Ruling 1731

Chapter 1731

Mrs. Lark sneered. “You want a divorce? Okay, I’ll get out of your way, but only if you know how to settle those properties—if you’re thinking about leaving my daughter anything less than she’s due, you can kiss your divorce goodbye! I know your reputation for underhanded trickeries, Alejandro, but I’m not intimidated by you at all! We Larks are not some doormats for you to walk all over!”

Even when she was apparently fighting for her daughter’s share, it was really just for the family—none of it was for Melanie’s benefits. Once this realization set in, Melanie could not brook any more of her mother’s squalls. “Leave, Mom! Leave us be right now! This is none of your business!”

Mrs. Lark stomped toward the door, the racket of furiously clicking heels trailing her. Shortly after she left, she had the temerity to text Melanie, ‘Alejandro still doesn’t know this is your big brother’s doing, does he? If you snitch, I’ll kill you.’

Melanie deleted the message the instant she finished it. Even now, all her mother cared about was her son. Was her identity as a mere daughter enough rationale to make her the scapegoat?

“Did it hurt?”

She looked up, startled at hearing Alejandro’s voice, and scanned him.

There was only impassion in his eyes. She chuckled mirthlessly to herself. “It’s manageable. All these years she raised me, that was the first time she’s ever hit me,” she replied. “With that being said, now that you’re here again, this is a good time to return to our discussion pertaining to our divorce, right? …Granted, there was never much to discuss. You just have to sign the paper.”

Alejandro sat on the couch and lit up a cigarette. “I’ll ask you one more time: what exactly happened in Tiffany’s incident?”

No, no more words on this matter. Why split hair about the technicalities? Why pretend it would make an ounce of a difference whether it was Melanie who did it or her brother? She would still be a persona non grata to him at the end of the day. The only part where those two admissions departed was on how much trouble the Larks, as a family, would be in.

“It was me. I pushed her down the stairs. This is why… we must divorce.”

A tempest shrouded Alejandro’s mien. “…Why?! You already know that she and I were over a long time ago! Did you really just spend your brain cells on getting close to her and pretend to be her friend, just so you could find the right staircase to push her off and tear two lives away from this world with one stroke? Did it never occur to you how absurd—how ludicrous—this whole scheme is? F**k, what did her baby do to be dragged into this sh*t, huh?! Tiffany’s fine right now, but that baby? Her life’s still hanging by a f**king thread; she could tip over to the side of death any second now! Are you telling me that conscience of yours isn’t experiencing a single f**king shred of remorse?!”

No matter how apoplectic Alejandro became, none of it surprised Melanie. His lips told her that Tiffany was a thing of a past he had given up—and yet he interrogated and inquisited her over and over again. What else could have spurred him?

Melanie decided to seize on his demonization of her as the last push. “Why should I feel remorse? My first child turned out to be a girl—that’s not what a family of means and standing like yours want, is it? Isn’t an heir what you need? If yes, then why won’t you give me a chance to try again? It’s to make our eventual divorce easier, isn’t it?” she snapped. “Remember that time when I was pregnant with Millie, and you—yes, you—wanted her aborted? God, what changed your mind back then, huh? Or maybe I shouldn’t ask; don’t want you to waste our time with another verbiage. Why is it that Tiffany was given a

chance to have another child while I am denied? Yes, I'm bitter enough to want both of them dead! And now, let me say the quiet part out loud for you: I want a divorce. Sign the d-damn paper!"

A divorce to end it all. Screw the family who so readily abandoned her! Screw her stupid, loveless marriage! After this, she would be alone but unfettered from starting a new life for herself—a brighter future. But now? Christ, everything in her bleak life was just… crap!

She used to be loved—treated as though she was a star. But now all she felt was the travail of plummeting straight into the ground from the sky, an unwanted, fallen star… And it hurt; it hurt like hell. She was battered and marred, and the only thing she clung to right now was to flee from everything that had done nothing but hurt her.

Alejandro extinguished the ember in his cigarette and leaped to his feet in a single stroke. "You want a divorce? Fine, you get a f**king divorce! Give me the f**king agreement!"

Melanie rose and hurried up the stairs. Beside her bed, close to the headboard, was the divorce agreement—every single sentence grazed on it read and re-read for more than ten times. Yet, every time her eyes fell onto the same, oft-revised words, it tortured her, especially the heading in its affronting large size: "Divorce Agreement."

She was in no mood to wonder why he kept insisting the divorce was her idea, even though the word sprung out of his mouth first. He was the one who wanted it, and she only prepared the agreement in accord. The only reason why she fibbed about it being her request to Mrs. Lark's face was to halt a fusillade of unwanted troubles that was sure to come had she said otherwise.

The paper was now before Alejandro's very eyes. With no hesitation, he grabbed his pen and branded it with his signature.

His strokes were unbridled and unyielding—just like him.

Chapter 1732

Melanie waited until Alejandro put his pen down before signing her name with equal resolute. She ended it with a print of her thumb, asking, “So, when do we begin the legal procedures?”

