Ruling 1691

Chapter 1691

'Mark bought me chocolate? Is there poison in it? I don't know why, but I get the chills whenever a cold person like him goes all sweet on me.'

Smore had a serious expression on his face and said, "Daddy said that he bought it for you. He refused to let me eat, but I insisted, so he only gave me one piece. Stingy daddy! I'm holding in my saliva to control myself from eating it!"

Arianne could not help but laugh. 'This chocolate is definitely custom made, the price is probably enough for me and Tiffany to get something nice to eat together.' Arianne was not a person who liked chocolate because it was too sweet for her, but she would want to try it if it was given by Mark.

Mark could already hear the sounds of laughter before he even walked up to the door. He quickly walked forwards and asked while he was changing his shoes, "What are you guys laughing about? You actually didn't wait for me and came upstairs by yourself first. I was your private chauffeur, you know? How could you do this to me?"

Arianne put Smore down. "I thought Mary was going to have a hard time cleaning up after Smore, since he's so prone to making a mess of the house nowadays, and that you'd get irritated when you saw that, but who knew that the house would be so clean today. Hurry up and wash your hands before you eat. By the way, why did you… suddenly think of buying chocolates?"

Mark stole a glance at the chocolate in Smore's hand and casually said, "Hmm… Jackson once said that Tiffany loved to eat these, so I thought most women might like them. Hence, I asked Jackson to buy me a box while he was at it. If you like it, I'll ask Jackson to get me more next time. Also, you shouldn't let Smore eat too much of it. We don't want his teeth to get affected when they haven't all grown yet."

Smore turned his lips into a frown. “Daddy bad, daddy only loves mommy and not me.”

Mark had a helpless look on his face. “What are you rambling about? I love you too, but it’s not the same kind of love as I have for mommy. Plus, this is for your mommy and you’ve already had your share of it, so don’t be so greedy.”

Smore pouted his lips and ran into the kitchen to complain to Mary, who only laughed, and it spread very far away.

After dinner, Mark did not seem to have the intention of leaving but instead, with Smore in his arms, watched television in the living room with Arianne.

Arianne did not intend to ask anything about Shelly since she was afraid she would touch on a sensitive subject. However, if she did not ask, her heart would race in anxiety. She pondered for a moment before tentatively asking, “Are you not going back tonight?”

Just as he was about to answer, Smore shoved a piece of chocolate in his mouth, causing him to frown from all the sweetness. However, he did not spit out the chocolate. “...I’m not going back… You’re coming back with me to Tremont Estate in a while. Smore, stop feeding me already; it’s too sweet. I asked you not to eat so much, yet you’re still eating it.”

Arianne snatched away the remaining chocolate from Smore’s hand. “Mommy will keep it for you. You can’t eat any more today. Just look at you and daddy’s mouths, look how much chocolate there is in it. You both look like squirrels. An adult and his child, munching away non-stop while watching TV.”

Mark's lips twitched. "I don't like eating this, but he keeps feeding it to me. Why aren't you eating though? Do you not like it? Although, that's true as well… I've always thought that you were different from other normal people. You never seem to like anything that women usually do."

Arianne's lips curled up into a smile. "I didn't say I don't like it. I like it very much, but I'm just full now. I'll eat it tomorrow."

When Mark heard that Arianne liked it, he immediately said, "I think it tastes nice as well. I'll ask Jackson to get me some more tomorrow. These are overseas products, so it's going to take two days before they arrive. Also, I have no idea how fat Tiffany will become after eating so much chocolate while she's pregnant."

Arianne subconsciously picked up a piece of chocolate and put it in her mouth. 'Hmm… It doesn't matter how expensive the chocolate is… They're all so sweet…'

Arianne had a toothache in the middle of the night and found it hard to sleep.

Mark reached out his hand to turn on the lights before getting up and asked, "What's wrong?"

Chapter 1692

Arianne covered half of her face as she mumbled, "My tooth hurts…"

Mark got closer to her. "Open your mouth and let me see."

Arianne obediently tried her best to open up her mouth. After looking at it for a while, Mark said, “We’ll go to the dentist tomorrow, you’ve got a rotten tooth. This couldn’t have happened because of a piece of chocolate, could it?”

Arianne was in so much pain that it showed on her face, but she could not help but laugh. “Why have I never noticed that you have the talent of being a dentist? I’ve always had toothache issues, but I was always too lazy to bother. I suppose I haven’t got the luxury of enjoying sweet stuff, not when I’m having issues from just one piece of chocolate.”

Mark got out of bed to look for some painkillers for her. “Take some medicine and get some sleep. I’ll take you to the dentist when you wake up tomorrow. You had pretty nice teeth when you were young. Your teeth looked like white snow when you smiled.”

Arianne deliberately smiled to show off her front tooth. “What about now?”

Mark smiled happily as well. “Still white! Is that enough? Hurry up, take your medicine and go to bed.”

She suddenly hugged him. “I suddenly feel that… I really love you.”

