner, “Have I said too much again? I’ll stop if you think I’m annoying. Try on the shirts that I bought for you when you have time; I’ve bought it all according to your measurements. Let’s get something to eat first though. You must be hungry since you’ve worked the whole day already.”

How could Mark open his mouth and ask the question in that kind of atmosphere? In the end, Mark chose not to mention about her being a suspect. Instead, he decided to ask Sylvain first and check out all the suspects.

The next afternoon, Mark privately asked Sylvain for lunch outside.

Sylvain was no fool—when had Mark ever been so generous and asked someone out for a meal, especially after such a thing had happened? Thus, Sylvain knew that Mark had asked him out to talk about the plagiarism case. Sylvain didn't think that it was strange for Mark to place him as one of the suspects since he would normally have the chance to get his hands on Arianne's designs.

Chapter 1663

Before Mark even opened his mouth, Sylvain took the initiative to mention the case and said, "Mr. Tremont, I can swear that I wasn't involved in Arianne's designs being plagiarised. Although I did see her sketch, there were many areas in her sketch that I had helped to amend. Therefore, I may not be able to claim ownership for her designs, but I am able to claim at least 10% of it, so there is no reason for me to do such a heinous act. From the bottom of my heart, I would like to continue developing my career in Tremont Enterprise because there's no better place to be working at other than Tremont Enterprise, so I would never do anything that would be detrimental to myself. Also, I'm not sure if Arianne has told you or not, but there is one other person who has actually seen her sketch other than me… That person has also seen her sketch right before my own eyes."

Mark nodded his head. "I wasn't actually suspecting you in the first place. I merely wanted to understand more about the case. Did you really see… my aunt looking at Arianne's designs with your own eyes?"

Sylvain firmly said, "That's right, most of the surveillance cameras in our office can only store events that happened between the span of one week, so it's definitely out of the question to use that to verify. However, I'm definitely sure that I haven't misremembered. Your aunt was sitting in Arianne's place as she chatted with me and picked up her designs to have a look. I didn't think too much about whether she had any malicious intentions since she's your aunt. However, not that something like this has happened, but I think… it'd be better to look into it rather than accusing Arianne. She isn't that kind of person."

A hint of confusion flashed through Mark's eyes. "What if… I've misunderstood my aunt?"

Mark seemed to be asking Sylvain this question, yet also himself at the same time.

His relationship with Shelly was already on the brink of collapsing, and bringing up such a matter would only make their relationship even worse.

Sylvain did not really understand what Mark was asking. "Are you hesitating on whether to suspect her because you're afraid that you'll have misunderstood your aunt in the end? What about Arianne then? Allow me to ask a bold question; would you really choose to side with your aunt if you were to find out that she's the culprit? Would you destroy Arianne's career because of this? If your answer is "yes", then I've really misjudged you."

Mark shook his head. "Impossible. However, if Arianne has actually plagiarised, I would defend her…"

Sylvain's lips twitched. "You're… quite the man with double standards. So, what are you planning to do now? Keep on delaying the matter? You're going to have to ask your aunt, whether you like it or not. You should just ask her nicely and directly. If you do end up finding out that it was all only a misunderstanding, then just resolve it. It's better to be mistaken than letting the real culprit run free.

Mark took a deep breath as though he had made a decision. "I understand. Let's eat first. By the way, how are things between Robin and your mom?"

Sylvain pursed his lips. “Can you not bring up that sad case? It’s impossible to try and get them to be on good terms with each other, so I’m already trying my best to not let them meet one another.”

Obviously, between his mom and his wife, Sylvain chose the latter, hence his decision to take care of his mom at the same time was a wise one. However, Mark was in a different situation, as he did not have the luxury of picking sides. Suddenly, Mark was a little envious of Sylvain for being able to make the right decision without hesitation.

That afternoon, Mark directly went back to Tremont Estate instead of returning to his office.

The weather was fair that day, the sun was shining warmly, and there was a gentle breeze as well. Shelly was seated at the patio and reading her book peacefully. She had done a good job maintaining the greenery at the patio, which looked like it was full of life.

Things would definitely have been just perfect if so many things had not happened…

When Shelly heard the sound of footsteps, she turned around and smiled from ear to ear at the sight of Mark. “Mark? Don’t you have work to do this afternoon? Why are you back all of a sudden?”