Alejandro didn’t answer her. Instead, he stormed out of the house and slammed the door.

Melanie’s knees buckled and she crashed onto the couch, her strength leaving her body. Tears broke out from the corner of her eyes and traced an invisible path down her face, its salty liquid stinging the painful heat that had yet left her cheek. A while later she rose to her feet and went into the bathroom.

She stared at her reflection in the mirror and suddenly felt a thick, awful lump furling in her chest. Mrs. Lark had put in more force than she expected, causing her cheek to swell even more than she had imagined. When Alejandro looked at her just now—she must have been a hideous sight to him, wasn’t she? He had never liked her, but after all of this, after Tiffany… He must hate her even more, did he not?

There was nothing left for her now. Nothing… not even her daughter belonged to her.

They might not have begun their legal procedures, but both sides had assented to the agreement with their signature. Melanie took it as an opportunity to leave the Smith Estate at once, so she packed her things and—after coaxing Melissa to sleep—slipped out of the residence unnoticed.

If Melissa were awake and saw her leave, she would immediately burst into tears in protest. It was hardly surprising, given that Melanie had always been the one taking care of the girl since she was a baby. Just thinking about how harrowing and gut-wrenching Melissa's bawl would be jarred her heart, but… she was not given any choice.

Melanie took nothing from her divorce, but her exit was at least buffered by some personal savings. Through that, she was able to get a room in a hotel for the time being before looking for a good place to rent.

One day, Alejandro would finally know she was not the one who pushed Tiffany. Still, Melanie rather not imagined if he would regret his decision. He would not, most likely. His knowledge would not matter.

At night, in her sleep, Melanie dreamed of Melissa crying for her mother. She woke up from that dream, weeping just as hard, and found herself in a strange hotel room.

A pang jarred her into a daze. Melissa had never left her side before while Alejandro was not at home. How could she be relieved?

After much debate with herself, she decided to try calling Alejandro. It was five in the morning by now—a bad time to call anyone, really—but she simply could not bring herself to wait.

Fortunately, the call connected.

She immediately launched into asking, "Is Millie awake? Is she crying? Are you at home? She's never left me before, so you must be patient with her, okay? She'll get used to my absence after a while, it's true…"

It was quiet on the other side. Alejandro was holding his phone in one hand and cradling his daughter with the other.

She had finally fallen back to sleep after a bawling fatigue, but one could still see glistening trails on her cheeks. After an entire night of frantic coaxing, Alejandro felt like death warmed over.

“Hello? Hello? A-Are you listening? Oh no—are you not at home? God, I texted you about me leaving, didn’t I? I’ve left my daughter to you, so can you please… Please, for God sake, be a bit more responsible? Please?” Melanie sounded both helpless and maddened.

“I am at home. She’s only fallen asleep after giving me an entire night’s share of troubles. Woke up a few minutes after you left, so the retinue at home called me and told me to come home… and I did. Why are you so gung-ho about leaving anyway? Can’t you at least wait until she’s used to this?” Alejandro answered in his typically husky voice, though it was weaved with helplessness and some other sentiment that was indecipherable.

Melanie sighed in relief. “O-Okay. As long as you’re there. I… It doesn’t matter; I’ll be leaving sooner or later, anyway. ‘Better an end with pain than pain without end’, after all. I’m the one who always took care of her, so how do you suppose she could ever be acclimated with my absence if I go back there? This is the only way,” she replied. “That is all. Goodbye.”

Chapter 1733

“Where are you?”

Alejandro asked to the beep of a terminated call.

Instead of putting down his phone, he simply stayed in his posture, his mind churning unfathomable thoughts.

A while later, he finally put his phone down before gingerly placing Melissa back onto her bed. Perhaps something was wrong with the way he lowered her—either way, the feel of his movement was too dissimilar with Melanie's that Melissa woke up before screaming for her mommy again.

Alejandro had lost his patience. Exasperated, he decided to let the child bawl and shriek to her heart's content until Jett, who heard her from outside, knocked on the door. "Mr. Smith? Would you like me to help?"

Alejandro sat on the edge of the bed, defeated. "Yes, just coax her to sleep. I'm done."

Jett pushed open the door. He adroitly brought Melissa up in his arms before gently rocking her. "Hush, hush. It's alright, don't you cry… Mommy will be back very soon."

Melissa would not listen. She knew her mother was not around. Worse, night was the time when a young child felt most hapless and insecure; the only outlet to express her distress was through a crying fit.

It went on until daybreak before the kid finally fell back into slumber. By then, she had cried so much that her voice had dwindled into a croak.

Alejandro had lost an entire night's worth of sleep. But he still discarded any plan to recover his lost winks, knowing full well that Melissa would wake up after two hours or so of sleep, and he would have to go back to soothing her.

Melissa's mood was a lot less volatile during the day, though her lips were still pressed into a pout complementing her watery eyes as she pleaded with Alejandro to take her to her mother. Thinking that all the kid needed was an eye-catching, exciting distraction from outside to stop her from fixating on her mother, he brought Melissa to the office.