Mark had the medicine in one hand and a glass of water in the other, so there was no way for him to hug her back. The colour in his eyes gradually deepened. “What’s the matter? Has your tooth stopped hurting because you love me?”

She nodded her head in his embrace. Her tooth did indeed hurt less at that moment.

Arianne's actions were akin to a little kitten cajoling in Mark's arms; the look on her face made her look very lovable. Mark fought hard to suppress the urges within him. "Take your medicine first…"

She let go of him and took the medicine to swallow it down. The painkiller did not have any sugar coating on the outside of it, so Arianne frowned from the bitterness on her tongue and took a few gulps of water before the taste was washed away. "This is so bitter. You also have moments when you have the patience to feed others medicine? I was terrified of getting sick when I was little, terrified of eating medicine, and terrified that no one would be there to coax me. Plus, you'd always stare at me with such a fierce expression on your face as I took my medicine that I would fight back my tears from the bitterness. It would've been so much better if you had this temper back then."

He took over the glass of water that she gave back to him and placed it by the bedside. "Do you still hold a grudge? Those years… How was I supposed to smile when such a thing had happened? I'm sorry for having let you meet me while I was in such a state."

Arianne was lost for words at that moment. 'That's right, he had become an orphan just like me, so how was he supposed to smile after losing his family? The weight of Tremont Enterprise suddenly laid on his shoulders, so he must have been tired, so tired that he couldn't even breathe.

'He was already 18 years old at the time, just the right age to know right from wrong. Unlike me, who was only a child. I didn't even know what death was, so it wasn't that painful at the time. However, I soon came to understand the meaning and the pain behind it as I grew up.'

The lights in the room dimmed again as Mark got on the bed to lie down as he hugged her. The urge he had within him had silently calmed down. He did not want to only think of his own pleasures while Arianne was having a toothache.

The next morning, Mark forcefully brought Arianne with him to the dentist since she refused to do so. She did not feel that her tooth was in pain any longer after taking the medicine, but she was terrified whenever she thought of the dentist drilling a hole in her mouth with their equipment. Arianne may not have experienced it herself, but she had heard rumors from others, especially when she heard other patients' "squealing" at the dentist's office. At the thought of it, her knees grew soft under her. "I don't want to go… I really can't handle the pain. Why don't we head to the office? I still have a bunch of work left to do!"

Chapter 1693

Mark adamantly grabbed her by her wrist. "You're already a mother, yet you're still so cowardly. It's just a trip to the dentist, nothing else, so don't try to run away. Are you as busy as I am? Even a busy person like me is willing to spend some time to accompany you to the dentist, yet you still dare to run away? Even after so many years, you haven't changed a bit. You were always like that when you had to visit the doctors' when you were young, but you've never been to the dentist before. What now? Do you even have a phobia towards that? Hurry up, it's almost your turn. I've asked Brian to line up and get you a slot early this morning."

The moment he said that, the nurse called out Arianne's name.

Arianne surrendered to her fate and entered the dentist's ward stubbornly. The dentist was a woman in her 30s. Although she was wearing a mask, she still had a gentle look on her face. Otherwise, Arianne would definitely have been so terrified that she would have run away on the spot.

However, no matter how gentle the dentist was, the pain was still the same when she held the equipment towards Arianne. Instead of the very obvious kind of pain, the displeasure and pain from getting one's tooth fixed spread all the way to one's bone marrow. After the treatment was over, Arianne was in a complete daze. "I swear, I never want to visit the dentist ever again…"

Mark could not help but laugh, although he felt heartbroken at the same time. “All right, it’s fine now. Your tooth will be better after a few days. Then, let’s go out and get something nice to eat, but no spicy food, since you’ve got to refrain from eating that for the next few days. Come on, let’s go to the office.”

It was already 11 AM by the time they arrived at the office and everyone was already at work. However, Mark did not go to his office directly. He brought Arianne to her desk instead and kept on nagging her not to eat anything she should not be eating at that time. The amount of his nagging and fussiness befuddled everyone who saw the scene. Arianne had been nagged so much that she began to get irritated. “Are you done? I’m already an adult, so I know everything that you’ve said. You don’t have to repeat it anymore. If you keep on repeating yourself, we’re going to be off work and I still wouldn’t have done anything yet…”

Mark finally zipped his mouth. “Alright… I’ll stop if you think I’m nagging too much. After work, let’s go to White Water Bay Cafe for dinner. Jackson and Tiffany will be there as well.”

Arianne was still feeling slightly uncomfortable because of her mouth and did not want to speak, so she waved her hand to send him away.

Mark walked away reluctantly and looked back every few steps. He was startled for a good moment before he completely disappeared from sight.

Sylvain, who had been bombarded by their lovely sight, could not help but ask, “Have the two of you remarried already?”

When Arianne shook her head, Sylvain asked again, “So, you’re going to remarry soon?”

Arianne still shook her head. ‘Mark has not mentioned getting remarried. Plus, he never even mentioned what’s going on between him and Shelly.’

