Ruling 1891

Chapter 1891

When they arrived at the hospital, Raven was still in the emergency treatment room.

Melissa was waiting at the corridor like a child who had done something wrong. After all, she was still young and had been pampered all her life, so how would she have experienced such a scenario before? All her traces of arrogance had completely vanished, and when she saw Aristotle, she felt even more guilty.

However, Aristotle did not put the blame on her. Instead, he wanted to know what had happened as he asked, “What happened exactly? Why did it happen to her while you were shopping? Did the two of you walk for too long? Didn’t you just leave not too long ago?”

Melissa squirmishly glanced at Cynthia before she mumbled, “I don’t know either… I did hear that she isn’t that healthy, but I don’t know what kind of sickness she has exactly. So we went out shopping like normal people, but who knew that she would suddenly faint? At the time, I noticed that she was coughing so much that her face had turned completely red. I was shocked when I saw that and thought that she had asthma, but that didn’t seem to be the case either. That’s when I drove her directly to the hospital. She fainted the moment she got into the car. I think… She should be fine, shouldn’t she?”

Melissa did not have the courage to confess that she had taken Raven to walk on the longer route, plus they were brisk walking at the time. ‘If I knew Raven was so fragile, I definitely wouldn’t be so reckless.’

Aristotle heaved a sigh. “She’s been through this situation in the past as well. So long as she’s sent to the hospital on time and there’s no risk of her suffocating, she’ll be fine. I don’t think there’s going to be a problem, so you shouldn’t be so worried. Look how shocked you are. Raven can’t do strenuous exercises, nor can she walk too long of a distance. You’d better not ask her to go shopping with you next time.”

Cynthia was feeling a little guilty. “I’m sorry, this is all my fault. It’s got nothing to do with Millie.”

Melissa was afraid that Cynthia would accidentally give the slip, so she hurriedly neutralized the situation. “How’s this got to do with you? I was the one who insisted on dragging her to shop with me. If something really does happen, it’s my problem!”

Aristotle waved his hand. “That’s enough, can you please not play the “loving sisters” role here. You’re making me look like the bad guy.”

Melissa pursed her lips. “You’ve always been the bad guy. Which guy in his right mind would bring home a woman who he is completely unrelated to and then live with her?”

Aristotle walked to the bench on the side and sat down. “It’s not completely unrelated to begin with. I’m the reason why she’s in poor health.”

Aristotle began explaining the story of how he and Raven met. He requested for the two girls to promise that they would never tell anyone else about the matter especially the seniors back at home. He was afraid that they would be worried about how dangerous his life was while he was overseas.

Actually, his life was not that difficult. He was only too exhausted and was so busy that he did not have much time to catch his breath. The night he et Raven, he was coincidentally thinking of taking a breather alone.

After learning about the circumstances, Cynthia once again thought that she had gone overboard. ‘I shouldn’t have worked together with Millie to “bully” Raven.’

However, Melissa did not agree. In fact, she even complained as she said, "What could a few hooligans do to you when you've got such great skills? Her taking a knife for you was purely excessive. She was the one who rushed out to defend you, yet she's even pushing the responsibility to you. Also, even if she did save your life, wouldn't the matter be resolved if you paid her a sum of money? Why did you have to bring her home with you? You've brought her here all the way from France. Are you planning to let her stay with you forever? In that case, you might as well marry her. I suppose it wouldn't be a hassle at all since she's willingly given herself to you. No matter how severe her sickness is, it's already been half a year. I think whatever debt there was between you two should've already been cleared up by now, shouldn't it? If her sickness is permanent, are you going to take care of her permanently as well? In that case, you shouldn't drag others down into the mud with you. A man can't have two wives; you might as well marry her and be done with it!"

Melissa had always spoken like that. She had truly never been afraid of anyone since her father, Alejandro, was backing her up.

Chapter 1892

Aristotle casually shot her a glance. “Is this little girl actually teaching me what I’m supposed to do? I’m your brother, you should at least be more polite with me. I know what I’m supposed to do. When the time’s right, I’ll get her settled. However, now’s not the time; you saw it yourself, she’s in no condition to leave at the moment.”

Melissa was slightly aggrieved as she said, “What do you mean that she’s in no condition to leave? If she could leave if she wanted to, she’d never be in the condition to leave.”