Chapter 1664

Mark walked towards Shelly and sat down on the rattan chair. “I’ve got some things to ask you.”

Shelly closed the book that she was reading and looked at him with a serious expression. “What’s the matter? Ask away.”

He stared at her eyes and slowly formed the words as he asked, “Have you looked at Arianne’s designs?”

Shelly was momentarily startled. “When have I… Oh! I remember now. Are you referring to that day in the office? I may have seen it when I went there to look for her for a discussion, but she wasn’t around, so I sat in her seat and chatted for a while with that young man named Sylvain. I did pick up the stuff she had at her desk and looked through them for a short moment. I would’ve forgotten if you hadn’t brought it up. I believe there were some designs. Is this very important? I thought that it wasn’t anything important since… she left it lying around on her desk. Wasn’t Sylvain there as well? I don’t think I’ve done anything wrong, have I?”

Mark let out a deep sigh for a moment and then continued to ask, “Are you sure… you haven’t told anyone about the contents of the designs?”

Shelly raised an eyebrow and frowned. “I didn’t bother to remember about it since I didn’t think that it was anything important, so why would I tell anyone else? Moreover, aside from going out for tea and chatting with the housewives, who else would I be able to tell? Furthermore, they aren’t even interested in that kind of stuff. Hold on… You were saying that there was a plagiarism case in the office previously. Could it be that Arianne’s designs had been plagiarised by someone and is being sued?”

Mark did not say anything, but his silence could be taken as an acknowledgement to her statement.

Shelly’s face was filled with sadness. “I think… based on Arianne’s character, she wouldn’t resort to plagiarism, would she? Could it be that someone had the chance to peek at her designs since she did not keep them properly? It’s reasonable for you to suspect me since I did have a look at her designs, but there’s no reason for me to do so. I do hate her, but I wouldn’t involve Tremont Enterprise and put its reputation in jeopardy.”

Shelly's explanation was flawless. She even managed to speak for Arianne as well, hence Mark felt frustrated all of a sudden. "Based on what you've said, she didn't stow away her designs properly, so it can't be said for certain how many people have actually managed to look at them. I'm currently stumped with how I should proceed with my investigation. I suppose I can only meet up with the designer who's suing her for plagiarism then."

Shelly agreed with Mark's plan as she said, "Since there's no way for us to investigate from our side, I suppose the only choice you have left is to meet that designer. After all, he's the one who's suing for plagiarism. As for who's the one that plagiarised, you'll be able to find out when you ask him. However, he's definitely not going to admit it since confessing would only mean ending his own career, which is no joke. You'll have to be smart about it when you question him."

Mark's attitude towards Shelly softened, probably because she had spoken on Arianne's behalf earlier. "I understand. You carry on with your book, as I'll be heading out now. I won't be back for dinner tonight."

Shelly agreed to it readily. "I'm sure you won't be able to avoid meeting up with Arianne, not when such a thing has happened… I usually forbid you from meeting her, but I'll allow for an exception because of this case. You're free to do anything you want, as long as you come home tonight, no matter how late it is."

Mark had an unprecedented look on his face as he agreed to do as she had asked. Shelly also had a glow on her face that had not been seen for a long time since she had not communicated with Mark in such harmony. 'In the end, Arianne is still the reason we're able to talk to each other nicely. Is she really that important to him…?'

When Mark arrived at his office, he instructed Davy to check up on the designer that was suing Arianne. As a result, he found out that the designer was participating in some activity abroad and would be back in the country in approximately three days. Therefore, Mark could only wait for the designer to return.

Although the designer was not in the country, he was not staying put and had sent Tremont Enterprise and Arianne a legal letter. Although Tremont Enterprise did request for a meeting with the designer to have a discussion, it had been rejected. Therefore, it was obvious that the designer wanted to see it till the end and would not accept any settlement. It was possible that the designer was putting on airs and would leave Tremont Enterprise hanging on a thread until the last second before asking for a huge sum of money as compensation.

Chapter 1665

Regardless, Arianne would be the only person who would be on the receiving end of trouble. If Arianne got charged for plagiarism, there was definitely no way for her to continue working in the industry.

Within just a few days, news about the plagiarism case had spread like wildfire, causing Arianne to inevitably become the center of attention amongst her colleague's gossip and get criticized. As Mark sent her home, he suggested, "Why don't you take some time off and rest? Let's wait until I resolve the matter first."