Alejandro had not enjoyed a moment of respite after a full night's torment and an additional trouble from half the day, so his cantankerousness was displayed right on his face for everyone to see. Wary, the people in the office had bid him greetings with extra precaution.

Every ten minutes, Melissa would ask Alejandro the same thing: "Daddy, where's Mommy? Where is she?"

His (very patient) answer had been the same. "You'll see her very, very soon. Mommy's… uh, she's going through a facial treatment! She's coming to get you after she finishes that. You know those places—she brought you there before, remember? Uh, beauty centers or something like that?"

Melissa scanned her surroundings anxiously. "'kay, Millie know. But why not here yet?"

Alejandro's reply was a lengthy beat of silence.

They reached his private office where Alejandro's personal assistant had been waiting with toys and tasty treats, prepared precisely for the girl. "Hello, sweetie! Let's play together!"

Food and toys made Melissa's eyes twinkle brightly, but it was short-lived as her eyes dimmed. "Where's Mommy?"

The personal assistant braved through the hard question with a non-answering coax, "We can play while I go and look for Mommy, okay?"

At the very least, it did not occur to Melissa that her mother's absence was permanent. Still harboring hopes for her return, she began to play, though not without shooting some confirmatory glances at the door from time to time.

Suddenly, the phone on Alejandro's desk rang. He picked it up. "Hello?"

It was from the marketing department. "Mr. Smith, I discovered something weird. It's been two days, and the West Industries seems to have gone on an odd… scramble to snatch up every single customer of the Larks, causing the latter to lose out on revenues. Since the Larks are, well, your people, I thought you'd be interested with this report."

Chapter 1734

Alejandro frowned. "What—why? Why would the West family have beef with the Larks?"

Because Melanie pushed Tiffany? But if Jackson knew that, then should his target not be Melanie—or hell, Alejandro himself? Why would he take out his anger on the Larks?

The man on the other side of the phone was just as clueless. “I have no idea. Thought it was kinda weird myself.”

After the call ended, Alejandro paused for a minute before calling Arianne. It would be impossible for him to ask Jackson directly; he was sure the latter would hang up his call as soon as the man’s brain recognized Alejandro’s voice.

As soon as she picked up, Alejandro went straight to the chase. “Why is West Industries flipping the Larks off?”

Instead of answering him immediately, Arianne rejoined with a question of her own. “What? Can’t bear to see someone taking on your in-laws? Itching to hit back, aren’t you? Here’s a piece of advice: don’t. Stay out of it.”

Alejandro fell silent for a beat before stating, “Melanie and I have signed our divorce agreement.”

She paused for a second. “Well, then. I guess I’ll have to be the breaker of news.

“Melanie has nothing to do with Tiffany’s accident—because it was the Larks who wanted her gone,” she began. “It wasn’t Melanie who pushed her; it was her brother, Nikolai. If ‘why’ is what’s on your mind, well, let’s just say it’s your past entanglement with Tiffany coming back to bite you. To be fair, her family isn’t entirely sure about your status with Tiffany, but they believe she’s the reason why you always treat Melanie like a stranger. They’re worried that you two will divorce soon, and that would jeopardize the Larks’ interests. Of course, Melanie did play a role—if it weren’t for her, this whole thing would have ended with two dead bodies.

“If you’re divorcing Melanie over this… well, you’re dead wrong. Melanie must have kept the whole thing secret, right? You know why? Because the Larks want her to be their fallguy. Did it occur to you that after her divorce, she’d have no place to go because her family doesn’t want her back at all? Think this through, Alejandro. Jackson knows this; that’s why he can’t let the Larks go scots-free, can he? He hasn’t asked for Mark’s help yet, because the Larks still own a portion of Tremont Enterprise’s share, and that makes him wary of dragging his best friend into this. But Mark’s ready to help—all he needs is Jackson to give him the word, and he will abandon that little bit of profit without batting an eyelash.”

Alejandro was stunned. Snippets of memories, depicting Melanie’s behavior during his interrogation, roared into mind.

He wanted to slap himself on the face!

Why could she not just be honest with him?! All he ever wanted was for her to tell him the truth! Had he known earlier, he would not have been mad at her at all, would he?!

Alejandro forwent bidding Arianne farewell and hung up instantly so that he could call Melanie straightaway. However, her line was busy. He drew a deep breath as his eyes caught Melissa playing at the far side of his office.

Remorse and self-accusatory sentiments snowballed. She had left him so abruptly that he realized he could not care for his daughter on his own at all. Hell, he was completely at a loss every time Melissa broke into a crying fit!

“Jett! Jett, get the hell in here!” he cried, drawing Jett inside. “Go, find Melanie and bring her back to the estate. Melissa and I will be heading there right now!”

Jett was mystified. “Uh… What’s going on, Mr. Smith?”