When Sylvain saw that Arianne remained silent, he was slightly curious. “What’s wrong? At a loss for words? I’m getting tired of guessing already. Mr. Tremont has been weird enough today. I haven’t seen the two of you so intimate in a real long time. Has he always been so chatty when he’s with you, out of everyone’s sight?”

At that point, Arianne reluctantly agreed. “Yes… He really does have a lot to say when no one’s looking. I’ve just had my tooth fixed and I’m feeling very uncomfortable at the moment, so please don’t force me to say anything else. Also, since when have you been such a lover of gossip? Do all married men gradually become naggy?”

Sylvain took a pen and knocked it on her head. “What do you mean naggy? I’m just asking out of concern as a friend. Do I look like the naggy type of person?”

Mark, who had turned back, saw everything that had happened. When Sylvain saw Mark, his smile froze and he hurriedly buried himself in his work. ‘Yeap… I shouldn’t have knocked the boss’s woman in the head… I shouldn’t have…’

Mark’s expression darkened as he walked towards Arianne. “Let’s go, we’re having lunch together.”

Arianne had a surprised expression on her face. “What time is it? Didn’t you say we were going to White Water Bay Cafe after work? Why do you want to go now all of a sudden?”

Mark merely reached out his hand to grab her without saying anything.

Arianne helplessly took her bag with her as she was half-dragged by him. “Slow down! Are you trying to show off your long legs?”

Chapter 1694

When they arrived at the entrance of the elevator, Mark suddenly pushed Arianne against the wall with both his hands beside her, trapping her in between the wall and himself. Mark stared at Arianne straight in the eyes. “Have you and Sylvain always been on such good terms? I allowed you to get close to him so that you could pick up some skills, not so you could have a lover’s argument, especially during working hours.”

Arianne firmly denied it and said, “Who’s had a lover’s quarrel? How am I supposed to explain things to Robin if she heard what you just said? We were just fooling around, isn’t that what friends do? Are you jealous?”

Mark slightly turned his head to scan his surroundings. When he saw that no one was around, he lowered his head to kiss Arianne’s lips.

Arianne’s first reaction was to push him away. ‘I’m still recovering from my trip to the dentist, so wouldn’t kissing make it even worse? Furthermore, we’re at the office’s elevator entrance; somebody could show up anytime!’

Thankfully, Mark still knew what he was doing, so he did not kiss her for too long. “Can I not even kiss you for a bit?”

Arianne reached out her hand and slammed his chest with her fist. “My tooth hurts!”

He pursed his lips with frustration as he said, “You don’t even need your tooth when you kiss…”

Arianne shirked her neck. ‘What’s happened… to this guy? Why does he look a little saddened about it?’ Arianne lowered herself so that she could squeeze out from under Mark’s arms and press the button on the lift. “I never knew you were so thick-skinned in the past. Are you not afraid of letting your employees see you kiss your ex-wife? I, on the other hand, am afraid of getting criticized.”

“This is my territory, so I can do whatever I want. You might be my ex-wife, but you’re still my woman and will become my current wife again very soon, so I’ll see who dares to criticize you.” Although Mark said that, his eyes were still scanning his surroundings. He was still an egoistic person in the end, so he did it out of urge.

Arianne squinted her eyes at him and found him to be both funny and annoying. “Who said that I was going to remarry you? Where am I supposed to put my dignity if I remarry you just because you said so? I was completely fuzzed when I married you last time, but I want to have a clear mind this time. I’m no longer the 18 year old girl you knew from before. I’m not so easily tricked anymore.”

Mark confidently curled his lips into a smile. “I don’t have to trick you. I’ll make you remarry me willingly.”

‘If you want to remarry, you’re going to have to resolve matters with Shelly first.’ With a straight face, Arianne said, “What are you planning… to do with your birth mother? As long as she’s still in Tremont Estate, I won’t go back there. I’m not pushing you to do anything, but there’s certainly a solution to achieve a win-win situation.”

Mark's face turned serious. "I know, I've got my own plans, so you don't have to worry about it."

The doors of the elevator opened after a "ding" sound, ending the topic abruptly.

When they arrived at White Water Bay Cafe, Arianne from afar could see Tiffany standing in front of the cashier and talking to the staff in charge. Tiffany's posture was totally like that of the lady boss of the restaurant.

Arianne walked up and teased Tiffany as she said, "You finally look like a lady boss now. I've never seen you handle any official matters aside from eating when you're here."

Tiffany had a startled expression on her face. "I was talking to the reception about what dishes were to be ordered later and how the bill would be charged… The dishes I ordered are all your favourites. See how good of a friend I am?"

Arianne's lips twitched. 'I suppose I've misunderstood. I shouldn't have expected that Tiffany would ever realize the responsibility of being the lady boss of this place.'