At that moment, Cynthia tapped Melissa’s shoulders. “All right, all right. Ares has been living alone in France for so many years, so it’s tough enough for him to be able to find someone whom he could talk to. Furthermore, she even saved his life, so we shouldn’t be so petty about it.”

Melissa shot Cynthia a glare. ‘Am I not doing all this because of you?’

After Cynthia awkwardly laughed, no one continued to speak further about the matter.

After a very long time, the doctor came out. “The patient isn’t in any danger at the moment. She’s very fortunate to have been brought here in time, so she hasn’t suffocated severely. However, she’s going to have to avoid these kinds of situations as much as possible in the future, as it could be life threatening. Based on the patient’s physical condition, there’s no need for her to be admitted into the hospital. All she needs is to get enough rest when she gets home. She’s already woken up, and she can leave after her drip finishes.”

Aristotle nodded his head before walking inside.

Raven looked very pale, but she still managed to force a smile. “Ares, you’re here.”

When she saw Cynthia and Melissa behind Aristotle, the smile on Raven’s face froze. ‘I almost forgot, I fainted while I was with Melissa. I wasn’t pretending this time. I knew that Melissa was making things difficult for me on purpose, but I still went along with it so that I could give her a warning.’

When Melissa heard Raven call Aristotle “Ares”, she immediately rolled her eyes.

Cynthia also felt slightly uncomfortable. She recalled Raven’s name being saved in Aristotle’s phone as “Rey” and how Raven had so intimately called him “Ares”...

Suddenly, Raven lowered her eyes and very weakly said, "I'm fine, Ari, this isn't the first time this has happened to me. I'll be careful in the future. This has got nothing to do with Melissa, it's my own fault for not telling her beforehand...I was just worried that I might kill the mood. Also, I didn't tell her the moment | began to feel uncomfortable, but I didn't think it was going to be so serious."

Aristotle did not say anything. Instead, he merely raised his head to look at the drop bottle. No one knew what he was actually thinking at the moment.

Melissa was furious. 'Isn't she just a stereotypical b*tch? Ares hasn't even said anything yet, so why is she even pretending to be all holy? I. admit was deliberately making things difficult for her, but all of it could have been avoided if she had just said that she wasn't feeling well. Those are her own legs, plus I didnt force her to keep on moving either. She's making me seem like I'm some kind of evil monster!'

However, since they were in a hospital and Melissa did not want to cause a scene there, she immediately turned around and walked off.

Cynthia followed behind her. “Millie! I’m sorry, all of this happened because of me. Don’t be angry…”

Melissa ferociously stopped in her tracks and turned around to look at her. "I'm telling you, that Raven girl isn't anything saintly. A girl who's able to so casually follow a man whom she's only known for half a year to his country, all the way from France, must have some kind of ulterior motive. Isn't she being too casual about it? Don't you feel like she might be planning to have Ares take care of her for all her life? I think there's something wrong with Ares' mind. Couldn't he have resolved the situation by paying Raven a sum of money? Why did he have to bring her with him? He's crazy!" I

Cynthia was feeling kind of despondent at that moment. “Forget about it, Millie. Ares must have something planned up his sleeve. I’m actually not that worried.”

Chapter 1893

‘You’re not that worried?’ Melissa was so furious that she laughed. “Am I the only one who’s being worried for nothing? I thought you loved my brother, didn’t you? The man you’ve been dreaming of every day has returned from France but brought a woman with him, yet you’re actually not that worried? Let’s put aside your parents’ intentions for a moment. Do you dare to say that you don’t love him? I’m only helping you because you’re my best friend, so could you not be so relaxed, as if I’m helping you for no reason?”

Cynthia shook her head and lowered her volume as she said, “He… might have confessed to me. We also… did that already. So, I think he doesn’t feel that way towards Raven. It’s purely because she saved his life once. I trust that Ares will be able to handle the situation properly.”

Melissa’s eyes opened wide. “What? He’s only returned for a few days, yet the two of you have already had sex? That fast?! I never knew it, but you’ve really got it in you!”

Cynthia’s face flushed red and she instantly covered up Melissa’s mouth. “What kind of nonsense are you talking about?! I meant ‘kiss’ when I said we did it. How did you even link that to sex? You’ve got a very dirty mind!”

Melissa slapped her hand away and almost died from laughter. “Hahaha… I’m not the one with a dirty mind; you’ve just got a mind that’s too innocent. Why did you have to be so secretive about a mere kiss? Is that such a bad thing that it has to be covered up? Don’t say I didn’t tell you, but the thing with men is, no matter how serious they may look on the surface, the “sly beast” within them will rush out the moment they’re alone with a woman. I’m worried that a person as innocent as you wouldn’t be able to handle my brother’s ‘ferociousness’.”