Had Melanie not signed their divorce agreement just last night? Honestly, Jett did not expect his boss to miss her this badly after just a night…

Alejandro was not in the mood to divulge. “Goddamn it, you have your orders—so go get to them! The hell are you waiting for?”

Without the Larks’ home to return to, where else could Melanie go? She was probably still in the Capital—there was no way in the rest of that wronged woman’s lifetime would she ever return to Ayashe ever again.

As a matter of fact, Melanie had not gone far, and the hotel she picked was easy to locate, too. Jett did not waste too much time before finding his target.

They were to meet in Melanie’s hotel room. Observing social etiquettes, Jett remained outside the door instead of going in to pass his message, “Madam, Mr. Smith would like you to go back home with me at once.”

Melanie crossed her arms with her head lowered, chewing her lips. “Something lacking in the terms of our divorce agreement, huh? Tell him to simply draft a new agreement and hand it for me to sign.”

Jett shook his head. “I don’t think that’s it, Madam. Though, well… Mr. Smith did not tell me anything, either. All he told me was that he urgently wants you back. If you don’t come with me… well, I’ll be in a

really tight spot, you know what I'm saying? Anyway, if I had to guess, I'd say it's probably about Little Miss?" he wondered out loud. "Last night, knowing you weren't around, Little Miss cried for the entire night that her voice turned hoarse come morning."

Melanie's eyebrows furled. Once again, her resolve waned a little, but this time she forced herself to resist her nascent urge. "No, I don't think I'll return. Seeing me will only upset Millie even more," she announced. "That's how it is at first. Give it enough time, though, and she'll be used to it and it'll be fine. You have some child rearing skills under your belt, don't you, Jett? With me out of the picture, I'm afraid you'll have to come in and save the day more often—I cannot thank you enough.

"Now, if there's nothing else, please go back. Tell Alejandro that I have no intention of seeing him at all. We're divorced, for God sake. I won't let him order me around like he used to."

Chapter 1735

While Jett was still scrambling for the right response, Melanie shut the door in his face.

He knew what his boss was like, so Jett eschewed returning to the Smith Estate right away and opted to call Alejandro instead. Hearing about Melanie's rejection, Alejandro immediately supplied, "Tell her it's because Millie has fallen ill—as in, super-seriously-ill. I know for sh*t she doesn't have it in her to turn away from that. Then tell her that if she's not coming back, I'm not taking the kid to the hospital."

That was a bit too much for a lie, was it not? At the very least, it made Jett hesitate, but not enough to make him object. Shortly after the call, he knocked on Melanie's door again.

She opened it with a face written with helplessness. "Jett, I've made myself very clear. I'm not going back. Unless this is regarding the divorce's official procedures, I don't have any reason to see Alejandro again."

Jett steeled himself. “Uh, you see… Actually, Little Miss… she’s, uh, sick. And Mr. Smith said… Well, he said if you don’t come with me right now, he won’t send her to the hospital at all. She’s been crying and bawling for the entire night, so maybe Little Miss got ill because of it…”

Melanie’s face paled in shock. “What?! She’s ill and he’s not going to send her to the hospital?!”

Jett’s lips thinned in silence. Melanie, meanwhile, swiftly swooped her handbag. “Come on, we gotta’ go—fast! Don’t zone out on me!”

It was only after the two had descended the stairs and got into the car that Jett noticed Melanie’s unchanged hotel room slippers. “M-Madam, you… forgot to change your shoes…”

Melanie stared at them in slight embarrassment before her overall frenzy gobbled it whole. “Do I look like I have the luxury to care? This isn’t the only thing I didn’t change—I didn’t even brush my hair! I look unkempt and dowdy now, don’t I? But I don’t care. I have no time to care. Just bring me over there right now, please!” she rebutted. “God, why do you think he’s refusing to send our daughter to a doctor, huh? Is he trying to make a statement? That I shouldn’t have left Millie to him?”

Jett could not hold himself together any longer. “—Argh, goddamn it! I can’t do this! Little Miss isn’t sick at all, Madam. At most, her throat turned hoarse from all that bawling, but that’s it. It’s Mr. Smith—he’s so desperate to see you, but you wouldn’t come with me back there…”

Melanie instinctively tried to disembark from the car, but a defiant pull on the latch without the car door opening told her she was locked inside.

“J-Jett, let me out!” she cried.

Jett squared his jaw, crossed his heart, and stomped onto the accelerator. “I can’t do that, Madam. I’m sorry, I can’t! If I don’t bring you back with me… you know I’ll have to kiss my job goodbye!”

Of course, Melanie knew what sort of temper Alejandro had. Realizing that, she decided against making things difficult for him. Still, no matter how she looked it, she simply could not understand Alejandro’s desperation in seeing her, unless—

Could it be? Had he found out that it was Nikolai? He was baiting her into going back—because he wanted to make her pay?!

The long road home, to Melanie, became fraught with trepidation and fear. By the time the car had steered into the Smith Estate before slowing into a stop, she placed her hand to her chest, feeling her wild heart pounding. “J-Jett, tell me the truth. A-Alejandro… knows something, doesn’t he?”