Arianne frowned as she stared at him. "What are you trying to say? If I were to stay at home and hide away from the word, that would just be further proof for others to think that I'm guilty. I refuse to be suspended from work when I have nothing to be ashamed of. I've done some research and found that the person who is suing me is currently abroad, so I'll look for him when he has returned."

Mark helplessly sighed. "I'm just afraid that you'd be emotionally affected by the gossip around the office, so I was thinking that you'd be better off staying at home and laying low. I'm just doing this for your own good. It's fine if you don't take my advice, but do you have to retort at me so fiercely?"

Arianne glared at him. "For my own good? Why does your tone sound like your Aunt Shelly now? Have you ever listened to her when she told you that she's doing it "all for your own good"? I can still discuss other matters, but I don't want to stay at home and rest. I don't want others to think that you're defending me. I don't want others to think that I really am a plagiarising thief!"

Mark continued to coax Arianne with a gentle tone. “I know exactly what you’re thinking. I’ll meet the designer on behalf of Tremont Enterprise and talk about the plagiarising case, so there’s no need for you to do it yourself. If you can really handle the pressure, then continue to stay at the office as you please. You’re free to return home and rest when you’re tired. I won’t continue to force you anymore. I don’t want you to lash out at me because you’re unhappy. Give Mary a call and ask her to cook my dinner. I’ll head over to your place and have dinner tonight.”

Arianne unhappily said, “Why would I want to have dinner with you? Furthermore, why would you want to go to my place and eat some coarse food when the food at Tremont Estate is so much better? You’re the Tremonts’ only heir and the CEO of Tremont Enterprise while I’m just a pitiful divorcee who has to take care of her son all by herself.”

Mark was almost infuriated by her words. “Your little mouth really is so... Fine, I won’t argue with you any more so that I don’t burst a vein. If you won’t call Mary, I will. She wouldn’t listen to you anyway.”

After they were done with dinner that night, Mark played around with Smore for a while and coaxed him to sleep early into the night. When he saw that it was getting late and Mary was still watching television in the living room, Mark secretly sent Arianne a text message. ‘Wait for me in your room.’

Arianne was seated not too far beside him. When she saw Mark’s text message, she immediately rolled her eyes and ignored him.

Mark did not give up. ‘I don’t have much time. I’ll have to rush back home in a short while, so you better decide quickly.’

Arianne rolled her eyes again and refused to bother Mark. He began to panic, while Arianne remained perfectly calm, with zero intention of being involved in any other “activities”.

In the end, Mark could no longer sit idly. “Mary, it’s getting late. Why don’t you go get some rest while I discuss some matters with Ari.”

Mary still had some unshelled pistachios in her hands. She looked at Mark and then at Arianne. Then, she immediately realized the situation. “Right, I’ll go to bed immediately. I’m so tired…”

Arianne was feeling slightly hopeless. ‘Obviously, Mary isn’t tired at all. Look at how wide her eyes are opened, can’t you tell?’ Then, Arianne got up from the couch and went back to her bedroom. ‘Does he have to be so obvious with his intentions? Is it true that a person becomes more shameless as they grow older? Didn’t Mark have a very big ego in the past?’

When Mark followed behind Arianne into her bedroom, she immediately laid in bed and said, “Well, come on then. Make it quick and begone.”

Mark burst out into laughter. “What do you mean? Did you think I came in here just for this?”

Chapter 1666

She looked at him in disdain. “Isn’t that what you want? When have you not wanted to do it when you come in here? Men are all animals who use the lower half of their bodies to think. I can understand that, so stop bullsh*tting.”

Would Mark still be able to do it when Arianne had already made such an insulting remark? Instead, he gritted his teeth and wrapped her up tightly in her blanket. “I’ll do it if you’re willing to. Otherwise, forget it. I won’t force you. I have my needs, but I can suppress them, understand? Alright, get some sleep. I’ll accompany you for a while before I leave. Tomorrow… It’d still be better if you don’t go to work. I’ll come and look for you after I’ve had a discussion with the designer, so please be good and stay at home for the next two days. Just treat it as a vacation.”

Arianne struggled as she took both her hands out of the blanket to twist Mark’s ears for still being adamant on that matter. “I told you, I refuse to be suspended! Forget about being criticized by my other colleagues behind my back. I’m not afraid even if they were to criticize me in front of my face, so why would I want to be suspended? I’ve never been afraid of anybody!”