While they were eating, Jackson wore a pair of disposable gloves to help Tiffany de-shell some shrimps. Not only that, he even used his fair, slender hands to pull out the bones from the fish. Jackson's patience and skillful methods completely startled both Arianne and Mark. 'He's pampering her to the extreme…'

Chapter 1695

Tiffany was like a happy child, burying her face with food and eating very quickly. By the time she was full, Arianne had only just taken a few bites. Tiffany then put down her cutlery. "I'm full already, Jackson.

You should eat some yourself instead of feeding me. Not only are you like this at home, but you're like this when we're outside as well. Others might misunderstand and think that I'm torturing you."

Jackson slowly removed his disposable gloves and laughed as he said, "What do you mean by torture? This is entertainment, but it's too bad that you will never get to understand the joy from this entertainment. There'll never come a day when I need you to take care of me."

Arianne suddenly realized that Jackson was slightly dazzling in her eyes. 'Who wouldn't fall in love with a man like him? Not only can he manage business on the outside and cook at home, but he's even able to pamper his wife until she is over the moon. Not only that, he's handsome as well. Tiffany must have saved the galaxy in her past life for her to have ended up with such a decent partner in this life. Otherwise, it wouldn't make sense…'

Mark exclaimed and said, "I would never even dream a day would come where you would end up within Tiffany's grasp. Sometimes, I suspect whether you're still the Jackson I knew in the past, the "Jackson West". Indulging yourself in the night life suits you more, but when you've suddenly become so loyal to your wife, not only is it strange, but I find it scary as well."

Jackson laughed and rolled his eyes at Mark before pouring another bowl of soup for Tiffany. "Here, you should drink some soup after you finish eating. It's a little hot, so be careful."

Tiffany caressed her bulging belly and frowned. "I don't think I can drink anymore. Our baby might have been growing up too fast recently and might be expanding in my belly. Everytime I eat, I feel very full despite only eating a little, but then I'll get hungry again very fast."

'Only eating a little?' Arianne looked at the remains of the de-shelled shrimps and was slightly annoyed. 'How could you call that only eating a little? However, Tiffany doesn't seem to be that fat this time compared to when she had Plato last time. She was much fatter back then.'

Jackson took a tissue to wipe Tiffany's mouth. "Don't drink it if you can't. You can drink it later."

Tiffany nodded his head and looked at Mark. "When are you and Ari going to remarry? If you don't hurry up, I'm going to find her a new match. Ari is still so young, capable, and talented, so even if she has a child, do you think she can't find another man that she wants? Just don't regret it when that happens."

Mark slightly raised an eyebrow. "Jackson, is your woman too free at the moment? She still wants to be a matchmaker even though her belly's so bulged up. She's even plotting to match-make for me now."

Jackson laughed but did not say anything. 'Who am I supposed to help at this moment? It doesn't seem to be right for me to side with either of them.

Tiffany scoffed and said, "There's no use complaining; he can't do anything to me. You, on the other hand, should really answer my question. Are you still planning to remarry Ari?"

Mark helplessly sighed. "Aren't you just being ridiculous now? There's no need for me to rush things at the moment. I won't be running off anywhere. Just wait for me to settle my matters on hand before I come back to this."

Arianne's lips slightly curled up into a smile. "I'm not in a hurry either. Plus, I haven't decided on whether I'm going to remarry him after all. This is a big decision to make, so I need to consider it carefully. If we divorce and get back together again when it's needed, wouldn't that be treating marriage like a game?"

Mark was slightly unhappy at that moment. “Are you serious? I wasn’t the one who said I wanted to divorce; it was you who insisted on it. I listened to you when you wanted to divorce, so shouldn’t you listen to me when you want to remarry? If you dare come up with any other thoughts in your head, I’ll take Smore away. I refuse to believe that you won’t follow me if I have my son with me.”

Arianne shrugged her shoulders and had this expression on her face as if she wanted to challenge Mark. “Take him with you then. Raising a son takes a lot of money, but you’re so rich, I think you’d raised him just fine. Otherwise, I’d still have to wake up early everyday to earn money and buy a house for him. Women are all very materialistic now—they wouldn’t be willing to marry if they didn’t get a house or cars in return. Just thinking about it puts me under a lot of pressure. However, that’s all a small matter to you, so if you want to take your son with you, go ahead. He still has to call me mommy anyway.”

Mark had become so angry that he could not eat anymore. He put away his cutlery and pursed his thin lips into a fit of silent rage.

Chapter 1696

Tiffany was laughing so hard that she almost slid from her chair. “Haha… I bet you never saw this coming. Do you feel anxious, Mark? It’s good that you’re feeling anxious. Let’s see if you still dare to make Arianne unhappy. You’ve never courted her properly in the past, but it’s not too late for you to court her all over again now. In fact, I really do want to see how you court girls. No matter how cool a man is, he still has to bow his head down in front of the woman he loves, he still has to… Like how you are now… Haha… This is so funny!”

Arianne brought over some food and placed it on Mark’s plate. “All right, I know you aren’t actually angry. I was joking as well just now. How could I possibly bear to give you Smore? Come on, let’s eat.”