Again, Jett was as confused and clueless as she was. “Scared, Madam? Um, judging from how he had acted just now, I… I don’t think he’s looking for trouble. But then again… Sigh. Honestly, he isn’t acting like himself either, so I think you should probably be on your guard. But you two have been husband and wife for a really long time now, and there’s Little Miss there, so I don’t think he’s gonna tear you into pieces too. Whatever this is, you can count on me to be on my highest alert just outside the door.”

Melanie leaped to her feet from the car and realized that her knees had turned into jelly.

He was her husband, but she could never manage to read him. All she knew from her experience with living with him was that he was a cutthroat who never gave a damn about the cruelty of his methods. Would he punish her the same way he did to his enemies?

They had reached outside the upstairs bedroom now. Jett nodded at her in assurance. She steeled herself and pushed open the door.

If anything went south, she could at least count on Jett to burst inside the room and stop him.

Chapter 1736

It was nothing like she expected.

Alejandro sat by his bedside as he looked over at Melissa playing atop of the rug, wearing his softest expression. Toys were scattered everywhere in no discernible order.

Melanie suspected she was looking at the calm before the storm. She stepped forward, picked up the toys, and put them away. “Millie, don’t scatter your toys like that.”

Melissa froze when Melanie’s voice was within earshot. Then, she hurled herself into her mother’s arms, overjoyed, her glistening doe-eyes overflowing with glimmering tears. “Mommy!”

Melanie carried the young girl in her arms, her heart aching. But when her eyes linked with Alejandro’s penetrant own, she willed every emotion leaking out of her to diffuse. She summoned the nanny to take Melissa away, though it took Melanie quite some time to mollify the child before she agreed to waiting for her mother downstairs.

Melanie waited until there were just the two of them in the room before asking, “What do you want? Can’t believe you made Jett lie about Millie being sick.”

Instead of answering, Alejandro grabbed a piece of document lying nearby and ripped it into shreds right in front of her very baffled eyes. It was by recognizing the pieces that made up her signature and thumbprint when she realized it was their divorce agreement.

He had ripped their divorce agreement apart!

Melanie looked at him, bamboozled. “What are you—”

He stood and approached her before she could finish, “Why didn’t you tell me the truth? You’re a member of the Smith family—and how dare those schmucks from the Lark family think they could use one of my people as their scapegoat! They had the balls to do it, huh? Then on what right do they have to pass the buck to you alone, while you do as they asked? What are you, a moron?”

He knew!

She turned away from him, stumbling backward. “The Larks are my origin; I share my part in all of this even if my role differs from theirs. They are the executioners, while I’m the pawn—no, I’m just a cannon-fodder. Ultimately, it doesn’t matter; it happened, so don’t tell me you’re regretting your decision to split. This isn’t about you… Right now, I am the one who wants a divorce.”

Alejandro loomed, forcing her to back into a corner. “You? Want a divorce? You’ll have to see if I approve it, and right now—I don’t approve it!”

This was outside of what Melanie expected. He should hate her along with them, right? She had thought he wanted her to come back only because he wanted a payback. “But why don’t you approve of it? No one’s forcing you and I to be together anymore! And I… I don’t want to be bound to a loveless marriage anymore! A day spent living with you is another reminder of how all of my worth boils down to being a hapless pawn, a chip to procure profits—and I had it! I don’t want to be tied to the Lark family, and I don’t want to be fettered to you! Why can’t you just hate me? My brother hurt the woman you love, and I covered it up! Isn’t that enough to make you hate me?!”

He held his hands against the wall on either side of her, ensnaring her into what little space there was between his body and the wall. “Damn straight Nikolai Lark hurt the woman I love. He owes me, and I’m gonna make sure I squeeze everything he’s due out of him,” he said. “And the same can be said for the Larks—I will make them pay.”

A surfeit of jarring sentiments filled Melanie. So, he admitted—publicly, irrevocably, shamelessly—that Tiffany was still the woman he loved. How pathetic she must be, to be unloved by her family and equally incapable of inspiring a mote of fondness from the man she wedded.

She could not take it anymore and shoved him away from her. “Why don’t you divorce me already? Why do you insist on tormenting me?! I’m punished, Alejandro, I have nowhere to belong. So please, for goddamn once, just let me live! Even if you don’t love me, I’ve at least bore you a daughter, so can you please show me some mercy?”

The lights in Alejandro’s eyes shone slightly. “I will, but you stay here and take care of Millie. Don’t know if you noticed: she can’t leave you. Wait till I’ve finished the matters on my hand, and we’ll discuss about us.”

Melanie said nothing, because if she opened her mouth, a sob might escape.

He only forced her to come back because her daughter could not leave her. How was this any better than outright making her pay for her sin? No matter what it looked like, this offer was all thorns on the inside.