Cynthia said in disdain, “You sound as if you understand him better than I do. We’ve grown up together ever since I was a kid, while you would only appear once in a while. Ares isn’t that kind of person. As for our current stage, kissing is already the most that could happen, so you shouldn’t be that evil.”

Melissa pursed her lips. “Let’s just wait and see if you don’t believe me. He’ll only pretend to be serious in front of you because he’s afraid of scaring you.”

Of course, Cynthia refused to believe her. She had always thought that Aristotle was a very reliable person, even more so than Plato, her biological brother. ‘Ares isn’t someone who would indulge his vices, all right? I’d believe you if you said Plato has this “beast” inside of him, but Ares definitely doesn’t have it.’

Raven was only done with her drip after 10 PM and then left with the help of Aristotle.

Melissa and Cynthia were meanwhile waiting outside for them Melissa was a hyperactive person, so she had long but grown impatient from the wait. She chewed on some gum and blew bubbles in boredom.

She could not get used to looking at Raven sticking so close to Aristotle in her sickly state, so she walked up towards them, disgruntled, and said, "I'll hold her. Your fiancee is right there. "Aren't you fraid shell be unhappy from jealousy?" -

Raven’s body froze unknowingly. Aristotle glanced at Cynthia and his lips curled up into a faint snicker. “Fine, be careful with her. Don’t walk too fast.”

After that, he walked towards Cynthia. “Let’s go, Cindy. We’ll go to my place tonight, all right?”

Cynthia’s mind helplessly recalled what Melissa had said earlier, and the innocent mind she had was corrupted, just like that… She began to think about some dirty minded stuff.

When he saw that she did not make a sound, Aristotle took her small hand into his with ease. “What’s the matter? You don’t want to go?”

Aristotle's palm was very warm. His fair, slender fingers were able to completely wrap around her hand, making her feel strangely relaxed; She did not know how to reject him, so she lightly nodded her head. “Att: right."

As Raven looked at the couple in front of her, she naively asked, “Is she really Ares’ fiance?”

Chapter 1894

Melissa knew that Aristotle had kissed Cynthia, so she knew what was going on. Hence, she very naturally boasted, “Of course, they’ve been engaged to each other since they were born. Coincidentally, the both of them felt the same way about each other as they grew up, so wouldn’t this make it even better? From the way I see it, your illness isn’t going to recover for the rest of your life and the both of them are probably going to have to wait until Cindy graduates before they get married. So, you’d be better off moving back to France as early as possible. Don’t worry, you’ve saved Aristotle’s life before, so he wouldn’t be stingy with you financially.”

Raven wanted to control the unhappiness she had in her heart very much, but her emotions refused to follow her will. Hence, she fiercely struggled to wring free from Melissa’s grasp. Melissa was startled for a moment. “Are you crazy?”

After that, Raven regained her senses and took a deep breath. “I’m sorry… I was a little unwell just now. I didn’t push you away on purpose. I’ll be able to walk on my own, so you don’t have to help me. Thank you.”

That was something Melissa gladly followed through. All along, it was always others who served her, so she was not happy about serving the “wild flower” in front of her at all.

When they arrived at Tremont Estate, Melissa instantly changed the arrogant and snobbish attitude she had towards Raven. Then, using the excuse of taking care of her, she took the initiative to suggest that she spend the night with Raven.

Obviously, Raven was unwilling for that to happen. “No need, I’m fine, I don’t need to be taken care of. Moreover, you’re the eldest daughter of the Smiths, while I’m a lowly girl myself. There really is no need for you to do so.”

However, Melissa grabbed onto her arm. “Owh, why would you say something like that? Although what you said was correct, I think all humans are equal. Plus, you only got into your predicament because you went out shopping with me, so I really do feel bad about it. I’m worried that you might run into some trouble at night, so I’d better take care of you. Let’s sleep together then. It’s getting late, let’s go and take a shower.”

After that, Raven was dragged back to her room, no matter how unwilling she was. From the beginning to the end, Aristotle never laid eyes on her at all. Instead, his gaze was dead fixated on Cynthia.