Mark was slightly cajoled before he took up his cutleries and began to eat again, deliberately ignoring what Arianne said. Jackson saw an opportunity and butted in. “Mark, since when did you become like a sunflower? You brightened up as soon as Arianne gave you a little sunshine. Weren’t you just pouting

and mumbling something before? I never expected that you'd fall into Arianne's grasps as well. However, you're the complete opposite of me. I never rejected any women who came to me, while you wouldn't even take notice of any of them. In fact, I almost began to suspect you of being gay, but you ended up going back to a previous woman. Well done…"

Tiffany suddenly stopped laughing as she grabbed the sides of the table with both her hands, her face turning pale.

Jackson thought that she was angry at what he said. "I was just joking… Aren't we supposed to have a casual chat while we're having a meal?"

TIffany tried hard to raise her hand and grabbed Jackson's arm. "It's not that… My stomach hurts… Am I about to go into labor?"

Arianne was so shocked that she hurriedly got up and walked to Tiffany's side. "Where does it hurt? Point it out to me. You've already given birth to your first child, so it's normal if you feel a little pain. You'll be fine. Does it still hurt now?"

Tiffany seemed to be in a lot of pain, so much so that she could not even say anything. However, she finally managed to word out a sentence after a moment. "No… It doesn't hurt anymore. I felt that the baby had moved a little and made me feel bloated…"

Mark was originally slightly nervous as well, but he calmly continued eating after hearing Tiffany say that. 'This woman hasn't ever been normal in her life. She can't even tell if she's about to go into labor but scare others for nothing.'

Arianne was dumbfounded. “I really salute you; you’ve given me a really big shock. Are you truly no longer in pain now?”

Jackson was still worried. “Shall I take you to the hospital to check it out?”

Tiffany slowly regained her strength and waved her hand. “It’s ok, we don’t have to go. I was only in pain for a moment there. Plus, don’t I still have a few months to go before I’m due? How could I be going into labor so soon? Stop being a worrywart.”

‘Can I not be worried? I wasn’t really all for giving birth to this baby in the first place, but you insisted on it. If something really happens, I don’t even dare to think…’

When they were almost done eating, Mark’s phone suddenly rang. From his expression, Arianne knew that it was a phone call from Tremont Estate, so she deliberately said, “I won’t be returning to the office in the afternoon. I’ll be accompanying Tiffany to go shopping. So, you should attend to your matter after you’re done eating.”

Mark nodded his head. He picked up his phone without answering it, got up from his chair, and said, “I’ll be making a move now, Jackson. See you later.”

Chapter 1697

Jackson bobbed his chin slightly to mean “okay”.

Watching Mark vanish into the distance, Tiffany could not help but grumble under her breath, “His goddamned aunt again? For Christ’s sake! Honey, you have the patience of a goddess to tolerate this bullsh*t to this extent!”

Arianne flashed her a faint, slight smile. “Trust me, it’s alright this time. He always does what he promises me, and honestly? If I had no problem enduring this for so long, enduring this a little bit more is nothing.”

…

As soon as Mark returned to the Tremont Estate, he sprung up the stairs to where Shelly was.

Henry was in the middle of wrapping the woman’s hand with bandages. He had been the one to call Mark about what happened—apparently, in a desperate bid to avoid being institutionalized, Shelly had slit her wrist when none of the retinue was watching.

Although her gash had been properly addressed and was now wrapped snugly by rounds and rounds of bandage, there was still a bit of blood staining the outermost layer from beneath.

Mark’s face was the color of a tenebrous storm. As he stood a few feet away from her, his hands were balled into fists in fury.

“What the f**k do you want?!” he erupted. “Look at yourself—if your mental health isn’t full of sh*t, you wouldn’t have done all of these things! But you know what? If you want to do everyone a service like this, be my guest! Kill yourself if you want to die so much; go ahead! Henry, you’re exempted from looking after her. Let her die if she so desires it!”

Henry said nothing nor halted his action. He knew that it was unintentional rage that undergirded Mark's outburst. If Shelly did die, his boss would be most devastated.

Shelly's pale lips curled into a lifeless smile. "You'll stoop so low… all for the sake of one Arianne Wynn. For her you see no problem locking your mother up in a mental asylum. This is all you wanted, isn't it? Finding a place to lock me up, just so you can receive that broad with your open arms back here," she fleered. "She is unforgivable, but you? You're beyond the pale, beyond forgiveness. I will air all of your doings in the public, under the sun. Then we shall see what the future has in store for wretches like you."

Audible pops of digits cracking escaped Mark's clenching fists. He was clearly seething at the boiling point of his lividity.

Henry quickly moved in to bring down the heat. "Mrs. Leigh, please don't provoke Mr. Tremont like that anymore. Surely you know his heart is clearly only on your best interests," he admonished. "Everyone around you agrees that you do desperately need intensive help for your mental state. Please understand that what awaits you are merely treatments and therapies, Mrs. Leigh—not incarceration. When you're fully recovered, I have no doubt that Mr. Tremont will hurry to receive you home.