Chapter 1737

Over the course of the next few days, Alejandro was nowhere to be seen while Melanie was confined to her own house. She had no choice but to accompany her daughter.

Moreover, more bodyguards had been hired at the Smiths' just to keep an eye on her.

Melanie did not even have to think to know that Alejandro would be going against the Larks. Moreover, with the assistance of Jackson, the Larks were not going to be able to escape the incoming calamity.

However, what Melanie had not expected was for someone among the Larks to have actually remembered a "pawn" like her. Mrs. Lark's voice was angry as she scolded her. "Melanie Lark, how could you live such a cowardly life! Alejandro is now working with the Wests to go against us Larks. Furthermore, he's even announced so openly that the Larks have laid a hand on his woman, yet Jackson is still able to accept that, even going so far as to collaborate with him. Don't you feel anything at all? Huh? How are you still able to watch from the sidelines after being humiliated to such an extent?!"

Melanie casually asked, "How am I supposed to react? Didn't you already know that Tiffany is the one he loves and not me? I've always been a nobody in my own home, yet you still expect others to look up to me? I'm tired, I don't wish to be involved in the matter between both families anymore. The future of the Larks no longer has got anything to do with me."

Mrs. Lark growled and yelled hoarsely, “In that case, how are you going to repay the Larks for raising you all these years?! Are you going to just stand there as your man destroys the Larks just for another woman? Melanie Lark, I can’t be bothered with how you want to live your life, but you’ve got to repay your debts to the Larks for raising you! I don’t care how you do it, but you must get Alejandro to stop whatever he’s doing immediately! What would you stand to gain if the Larks were destroyed?”

Melanie finally asked the question that had been in her heart for a long time, “Am I your real daughter?”

Mrs. Lark was speechless and remained silent for a moment, but that was followed by a cold snicker as she said, “You’ve got that right; I’m not! I have no idea which wench your father went out with and ended up impregnating, then bringing you over when you were a month old. At the time, I had two sons and no daughters. Moreover, I heard that your real mother had long but died while giving birth to you, so I didn’t even get the chance to look at that wretched wench. Therefore, I thought I might as well accept you and raise you like my own since a daughter would prove to be useful in this kind of family. However, I never expected that you would turn around and bite the hand that fed you in the end!”

Unexpectedly, Melanie actually did not give a huge reaction to the revelation, possibly due to the numerous blows that she had received recently. From the moment the Larks had wanted her to be the scapegoat, Melanie had begun to feel that she was an outsider within the family. Therefore, she was actually not too surprised when she personally heard what Mrs. Lark had just said. “Is that so? In that case, why would whatever happens with the Larks have anything to do with me? At the very least, it shouldn’t be you who’s here to order me around at this moment, not when you’re not even my real mother! If I’m going down, we might as well all go down together since I’ve already… gone all out.”

Suddenly, Mr. Lark’s voice came out from the other end of the phone call. “What are you telling the child to do?! We’ve got to resolve the current matters at hand. What would venting your anger out against her do right now? Alejandro has never had any feelings for her in the first place, so what do you expect her to be able to do? Stop pointing fingers at her!”

Then, Mrs. Lark went on arguing with Mr. Lark by saying, “What’s the matter? Do you feel sorry for your daughter now? Don’t forget that I was the one who helped you raise that bastard. All this time, not once have I ever mistreated her, but now I regret it. What was the point in raising her? Wasn’t it you who agreed to let her take the fall in the first place? Since the beginning, hadn’t you chosen the Larks over her in importance? Why are you now being a hypocrite all of a sudden?!”

Melanie could no longer continue to listen any longer, so she immediately cut off the phone call. ‘Now that I think about it, there’s no need for me to feel sad. They’ve been able to do such things since I’m not their own flesh and blood, so there’s no need for me to be sad at all, isn’t there? Heck, it would be even more terrifying if a mother was able to do such a thing to her own daughter.’

That night, Mr. Lark sent Melanie a text message that contained a long string of words.

‘For him to not call me directly, he’s probably doing it behind Mrs. Lark’s back. I suppose there’s no peace within the Larks at the moment.’

‘Melanie, I’m so sorry. I know that it won’t help no matter what I say at this moment; however, do you really have it in you to see the Larks fall into nothingness? I know that what I’m asking for is extremely unreasonable, but I beg of you: could you please beg Alejandro to stop? The Larks are currently on the verge of crumbling. This is my life’s work; I wouldn’t have been able to feed all three of you kids without it. Whatever it is, your mother has never mistreated you while you were growing up. Therefore, you should overlook how badly she has been treating you recently. She has treated you well enough, considering you aren’t even her real daughter. I’ve been very stressed and am currently out of my wits already, so please, Melanie, I beg of you.’

Suddenly, tears began dripping on Melanie’s phone screen unknowingly.

Melanie raised her hand to wipe off her tears as she sat on her bed, burying herself within her knees as she silently sobbed.

Chapter 1738

Compared to Mrs. Lark's words, which were as sharp as a blade, Mr. Lark's method was much more coercive, but it was still meant to drive Melanie into a corner.