Arianne did not pull Mark’s ear with a lot of force, but he just wasn’t used to having his ears pulled, since it was rarely done to him; the few times that they were, those were all done by Arianne as well. He “fiercely” nibbled her lip. “Stop going overboard, I won’t control myself if you’re still going to pull my ears!”

Arianne’s eyes slightly squinted as she wrapped her arms around his neck and deliberately looked at him seductively. “What are you going to do about it?”

Mark was startled for a moment as his throat gulped as well. He said with a hoarse voice, “Stop fooling around and get some sleep. I’ll be off now…”

Arianne pulled her arms inwards and forced Mark’s body onto hers until both their noses touched. She said in a coquettish manner, “I don’t want to stay at home. Can’t you have pity on this single mother and her son who’re having a hard time living? Why don’t you let me go to the office? I could let Smore live a better life if I’m able to earn an extra day's salary. Please…”

Mark could not handle Arianne's attitude and began to lose control over his body. "How are you a single mother now? I'm not dead yet, so don't put on an act and say that you're living a very tough life. Have I delayed your salary or said that I wouldn't give you allowances? I'm going to have to… punish that little mouth of yours…"

Before he finished his sentence, Mark lowered his head and kissed her lips. Her lips were so tender and moist that he did not want to stop.

One hour later when the storm had passed, Arianne was looking at Mark as she laid in bed. The dazed look she had in her eyes had not completely disappeared yet. "So it's settled, I won't be suspended. Let them say whatever they want."

Mark was lazily lying in bed beside her as he casually played around on her arm. "You're such a stubborn woman. Then again, you've always been stubborn since you were a child. Fine, do as you wish. You're old enough that I'm unable to control you anymore. You're probably going to give me another endless lecture if I were to control you again."

Mark had not noticed that the tone he used as he said this made it sound like he was talking to his daughter. Arianne laughed as she slapped Mark's chest, the sound of her slap crystal clear due to his nakedness. "Who're you talking to? You sound like my dad. Since the matter is already settled, hurry up and leave now. Shoo, stop preventing me from sleeping."

Mark raised an eyebrow and said, "Are you killing the donkey as soon as it leaves the millstone? That's it? You're chasing me away already? Where's your conscience?"

Arianne almost smiled as she said with a straight face, "Are you a donkey?"

Mark pretended to have a serious expression on his face as he slapped Arianne's butt. Then, he got up to put on his clothes. "Why do I get the feeling that you're actually living more like a woman now that we're divorced? Your character used to be so similar to mine in the past and was more or less boring. Now that you've left me, you seem to be showing your true colours."

Chapter 1667

Arianne refused to comment on his statement. "You've always been boring, so it's only natural for me to become boring after living together for so long. It's probably because you still love me that our divorce hasn't had that great of an effect on me, unless… Apart from our divorce, nothing else has changed, has it?"

Mark's tone became melancholic at the mention of the topic as he said, "That's right, get some sleep. Good night."

After that, Arianne still refused to heed Mark's advice and went back to work in the office as though nothing had happened.

Three days later, the designer that was suing Arianne returned to the country, so Mark personally requested for a meeting. Obviously, the venue of the meeting would not be at Tremont Enterprise, since that would be obviously telling others that his company felt guilty and would like to request for a settlement, wouldn't it?

Therefore, the meeting place was fixed at Jackson's White Water Bay Cafe. Mark had specifically chosen to conduct the meeting in an elegant room where the space was more enclosed, making discussions easier.

The designer was an ugly man who was in his 30s and had a very common look at first glance. Moreover, although he looked so common that he wouldn't stand out amongst his peers, he had such an arrogant demeanor that he even had his chin up when he met Mark. The saying "Money is King" was true and had always been able to make anyone become arrogant when being indulged in it for too long. The arrogance that came from being rich was something that a normal person wouldn't have. Whatever it was, the man could be considered to be a designer of an average caliber and he did have some wealth, but he was too arrogant.

When he saw that Mark was alone, the designer laughed and said, "Just the two of us sitting at such a large table with so much food, aren't you being too courteous now, Mr. Tremont?"