Since Cynthia was going to be spending the night at Tremont Estate as well, Raven was restless and could not sleep. She did not know whether Cynthia was going to be sleeping in the same room as Aristotle, so she wanted to go out and check, but Melissa just had to be there to stop her. Raven was so

angry that she was close to losing her breath. The moment she sate she wanted to walk out of the room, Melissa would ask what she wanted to do and would help her get it done. instead. Obviously, Melissa was not going to allow Raven to even take one step out the door.

Hence, Raven was completely out of her wits and could only pretend to be asleep. She hid underneath her covers and sent Aristotle a text message secretly. 'Ares, I'm not. used to sharing a bed with someone else. I can't sleep, so could you ask Melissa to switch to another room? I can't bring it upon myself to tell her because I'm afraid she would misunderstand.'

After she sent the text message, Raven grasped her phone tightly, anticipating Aristotle's reply. Usually, Aristotle would be lying down in bed during that hour and would definitely reply when he saw her text message.

However, this time, even after waiting for a long time, there was still nothing. Raven guessed that Cynthia was most likely sleeping in Aristotle's room, which was why he did not have the time to pay attention to her.

She was living under the same roof as the man she loved, yet there was another woman staying in his room, and there was nothing she could do to stop that woman from being there. Raven felt as if there was cat in her heart that refused to listen to its instructions and kept on scratching crazily.

In fact, Raven had not guessed wrongly. Cynthia was indeed in the same room as Aristotle.

After showering, Cynthia helped Aristotle unpack the luggage he brought back from France since it was completely untouched and almost covered in dust.

When he saw how busy she was, Aristotle had an expression of one deep in thought. “I’ve got quite a lot of stuff, so I’m guessing it’s going to take a long time before everything could be unpacked and tidied up. It’s late, so why don’t we get some sleep? We’ll work on it tomorrow.”

Chapter 1895

Cynthia heard what Aristotle said, but her hands did not stop doing what they were doing. Her head was in a complete mess. “There’s no… no need. I’ll be able to be done with these now. Go ahead and get some sleep first. By the way, where am I sleeping tonight? There are so many rooms here, I’ll ask Agnes to help me clear one up.”

Aristotle walked up to her and squatted. He grabbed onto her arm with one hand while the other closed the luggage. “Just sleep with me here and stop tidying already.”

Cynthia suspected that she might have misheard. She took a look at the big bed behind him in a daze and suddenly felt her palm, which was held by him, burning up. “Y… You’re kidding, aren’t you, Ares? Although we used to sleep with each other a lot when we were kids, we’re all grown ups now, so wouldn’t that be a little inappropriate?”

Aristotle said with a straight face, “I wasn't joking.”

Cynthia panicked a little and recalled Melissa’s words once again. ‘Would Ares, whom I’ve known for so long, actually harbor a wild beast in his heart?’

While she was in a daze, Aristotle half pushed her towards the bed. “All right, let’s get some sleep. I’m turning off the lights.”

Right after he said that, the room returned to darkness. She instinctively held onto the edge of his shirt. “I think I’d better go sleep in the guest room!”

Within the darkness, Aristotle very accurately kissed Cynthia on the lips; the sweetness between her teeth was irresistible. He had long but wished to have done so, but it was a pity that Cynthia was still too young when he left the country for France. However, now, she was a full-fledged adult. All the things that he could not do in the past, he could try now.

Aristotle felt something within him that had always been chained up slowly break free. However, instead of preventing it from coming out, he wanted to let it run wild instead.

The girl he had protected for so many years belonged only to him.

“Ah…!”

Suddenly, Cynthia lightly moaned and pushed Aristotle away before taking a few steps back.

‘If I’m not wrong, his hands touched my chest just now, didn’t they?!’

It was only then that she thoroughly believed that what Melissa told her was true. ‘Men are indeed all the same. I thought we were just kissing. I didn’t think it would go any further than that!’

Cynthia did not notice that Aristotle’s body froze. Then, he very gently said, “What’s the matter? Are you… afraid of me? Or, do you not love me?”

Cynthia used both her hands to cover her chest and lightly shook her head, trying her best to pretend that she was relaxed. “N… No… I was just a little shocked, it was too sudden. Haha… We’ve been siblings for so many years, I haven’t even prepared myself to take this next step!”

Aristotle inched closer to her then reached out his hand to lift her chin. "Oh? Is that so? I thought... you would've come to the realization that you'd be my woman since you were young. So, it turns out I'm the only one who thought so, is that right? You're lacking an older brother, but t don't want to be yours. Apart from coming back to inherit my company, I've also come to 'inherit' you."