"Don't you see? Mr. Tremont had done so much for your sake as well, including divorcing Madam," he continued. "They shouldn't have needed to be separated, so yes, their return to marital union is only a matter of time. Still, I implore you to stop cornering Mr. Tremont. He had made a myriad of sacrifices… all for his mother."

Shelly shoved Henry away with all her might, causing the unfastened bandage to unfurl instantly. The poor gash on her wrist, which was just beginning to heal, tore open again from the action. In a flash, more blood oozed out from it.

“What a loyal, bootlicking cur for the Tremont family you are!” she shrieked. “Oh, I know what every single one of you pieces of sh*t want! You people want to kick me out of here and entomb me in a place for f**king nutjobs! No one will ever come to receive me from there, not ever; I’ll be stuck there until I die! But I don’t f**king want it, you a**holes. I had enough living in a f**king cage for most of my life! I don’t understand! Why are you treating me like this?! Why are all of you f**kers treating me like this?! —What the f**k did I do wrong?!?!”

Mark lost his strength and let his fists go limp. How could he not pity Shelly’s past? He, too, had avoided institutionalizing Shelly because he did not want her to be trapped in a place like that for years. And yet, time and again, she forced herself and set herself down this path!

Previously, she was at least sane enough to affect the quotidian behavior of a normal person, and it was harder to catch anything out of sorts from her apparent demeanor alone. But these days, her condition had exacerbated. When she was not sleeping, she lived every moment of her days in a deeply capricious, tumultuous state of laughing delirium and crying fits. She had begun to resemble a madwoman so much that it was impossible to think she did not need professional help.

At the end of his quiet musings, Mark said, “Please, just take this chance to heal and recover. So that in the future, I promise I will… be the one to take you home.”

He had tried to suppress all of the ill sentiments in his mind, hoping that it would ease the tension in his voice.

At the very least, Shelly seemed to have calmed down a little. “What happens if, one day, Arianne ruins your life and takes everything from you, including your precious life? Will you regret choosing her?”

Mark brooked no hesitance. “Never. I will never regret it. Even if she commits all kinds of travesties that you could imagine, I will not rue my choice… Because we Tremonts owe her this much.”

Shelly laid her head close to the headboard and closed her eyes.

“Okay,” she said finally. “You won’t regret this, you said. As long as you don’t regret this… okay. Send me away, then. Send me right now, don’t waste time. You dread to see my face for even a second more, anyway. One more day of me remaining here… is one more day of my son detesting me.”

Chapter 1698

Henry whipped his eyes to Mark in the hope of an order. As the days went on, Shelly’s condition consistently nosedived. If they delayed her treatment, they might be setting themselves up for something more baleful.

Mark was quiet for a beat before finally giving his verdict. “Henry, send her away right now. You have found and contacted the premier institution for this, yes? Tell them to arrange a personal nursing assistant to look after her, and that I expect only the best care and treatment for her. Finally, keep me posted with updates of her condition.”

With an affirmative hum, Henry left the room and began preparing the ride.

Later that day, only Henry and Brian drove Shelly to the institution, as Mark had eschewed seeing her off. He worried that he would regret his decision if he went with them, especially when his stance could not help but soften and wither whenever Shelly mentioned her past of living like a prisoner in a cage, with a look of abject terror and despair.

Why did things have to come to this?

Mark skipped work the next day. Arianne, noticing this, quickly called him.

The phone went unanswered for a very long time before he finally picked it up. When he spoke, his voice was devoid of life. “Hello?”

Arianne furrowed her eyebrows. “Where are you? Why aren’t you coming to work today? You know, I bought breakfast for Smore this morning, and he thought it was very scrumptious, and insisted that I bring the same set for you, too. I brought it to work, only to find that you aren’t here at all…”

Mark went quiet for a few moments before croaking, “I’m at home. Just don’t feel like going to work today. Can you come and keep me company?”

His voice was too hoarse and growly, almost as though he was suffering from a high fever. Too worried to inquire more, Arianne hung up the phone and bolted out of the company.

Henry was standing by the door to greet Arianne. “Good morning, Madam.”

“What’s the matter with Mark?” she quickly asked.

“Mrs. Leigh was sent to a mental institution just yesterday. Perhaps his pity toward her weighed in his mind so terribly that he had not slept a wink since last night. Neither did he have any meals since yesterday evening till now,” he replied. “Please, have a look at him.”

Arianne nodded wordlessly before striding up the stairs.

The first thing that leaped into her sight when she entered the room was Mark sitting at his usual spot before the French window. He had formed a habit of sitting there regardless of the time and would always do so after work, without fail, no matter how tired he was. Arianne could guess that he must have sat there for the entire night.

“Here already?”

Mark had not lifted his head nor turned to look at her despite catching wind of Arianne’s footsteps. His croak sounded even gruffer and huskier than she had heard it from the other side of the phone.