Mark could see the glee in the designer's eyes as though Mark was deliberately trying to gain his favour. However, Mark was not a man who needed to curry anyone's favour. "You've misunderstood, I'm not being courteous. This is how I normally eat. The quantity isn't important, but I definitely have to try out all the food I like. You are…"

Mark dragged his last sentence but could not utter out the designer's name.

The designer felt slightly awkward as he lightly coughed. "My name is James McGinnis. You're a really busy man, Mr. Tremont. I've only just sent a legal letter to your company, but you've already forgotten my name."

Mark casually said, "Pardon me, there's no way I could remember each and every person's name when I come into contact with so many individuals, could I?" Regardless of the situation, Mark did not even view James as a designer.

James was startled for a moment before he immediately asked, “Mr. Tremont, are there some official matters that you would like to discuss since you’re the one who has invited me here today? Let’s get right to it since we’re both busy men.”

Mark leisurely took a bite of the food on the table before he said, “Why don’t you tell me where you have gotten the inspiration for the design that you have produced and claimed has been plagiarised? I’ve always been very interested in art. Relax, we’re just having a casual chit chat.”

James remained silent on the matter. “I don’t think it would be appropriate for me to casually speak about this matter with anyone, would it? Plus, I’m not an employee of Tremont Enterprise. Mr. Tremont, your employee has plagiarised my designs. I suppose you should at least comment on that, shouldn’t you? I’ve already delivered my legal letter to your company, yet you don’t seem to be taking any actions at all, which is a great disrespect to me. I’ve heard that… the person who plagiarised my design is your ex-wife. Mr. Tremont, would you happen to be defending her?”

Mark suddenly slammed the utensils in his hand on the table. “How would you like to resolve this matter?”

Chapter 1668

James was a little shocked by Mark’s sudden intimidating demeanor, and his anger dropped by half; he did not even dare to keep his chin raised anymore. “About that… It’d have to depend on your sincerity. You’re the CEO of Tremont Enterprise, so how would you like to settle this? Furthermore, it’s your ex-wife that’s plagiarised my work, not the other way around. I was wondering whether your ex-wife had accidentally seen my design, as I published it first, and ended up plagiarising my work. Most importantly, I have never had the chance to interact with her, nor could I possibly have been able to plagiarise her designs. Therefore, based on all the evidence, I’m the one who’s the victim here.”

This was exactly why Mark was in a dilemma. No matter what angle he tried to use to look at the situation, James had no chance of plagiarising Arianne, and it was instead Arianne who could have

plagiarised his work after he had already published it. Mark took a deep breath before he said, “How much do you want? Name your price.”

A hint of greed swiftly flashed through James’s eyes. “Mr. Tremont, are you trying to tell me… you want me to keep this matter under wraps?”

Mark squinted his eyes as he looked at James. “Yes, I want you to tell everyone that this was all just a misunderstanding. Also, you’re going to have to cancel your lawsuit and ensure that neither Tremont Enterprise nor my wife are affected.”

James was slightly startled. “Your wife? Isn’t Arianne your ex-wife?”

Mark’s eyes darkened, causing James to go silent immediately. It wasn’t till after a moment that James raised his hand and gestured a one, five, and zero before he said, “I think this wouldn’t be a large sum for you.”

‘This will be made much easier as long as the matter is resolvable with money.’ Mark faintly sighed with relief. “$150,000? Fine, that won’t be an issue. I’ll pay you half the amount now and will pay you the other half when you’ve declared what I said to everyone. Also, you’re the only one who can know that we’ve met today, and the same goes for the contents of our discussion. If you so much as dare to mention a word to anyone, I guarantee that you won’t ever be able to make a living in the Capital anymore. But not just within the Capital, you won’t be able to have a place in this industry ever again.”

James licked his lips and smiled. “That’s for sure. I’d definitely have to honour my word when I’ve already received your money, wouldn’t I? Frankly, all I want is for you to show your sincerity, Mr. Tremont. Since you’ve already personally asked me out to eat and even agreed to compensate me for my losses, of course we can put this matter behind us. I won’t hold on to this any longer either.”

Since the matter had already been resolved, Mark no longer needed to stay around and waste any more time. He got up and said, “I’ll be leaving now. The money will be transferred to your bank account very soon. I hope that you’re a man of your word.”