Cynthia was not especially bright, but she just had to lose all capability to think at that moment. She stood on the spot in a panic; the room was filled with Aristotle's scent. Furthermore, she was even wearing his white shift, all of which proved that they were very intimate with each other...

He once again kissed her on the lips. However, this time, she made up her mind and no longer thought about evading him anymore.

Although they had not met each other for so many years and Aristotle actually did feel rather distant when he first returned home, it was undeniable that Cynthia had always been waiting for the day he returned. It wasn't known whether it was because Plato had felt disdainful of Cynthia ever since they were kids, but she missed Aristotle more than she missed her biological brother.

When she’d found out that he would be returning, forget about how happy she felt at that moment—she thought about him so much that he would even show up in her dreams.

Chapter 1896

Cynthia had never had a relationship before, so she did not know what love was. However, one thing was for certain. She loved the feeling of being with Aristotle and how he had protected her since they were kids. Even though Aristotle had become a little domineering and “naughty”, she was not taken aback by him. Instead, she even felt a little moved, which was amazing.

It wasn’t known how they ended up in bed, with their breaths synchronized. Apart from the final step, they had done just about everything else that could be done.

Just as they were about to hit the final step, Aristotle suddenly stopped and helped pull the covers over Cynthia. “Let’s sleep, good night.”

Cynthia was still lost in a daze from before. She did not know why Aristotle had suddenly stopped, nor did she have the courage to ask him. She had struggled for so long before having persuaded herself to go with the flow…

The next day, when Cynthia woke up, Aristotle had already long gone to his company.

She took a look at the time and saw that it was past 10 AM, but she still felt a little drowsy. After all, last night got very… exciting. It was all too exhilarating for her that her mind was in a complete mess for the entire night. This was especially true when Aristotle, while asleep, was no longer as innocent as he used to be. While dreaming he would easily touch her body. In fact, he had hugged her as he slept for almost the entire night, so there was no way that Cynthia would have been able to get a good night’s sleep.

‘Is it because I’m young and brimming with youthful enthusiasm? The moment he touched me, my mind went completely blank.’

Just as she was about to get out of bed, someone suddenly knocked on the door. Cynthia was filled with embarrassment as she jumped off the bed and hurriedly got changed. She had already asked Agnes to dry clean her clothes for her the night before.

When Cynthia opened the door, she saw that standing outside was Melissa. It would seem that Melissa had also just woken up, as she let out a yawn. “Has Aristotle left? Did you guys do it yesterday? Don’t tell me nothing happened at all. I sacrificed myself last night to keep my eyes on your love rival.”

Cynthia’s face “burned up” uncontrollably. “What nonsense are you on about? I’m going to wash up. After I’m done cleaning, I’ll treat you to a meal. Is Raven around? We’ll ask her to join us if she hasn’t gone off to work.”

Melissa pursed her lips. “She’s around. I’m guessing she’s still a little weak after fainting yesterday, so Aristotle didn’t ask her to go with him to work. However, it’s a good thing she didn’t go; the thought of them being together on their journey to and fro feels unsettling to me. Speaking of which, did the two of you really not do anything?”

Cynthia weakly glared at her. “Your brain is completely filled with dirty thoughts. That’s it, I’m going to wash my face!”

Melissa refused to believe her, so she followed her into the bathroom.

Lo and behold, her efforts had not been futile, as she finally found a love bite. It was just below Cynthia’s ear. Her fair skin made the love bite even more obvious.

Melissa laughed out loud. "Hahaha, you're still planning to hide it from me. He's already kissed you so ferociously yet you te still saying. nothing happened? I told you before I that all men are the same. Now do you believe me?"

Cynthia was so embarrassed, she could not stand it any longer. She splashed cold water all over her face. "Move aside and stop laughing What's so funny? You're only good with your words, but I'm guessing you still haven't had your first kiss, have you?"

Melissa immediately retracted her smile. "Stop rubbing salt onto my wounds, would you? If it weren't for how stern my dad is, I could've made him a grandfather after a year! It's all his fault that I've never even felt a man's touch before. I'm already 20-years-old, yet he still refuses to let me go to school overseas, saying that he wouldn't be able to look after me if I'm too far away. Why didn't he have another child with mom? He's placed all his attention on me. Gosh, I'm so aggrieved."

…

In the presidential office in Tremont Tower.