Arianne stepped forward and placed her hands on his shoulders, her own stance already softening. “Maybe… Maybe we should take her back from there? Maybe there’s another way to treat her? I mean, a closed-off mental asylum like that does seem a little too… cruel for someone with her condition. I don’t want you to feel troubled and tormented over this decision, Mark. Especially when you aren’t the one in the wrong…”

Mark leaned his head over her hand slightly. “It’s not too bad. It’s good, really. We can always receive her back to the family once she’s finally bested her mental malaise. But as long as she remains by my side, I’m afraid her sickness will never go away. My presence reminds her of the pains she had experienced. It’s only when she has finally recovered... that she can finally accept the world and the new chance of life she’s been given. But I don’t want to wait for that at your expense, Arianne. The method

you propose is a long game, spanning years, with no end in sight. How do I dare to stake your future with it? So, this is better. What we're doing now is better…"

Chapter 1699

It was at this moment that Arianne let go her hatred toward Shelly.

She loved Mark so much that she could not bring herself to hate anything that was his. If Shelly could recover, Arianne decided that she would not mind living under the same roof as her like family.

You cannot cling to the past if you want to live beyond it. If the past is all you care about, then you have doomed your future.

She sighed. "I'll stay here by your side, okay? Let's have the kitchen crew make something for you. After a hearty meal, go to sleep. And throughout this period, I'll be here with you."

Mark said nothing. In his silence, she gently withdrew her hand from his shoulder and turned toward the stairs.

"Henry, please tell the kitchen crew to make some fulfilling but simple dishes for him. He hadn't slept at all last night, so he needs all the rest he can get."

"Will he really eat it?" Henry whispered. "Were anyone else to try to talk him into it, he wouldn't possibly have listened. Only you know how to break down his defense, Madam. With that said, I will have the kitchen prepare food right away."

Arianne nodded at him. Next, she gave Mary a call, telling her to bring Smore to the Tremont Estate tonight.

Mark had always been a disciplined man who kept to his schedules. He could be dead-tired from losing a night's sleep, but Arianne was sure that if he slept right now, he would no doubt wake up right before dinnertime. Seeing Smore by then should do wonders to his general mood.

If she were to be frank, throughout their lives together, Mark had rarely let slip his vulnerable side. Seeing it in such unbridled display greatly disquieted Arianne.

The kitchen quickly whipped something up for Mark, though the man did not seem to have nurtured much of an appetite. Regardless, Arianne remained stalwartly by his side until he finally went to sleep, which was when she quickly went downstairs.

There was still a large ball of wax waiting for her at work. She was cognizant that just because she was not physically in the company, it did not exempt her from tackling what must be done.

Mark woke up around three in the late afternoon, rounding his total sleeping hours to just a few hours—a bit too few considering what he went through, thus making one wonder if he had really slept at all. Despite that, Mark had turned a complete one-eighty from his previous somnolence, as though his brio had all returned to him.

He was even blithe enough to have taken a satisfying bath before going downstairs, greeting Arianne with a tease, "I seem to recall you saying you'll be 'by my side', didn't you? And yet I've been sleeping all alone upstairs while you hammer away at your keyboard down here. How is this 'by my side'?"

Arianne snapped her laptop shut and looked up at him. “Isn’t it obvious? I was worried I might wake you up accidentally. Unlike you, I had a ten-out-of-ten sleep last night, so I couldn’t nap with you even if I wanted to. Anyway, why are you up so soon? I told Mary to bring Smore over only by late evening, because I was worried that our little rascal was gonna disturb you. You know, kids being rambunctious and all that.”

Mark approached the couch and took a seat beside her. “I’m as wide awake as can be, Ari; there’s no problem. I’ll tell Brian to drive them here right now,” he said. “What would the two of you like for dinner? Just inform the kitchen crew.”

Arianne studied his facial expression gingerly. Did all of his troubles really go up in smoke just because he had a good sleep, in a snap like that? How could that be, given how brooding and sunless he had been acting just hours ago?

As though reading her mind, Mark drew her into his embrace. “I’m fine, really. I was just a little carried away in my thoughts last night. So many things… didn’t seem to have an answer, and all of these knots crystallized into a surly lump in my heart. It was crushing me like a weight, and I couldn’t breathe, you know? But when I finally understood it, the lump went away. That’s just how life is, I guess. No matter how much of an uphill battle it becomes, when it thrusts itself upon you, you have no choice but to weather it either way. That’s the cost of living and breathing, isn’t it? Nothing in life is without faults, flaws, and follies.”

Arianne breathed a sigh of relief. “Phew, I’m good as long as you’ve figured things out. My God, I’ve almost never seen you looking that horrid in my entire life. It’s the stuff of nightmares…”

He fingered through her long hair lovingly. “Alright, alright. I’ll be heading to my study to work on something, so if Smore’s here already, play with him in my stead for a bit. At that thought, how about we go on an excursion a few days from now? We can travel around, sightseeing. Any holiday destination you have in mind right now?”