Despite it being a mess that the Larks had concocted, they were all still forcing Melanie to clean up after them in the end.

After a long time had passed, Melanie picked up her phone and dialled Alejandro's number. She had made her decision to treat it as her final repayment to the Larks for raising her. From then onwards, she would cut off all ties with them and never return to that family ever again.

When the phone call was connected, Melanie asked in a hoarse voice, "Where are you? Could you please come home for a while? I… wish to speak with you for a moment."

Alejandro seemed to be occupied with something at that moment and was distracted. "What's the matter? Just tell me over the phone."

Melanie insisted as she said, "I can't tell you over the phone. When will you be back?"

After a few seconds, Alejandro finally said, "I don't know how much longer it will take. I'll be back once I'm done. If it's urgent, you could come to the office to see me."

Melanie turned her head to look at her daughter, who was deeply asleep. She hesitated for a moment before she said, “All right, I’ll come see you in your office.” Melanie had no choice but to bring Millie with her since she was afraid that Millie would suddenly wake up and cry in the middle of the night.

Now that Melanie had Alejandro’s “permission” to leave, it was obvious that the guards would not stop her from leaving. In fact, they even drove Melanie to Alejandro’s office.

The company seemed very quiet at that hour with only a few staff who were working overtime.

When Melanie arrived at Alejandro’s office, she laid Millie down on the sofa and took off her jacket to cover up the little girl. Then, Melanie said, “My… My father has contacted me.”

Alejandro’s gaze shifted from his laptop screen towards her. “And?”

Melanie subconsciously fiddled with the edge of her shirt with her fingers. “Could you please forgive the Larks? No matter what, they’re still a family that I’ve lived with for more than 20 years. At the very least, they’ve treated me well before I was married. I know that you will never stop for Tiffany, but please, I beg you…”

Alejandro squinted his eyes. “For Tiffany? Who told you that I was doing this for Tiffany? There are already people who are seeking justice for her, so there’s no need for me to do anything. Wouldn’t Jackson and Arianne be enough?”

Melanie did not understand what Alejandro had just said. ‘Didn’t the Larks say that somebody has laid a hand on his woman?’

When he saw how confused Melanie looked, Alejandro closed his laptop before walking over and sitting by his daughter’s side. “Why have you brought the child here as well? Is she able to sleep well like this? Did you come see me just for this? There’s nothing for us to negotiate about this matter.”

Chapter 1739

Melanie’s heart sank. “What would it take for you to forgive the Larks? I’ll do anything as long as you’re willing to stop.”

‘This way, I can cut off all ties with the Larks.’

Alejandro lowered his head and tidied up his daughter’s hair, babbling about things that were unrelated to the topic at hand. “Her hair doesn’t seem to be very healthy. How come she didn’t inherit that from you? She doesn’t seem to be growing much with whatever she’s eating at the moment. She’s still so small…”

Melanie sighed. ‘Is he trying to change the topic? Is he completely unwilling to talk about this matter at all?’ Melanie began to panic slightly. “Alejandro… Is it really impossible for us to even have a proper discussion? I don’t expect to be held above Tiffany in importance in your heart, but we’re a married couple after all, so can’t you… think in my place for once, every now and then?”

Alejandro was startled for a moment, as his hands stopped. Then, he raised his head to look at her. “You’re still willing to defend the Larks despite how they’ve treated you?”

Melanie's eyes dropped as her emotions began to flow out of her. "I'm not defending them; I'm repaying them. In the future, whatever happens to the Larks will no longer matter to me. That is my father's life's work, so I would be repaying their kindness for raising me all this time. Frankly, I don't want to see the Larks crumbling down to nothingness like this as well."

Alejandro slightly raised an eyebrow. "In that case… I won't make the Larks disappear completely, but I'll annex them under the Smiths instead. How about that? I don't believe that the Larks will be able to last much longer, not with both me and Jackson pressuring them at the same time. At that point, they would have no other choice but to transfer all their assets to me. You've done everything you can, so they will know about it. Moreover, they will regret whatever they've done to you as well and know that they shouldn't have done it in the first place. After the takeover is completed, I will hand over whatever belongs rightfully to the Larks to you to handle."

'Did I hear wrongly? He isn't doing all of this for Tiffany, but for me?! Could he have meant me when he said "his woman"? No, no, no… He clearly said that he wanted to divorce me previously. I'm just overthinking things.'

"Didn't we… agree to have a divorce?"

Alejandro's lips curved and he smiled joyfully. "Is that so? Well, I've come to regret it now. Haven't I torn apart the divorce papers as well?"

Melanie was completely confused and had no idea what Alejandro was thinking; her heart was in turmoil at that moment. "Are you refusing to divorce because Millie is still young and can't leave my side? As long as you agree to my earlier request, I'm willing to remain and continue to take care of Millie after we've divorced until the both of you have no more need of me."