Jackson hurriedly pushed open the door and entered. “Aristotle!”

Aristotle put down the files in his hands and looked up at him. “What’s the matter, Pa West?”

Jackson’s face had a complicated expression. It took him a while before the words could come out of his mouth. “You mom’s woken up!”

Chapter 1897

Aristotle's entire being stilled.

He had waited for this news for nineteen years. As time passed, the flames died little by little, the heart grew more numb, until the very thought of it was no different from a pipe dream. But today, news of it coming true reached him and plunged him into a torrent of feelings.

A long while later, he finally muttered under his breath, "When… When will they be back?"

Jackson closed the distance between them and gave the young man a light, comforting pat on the shoulders. "Not so soon, I bet; not when your mother has just woken up and is in need of some time to recover. She did sleep for nineteen years, you know. So maybe after she's recuperated enough for a while…" he answered. "We've waited for nineteen years for this, right? What's waiting for just a little bit more compared to that? The most important thing for you to do is to manage the company to the best of your abilities. That's the way to not disappoint your father's expectation."

Aristotle said nothing. Had Arianne never suffered that tragic incident in the first place, nineteen years of his life would have been spared from much of the weight he had experienced.

A month and more later, Arianne and Mark had returned.

Being in a coma and bedridden for so long, many of Arianne's motor functions were still recovering from years-long inertia, so she was wheelchair-bound for the time being. One could tell that full recovery was only going to be a long journey, but the fact that she finally woke up from her sleep was victory in and of itself.

The first thing she did after descending the plane was to take in a couple of deep breaths. The city she had left for so long—Arianne was back in its embrace again!

It was at the crux of summer that day, so Mark had kindly prepared a sunbonnet and a pair of shades for her. Lowering himself to her eye-level, he muttered softly in her ear, “We’re going home, Ari. You will be seeing your son very soon… Are you happy?”

Nineteen years were a beast that had carved changes to even the city she used to be so familiar with. Everywhere she looked, the metropolis greeted her with another foreign sight, though the strangeness did not put out even a lick of jubilance in her heart. “Of course I’m happy! Oh, Mark, I bet he’s about as tall as you now, isn’t he? He’s grown so big… without his mother… I didn’t perform my duties as his mother at all. What happens if this makes us estranged? Does he… hate me?”

“No, he doesn’t. He knows why,” Mark replied comfortingly. “Come on. Time to go home.”

On their journey home, Arianne took in the sights flitting by outside… and Mark, sitting so close to her inside.

He had been waiting for her return for nineteen years-time had taken away much from him, leaving him¨ old. He might not have spotted the first tuff of white hair yet, but she could see the forlorn tracks left by the wheel of time in his eyes. It was a sharp contrast to herself; being asleep for so long had retarded her aging speed, leaving her with more or less the same look as she was nineteen years ago.

Suddenly, the gap between their age became impossible to miss.

She was so close to losing him… permanently. The harrowing emotional rollercoaster of being so close to losing someone you love only to finally have him back in her hands scarred her. Every now and then she would fear it happening again.

Arianne laid her head on his shoulder. “Let’s live here and go nowhere else together. Let’s never leave again,” she cooed softly.

Mark held her hand. "Agree. We're not going anywhere. Our son's old enough to inherit the company now, so you have a free man in me to bring you to all kinds of places you like. We'll do whatever you want to do. Everything you've missed these nineteen years... We'll take it back.'

They reached the Tremont Estate where everyone was already by the main gate.

Arianne was moved by the sight of the gathering, though there was a good amount of nervous skittishness that stopped her from coming out of the ear. There were more than the old faces she knew- there were a few more she could not recognize. The little puppers from before had all grown up to adults. They had changed.

She scanned the crowd before her wandering eyes settled on Aristotle. She could see Mark in him right down to his eyebrows. She knew it was Smore.

Mark carried her out of the car and placed her on the wheelchair. “You must remember Tiffany and the ‘gang’. Over there, you’ve got the Smiths’ girl, Millie. And that’s Cindy. And our son.. You can guess which one he is, I bet.”

Arianne did not know what to say so she only nodded, her eyes welling up with tears.

Melissa was the first to step forward. “Hello Uncle! Aunt! Welcome home!”

Cynthia mimicked her and stepped forward. “Um, Aunt Arianne? Pa Tremont? W-Welcome back.”