Arianne shook her head. “Nowhere in particular. Not that I have the luxury of time to dive into Trip Advisor or all those traveling guides and reviews and stuff. Maybe leave this for some other time? Otherwise, I can just defer to your choice. Either way, you should get back to business.”

A while later, Smore and Mary arrived on the courtesy of Brian. The first thing the little boy did upon entering was to automatically run up the stairs, but Arianne quickly grabbed him from behind, stopping him from disturbing his father.

“Uh-hem! Don’t disturb your Daddy right now, young man. Daddy will come down and play with you when he’s done with his work,” she chastised. “But now? He’s busy with adult stuff. It’s not good to disrupt him when he’s working!”

“Oooh, is Grandaunt not here anymore?” Smore suddenly whispered. “Mommy wouldn’t be here if she’s still living here…”

Chapter 1700

Arianne paused for a beat before clarifying, “Actually? She isn’t your Grandaunt, because she’s really your actual Granny… Bah, never mind. You’re too young to get me even if I explained it to you. Just wait till you’re all grown up, and you’ll get to dive into all of these juicy, messy things about the world. For now… wanna go downstairs and play outside? Your favorite slide is still out there in the yard. Mommy will play with you.”

Mentioning the slide instantly commanded the young boy’s attention. Living outside the Tremont Estate for so long had made him miss all of the fun doohickeys in his old home.

While the boy was knocking his socks off by himself, Mary and Arianne made themselves comfortable on the outdoor lounge chairs. “Phoo, now that a certain someone isn’t here anymore,” Mary said in the middle of their causerie, “The air has never tasted sweeter!”

“Mary…it’s all in the past now. Let’s not talk about it anymore, okay?” Arianne intoned helplessly. “Who knows if she’ll turn out to be a good, likeable senior once her sickness is cured? Mark’s actually pretty hurt by how things ended, you know.”

Mary gave a long sigh. “God, it’s bad to say that now? …Fine, forget it. By the by, when are you gonna go back to the Tremont Estate and remarry Mr. Tremont? When the two of you first married, there wasn’t any ceremony or party or any kind of pizzaz. So, maybe you two should prepare for an extravagant event this time around! The Tremont family isn’t just some common folks, alright—something as big and important as a wedding gotta have the appropriate amount of dazzle! I mean, look at Jackson and Tiffany’s wedding! It was grand and peachy keen!”

Since Shelly had only recently been sent away to be institutionalized, Mark was likely not in the mood for planning it, while Arianne herself had no time. “I don’t know. He hasn’t mentioned it formally either, so maybe we’ll think about it some other time? I honestly don’t care that much about grandiosity and pomp…”

It was dinnertime. Mark lifted Smore and placed him on his lap, announcing to the child, “Alright, little man. Tell me what you want, and Daddy will grab it for you.”

It was an invitation Smore took up without reservation. He began ordering his father around with the bravado of a commander—even if his cravings seemed to change on a dime. He would pine for a particular food one minute, only to change mind and want another in the next. Most surprisingly of all, Mark was in such a great mood that he obliged to every single request. He had always been a bit of a martinet when it came to rules and etiquette of dining, so it was a novel sight to see him allowing Smore complete, free reign.

Suddenly, the young boy paused and looked up at his father. “Daddy, when can Mommy and me come home?”

Mark froze for a second. Conflicting emotions flickered in his eyes flittingly.

“You can come back whenever you want, okay? This will always be your home, but… give a few days’ time for Daddy to prepare for your formal arrival, agree?” he replied.

Smore pouted, seemingly unhappy. “Well, if Grandaunt comes back, Mommy and me are gonna get kicked out of the house again, right?”

“Smore! We were not ‘kicked out’ of the house; Mommy just decided to leave of her own free will!” Arianne quickly sprung into a correction. “And get back down from there! You are to go back to your place and eat on your own. Don’t make Daddy feed you… Go!”

Smore slid down from Mark’s lap deftly and climbed up an empty chair nearby. “Okay-okay-okay, Mommy. Don’t shout at me.”

Arianne was speechless. She did not shout at him! She was just… speaking a little bit more forcefully, that was all. And she would not have done that, if Smore would stop saying things that might ruffle Mark’s feathers, too. Kids never seemed to know which topics were off-limits.

However, Mark simply continued grabbing Smore’s favorite food and placing them onto his plate. “Don’t you worry. From now on, no one can ever make you and your mother leave.”

Arianne, Smore, and Mary did not stay in the Tremont Estate for the night, as they had not brought any fresh clothes or washing utilities with them when they came. Besides, Smore had gotten acclimated to his condominium house. He no longer felt at home sleeping in the estate, which spelled potential for the boy's midnight tantrums.

The next day, at work, Arianne had barely warmed her seat when Sylvain gently tugged her into looking at a fashion magazine in his hand. "'Sup! Check these out! Are these bridal gowns sweet or what?"