Alejandro frowned and stood closer to Melanie. “Have I not made myself clear enough? It’s I who doesn’t want to get a divorce, not because of someone else. If you had told me earlier that it was Nikolai who’d done it, would I have still been at odds with you? Whatever the Larks have done to you, I will get back at them for your sake. I don’t want them to think that you’re casted aside in the Smiths. Also… There’s no need to have a son in order for you to be useful—Millie alone is enough.”

At that moment, Melanie was completely confused. She retreated and stood in front of Alejandro’s desk. “I… I want a divorce!”

Alejandro continued to press forwards until Melanie had nowhere to run to. “But I don’t want to, so it’s not up to you to say.”

Melanie could almost feel Alejandro’s warm breath by her ears. “Is there absolutely nothing I can do at all? Wouldn’t a divorce be a relief for the both of us?”

Alejandro kissed Melanie’s immaculate neck. “What if… it’s a torture instead?”

Melanie was extremely startled when Alejandro suddenly laid her down on his desk. The pens in the container fell all over the ground and caused a commotion. Melanie’s first reaction was to think of her daughter; she was afraid that Millie had been awoken by the noise. “Don’t wake Millie up!”

A hint of passion flared up beneath Alejandro’s eyes. “I know… She’s in a deep sleep…”

When Melanie realized what Alejandro intended to do, she reflexively struggled. “Stop it! What if someone sees us…”

A normal man would never be able to stop himself in that kind of situation, and the same applied to Alejandro. “Who’s going to see us? Only the lights in my office are switched on this floor. Haven’t you wanted to have another child?”

Chapter 1740

Melanie was not able to recall when she had ever said that. “When did I ever say that?! Don’t you feel disgusted at having a child with someone you don’t love?! I’m grateful enough that you’ve allowed me to give birth to Millie. Stop it… Let go of me!”

Alejandro let out a sigh by Mealnie’s ear. “I don’t know whether it’s love or not either, but I… don’t want to leave…”

Melanie’s arms lost their strength as she gave up struggling. ‘He doesn’t know if it’s love or not… But he doesn’t want to leave… Can’t he leave…?

On the way home, Melanie’s head remained low as she held onto Millie, afraid that someone might be able to see whatever she was thinking. When she recalled what had just happened in the office, she still felt as if she were in a dream. From the moment she had left to meet Alejandro earlier, her mind had been in turmoil. However, she was still spacing out at that moment.

‘Alejandro’s been gloomy for the past few days, yet now he’s all smiles and seems to be in a good mood.’

Melanie asked softly, “Are you really… not going to divorce me? But I still think…”

Alejandro interrupted Melanie before she was able to finish her sentence and said, “There isn’t going to be a divorce, so don’t even think about it. What is there still for you to think about? The things that go inside women's minds are like a bottomless pit. I have no energy to try and predict whatever you’re thinking, but I would like you to stop overthinking things, please.”

Melanie mustered up the courage and asked, “Didn’t you suggest divorcing me because of Tiffany’s incident?”

Alejandro remained silent for a moment. “Yes and no. I’m more annoyed by the fact that you refused to tell me the truth and made me think that it was you who harmed her. I love how you were in the past, and I despise you for playing such a cruel act. That kind of tactic is only suitable to be used by me. Relax, I will do whatever I promised you—I won’t let the Larks go down into nothingness. Lark Enterprise will also continue to operate under your supervision. I think this is a result that should satisfy us both.”

Out of everything Alejandro had just said, Melanie only caught onto the word “love”. ‘He loves how I was in the past? Does he actually have love towards me?’

Melanie suddenly had the urge to ask him whether he had ever had feelings for her since the beginning. However, the words were stuck in her throat when she was about to say them—either because she hesitated, or she was actually afraid of receiving an answer that she did not want.

…

Soon, Tiffany had been discharged from the hospital and was transferred to the West family residence where Summer attended to her with the utmost care.

Tiffany may be living a carefree life at that moment, but she missed her child very much, since she had never laid eyes on her since she was born. Tiffany kept hoping that she could bring her daughter home as soon as possible, but Jackson kept on telling her that she had to remain in the hospital under observation, since she had been born prematurely.

Tiffany was well aware of Jackson's actions towards the Larks, but there was nothing she could do. 'I know Jackson's temper very well. Once he's really angry, nothing will be able to stop him from going off on a rampage.'

While she was at the hospital, Tiffany was unable to contact Melanie. However, now that the situation had developed into such a complicated stage, Tiffany could no longer sit aside anymore, so she gave Melanie a call.

The phone call connected within a short period. Tiffany carefully thought of what she was going to say before she asked, "Have you and Alejandro… really gotten a divorce?"

Tiffany instantly panicked after asking Melanie that question, the latter of which was unable to immediately give a reply. Tiffany was afraid that she had ruined the friendship between them because of such a question. Moreover, she regretted asking something that sounded like she was prying into her private matters the moment she opened her mouth. "I didn't mean it like that! I'm just worried for you. I don't want Jackson to go up against your family as well, but I can't stop him!"