James nodded his head continuously. ‘$150,000 is going to be enough for me to live out the rest of my life! Although I’ve been a designer for many years now, I haven’t even been able to buy myself a better house in the Capital; the most I could do is eat well and clothe myself well. Although I look wealthy on the outside, I’ve still got heaps of loans to pay off. However, now that I have this money, my problems are resolved.’

When Mark left the cafe, he instructed Brian and said, “Get someone to keep an eye on James. See who he comes into contact with. I want to be informed immediately if there’s any news.”

Brian nodded his head. “Understood. I’ll arrange for someone to tail him.”

When he arrived at Tremont Enterprise, the moment he entered, Mark saw that Arianne was seated on the couch in his office.

Mark knew that Arianne was there to ask about his meeting with James. “I’ve met the designer, and the matter has been resolved. Neither you nor Tremont Enterprise will be affected. As for other matters, you’d be better off not asking but put this case behind you and forget about it.”

Arianne was slightly curious. “Resolved that easily? Don’t tell me you’ve resolved this with money, have you? I didn’t plagiarise anything, so why would you spend money to resolve the matter? Wouldn’t you be telling others that we’re feeling guilty by spending money? Wasn’t the designer very arrogant when he sent us the legal letter? How much have you actually paid him for him to rest his case?”

Chapter 1669

Mark was so furious that he was about to explode. “Stop! Calm down and listen to me. Yes, I’ve paid him some money, but that’s the only method we have to resolve this at the moment. It doesn’t matter who plagiarised who, what we need to do now is clear our names first, then we can slowly investigate the matter. The only lead we have to crack this case is with James, yet he denies that he’s the one who’s plagiarised your work. Furthermore, we haven’t got any evidence to use against him, so what are we supposed to do other than neutralize the situation for now? I know what I’m doing and I have a plan to resolve this, so don’t cause me anymore trouble and get back to work please.”

Arianne wanted to say something but stopped. She did not approve of Mark’s method of resolving the matter through money. There was literally zero difference between hers and James’ designs, so it was confirmed that James had indeed plagiarised her work. ‘How did he plagiarise my design? Based on Mark’s attitude, did this matter really have nothing to do with Shelly? In that case, who could the real culprit be?

Mark suddenly remembered something and reminded Arianne as he said, “By the way, you really should stow away your unfinished designs in a safe place so that no one else can see them. You’ve got to be careful even if it’s your own colleagues, that way you won’t have that many issues arising.”

Arianne refuted as she said, “It wasn’t that I did not stow the designs away securely. In fact, I kept them safely locked in my desk drawer. However, I had to take Smore to the hospital that morning, but I wanted Sylvain to help me have a look at the designs as well, so I asked him to take them out. They had only been taken out for a short moment, who else could have seen them other than Sylvain and your aunt?”

Mark’s expression suddenly changed when he heard what Arianne had said. “Are you saying… that the time Sylvain took to have a look was the only time someone else would have the opportunity to see it?”

Arianne firmly said, “Yes, I’m sure! There’s absolutely no way I would plagiarise James’ work, only the other way around. As for how he managed to get my design, I’m not sure. I merely wanted for you to not waste your money when there clearly is no need to do so, but if you don’t want me to interfere with this matter, I’ll do as you ask. Have it your way then.”

Mark waved his hand and did not comment, but Arianne could tell that he clearly knew what he needed to do. Therefore, she turned around and left his office so that he wasn’t annoyed any further.

That night, when Mark drove home to Tremont Estate, he stayed in the car for some time before he went into his house as per usual.

He knew that the moment he entered the door, there was going to be yet another argument that he needed to confront.

Shelly had already asked the kitchen to prepare a sumptuous dinner. “Mark, you should go and have a shower now. Dinner’s going to be ready soon. Hurry up, I’ve prepared all your favourite dishes today.”

Mark did not reply and merely headed upstairs, looking moody. He kept thinking about how he was even going to begin to talk about the matter when he had already questioned Shelly previously. He did not think that Shelly was behind the matter, but now that Arianne had said that, Shelly seemed to be a suspect again…

When Mark returned downstairs for dinner, Shelly kept on talking to him about trivial matters at home. She was already used to Mark’s silence long ago, so she kept on talking without even noticing the expression he had on his face.

Suddenly, Mark interrupted Shelly and said, “I’ve checked, but only you and Sylvain have seen the designs. Also, I’ve already questioned Sylvain, and it’s not him…”

Shelly’s face froze. “You… Do you mean to say that I’m the only one who could have done it? Mark, think about it, why would I do that? I do hate Arianne and wish to chase her out of Tremont Enterprise, but doing so wouldn’t be beneficial to Tremont Enterprise either. With that said, are you going to suspect me only because you have two options? In your heart, am I nothing compared to Arianne? Am I nothing compared to Sylvain, who’s a real outsider? I’m your mother, how far could I go and bring harm to you?”

Although Shelly’s defense was sound and it would not be logical for her to be the culprit, Mark would never believe her easily ever again since she had lied to him previously.

Mark lowered his eyes and looked at the food in front of him. His slender fingers kept tapping on the table without any further actions. In fact, he was so silent that it was unsettling. “I do want to believe you, but the facts are there. If you really did it, just admit it now.”

‘If she does admit to it, if she does promise that she won’t ever do something like this again, I… I could let her off the hook as repayment for everything I owe her as my mother.’

Shelly bit her lip as though she was trying her best to hold in tears in her eyes, which were already turning red. It took her a moment before she said with a shaky voice, “It’s fine if others refuse to believe me, but if you don’t believe me either… Yes, Arianne is the love of your life, so you’d believe everything that she says. I’ll admit that I can’t be compared to her since I’ve been helplessly forced to stay away from you for all those years, but how am I supposed to admit to something that I have not done? I knew I shouldn’t have touched her things, I knew I shouldn’t have even looked at it for a moment more…”

Chapter 1670

Mark could not bear to hear any further. “Fine, we’ll leave it at that. I haven’t got any appetite, so you go ahead and eat by yourself. I’ll be heading out now.”

Shelly hurriedly asked, “Will you be back tonight?”

Mark paused for a moment. “I’m busy, so I won’t be back tonight.”

As she watched Mark walking away without even looking back, Shelly’s shoulders dropped. She had also lost her appetite, despite having a sumptuous meal laid out in front of her.

The atmosphere within the entire Tremont Estate seemed gloomy. Even the maids remained hidden and would only show up when Shelly called for them, as though she was the cause of everything bad that was happening. The loneliness that Shelly felt was similar to how she used to feel in the past when she was overseas. During that time, she would always be alone… Alone as time passed. Every day was a struggle for her, so much so that she did not even have anyone to talk to.

…

When Smore heard someone knocking on the door, he immediately rushed towards the door and stood on the tip of his toes to open it. When he saw Mark behind the door, his clear eyes turned into crescent moons. “Daddy!”

Mark bent down and held Smore in his arms. “Did you miss me? Have you eaten yet?”

Smore pouted his lips. “Of course I missed you. I haven’t eaten yet. Mama and Granny are cooking now. I can smell the nice food already.”

Arianne heard some noises and walked out of the kitchen; she was only helping Mary as an assistant, such as washing the vegetables, since Mary would not allow her to do anything else. Arianne wiped the water off her hands on her apron. “Why are you here all of a sudden?”

Mark stared at her for two seconds before he suddenly turned so sweet that it could make others panic. “I missed you.”

Arianne immediately felt chills down her spine. “We’re always meeting in the office on a daily basis. Are you done fooling around? Whatever, we’re just about to have our dinner. Based on the look of you, I suppose you haven’t eaten yet, have you?”

Mark was only able to feel completely relaxed when he was there. He smiled and carried Smore to sit with him on the couch. “I won’t be leaving tonight.”

When Arianne heard Mark saying that, she subconsciously thought of something else. “It’s fine if you’re not leaving… But you didn’t have to say it out loud… You sound as though you want everyone to know what you’re thinking of doing…”

The smile beneath Mark’s eyes became even more intense. “What the hell is going on in your mind? I’m just telling you that I won’t be leaving tonight, exactly what it means on the surface. You’re the one who’s letting your imagination run wild.”

Arianne was teased so much that her face immediately turned red. “Fine, so be it. You accompany Smore for now. It’ll be time to eat once the soup is ready.”

The couple seemed to have read each other’s minds as neither mentioned a word about the plagiarism case. Home was always supposed to be a place where one could completely relax themselves; having to discuss company matters at home would only be inviting problems for oneself. That night, as the two of them held each other in their arms in bed, they both felt somewhat peaceful even though nothing was happening.

Arianne, finding it hard to sleep for a moment, leaned against Mark’s embrace and whispered, “What are you thinking?”