Chapter 1898

Arianne grabbed the two beauties by the hands and smiled. “Thank you! Gosh, to me… it’s like you two have grown older in the blink of an eye! How gorgeous the two of you are! Cindy, where’s your brother? Plato hasn’t come home yet?”

Mentioning the name of her dear brother made Cynthia pout. “He said he was coming home half a month ago—that’s what he said. Who knows what he’s actually doing, though? Anyway, who cares about that no-good. He’s always like this anyway. Oh, um, the weather is quite hot. We should probably get inside.”

Arianne nodded and shot a brief, uneasy look at Aristotle. Not once did he look like he wanted to talk to her… Could the boy be counting his grievances in his mind? Mark and Arianne had stayed in Switzerland for so long; life must have been hard for him all alone.

It took until she reached the living room to finally notice Raven. “Millie, is this your younger sister?”

Melissa quickly sprung to correct her. “What? Noooo. This is Ares’ classmate or something; the name’s Raven Leigh. They met in France, and she’s taken up temporary lodging in the house. Really, I’m the only child at home. Mom never got around to ‘making’ a second one.”

Only now had Raven stopped being invisible to the rest of the world. She braced herself to greet Arianne. “Hello, Mrs. Tremont. Pardon me for… staying here for a while.”

Arianne’s lips thinned into a slight smile without sparing the girl any pleasantry. Instead, she turned to look at Aristotle. “Smore, I… It’s been many long, hard years. I’m sorry you had to suffer. Sorry that your Pa West and Aunt Tiffany had to experience so much trouble.”

Aristotle stared at his mother, his expression unperturbed. “I didn’t suffer. Hardships like these are a part of growing up in the Tremont family—I’ve understood that a long time ago,” he said. “The journey must have tired the two of you out, so I’ll fetch Agnes to take care of the rooms.”

He was just about to turn and take the stairs when Mark suddenly spoke, “Aristotle, wait.”

The young man halted on his step. “What’s the matter, Father?”

“You are to stay here and catch up with your mother. I’ll handle things from here,” the older Tremont said in a low voice—in a tone that was meant to be a command.

Raven observed the event unfolding quietly from the side, a little. flabbergasted at how... odd everyone seemed to act. She thought she had explored all there was to know about Aristotle, but today made her stand corrected. There were plenty more mysteries undergirding this strange family. An example of it would be how Aristotle told her that Melissa was just his childhood friend known because the Tremonts and Smiths were partners and shareholders. And yet, she distinctly heard Melissal call them "Uncle" and "Aunt", as though they were relatives.

Little did Raven know that there were more uneasy enigmas that awaited her that day.

By nightfall, the families gathered around to have dinner together.

She was the only one who did not belong; an interloper. She felt like an afterthought.

Tiffany seized the chance of everyone gathering around the table to bring up the subject of their "childhood engagement" again. "Well, Ari? Now that you're up and our kiddies have all grown up. Whaddaya' think? Shouldn't we talk about how our One True-Pair should proceed?"

Arianne beamed at Aristotle. “It depends on what those two think, though. I’m good either way. If they like each other enough that way, I’ll be pretty overjoyed!”

Cynthia lowered her eyes to her meal and played with her fork. With so many eyes on her right now, she was too embarrassed to say anything.

Aristotle was not at all like her, though. Instead, he proclaimed candidly, “I love it. I kinda like Cindy that way.”

Under the table where no eyes could pry, Raven's clutched a fistful of the tablecloth Half a year of dreaming for a better life-shattered in a single uncaring stroke half a year of living with him and yet Aristotle's heart never once beat for her.

Tiffany was ecstatic. “Ahahhaha! I think my daughter’s pretty damn smitten with Smore, too! That’s it; we’re gonna pick a date for them for their official engagement! And then, when Cindy’s graduated, they can marry one another!”

Arianne nodded. “Good idea. I can’t get around in this state, so let’s have Mark do it. I expect you guys to put on a lot more effort into this… It’s a big, happy day, after all.”

Cynthia wondered if she was dreaming. In the snap of a finger, the future of her life was decided while she was still dizzying from the speed of how things had developed!

Chapter 1899

Melissa was the type who always pushed things to go as festive as logically possible. She leaped to her feet and raised her cup, “Yo, everyone! Let’s toast to Cindy becoming my cousin-in-law!”

The crowd answered enthusiastically with their cups in the air and a roar—except Raven, who remained seated. “I have a sickly constitution. I can’t drink. I’m sorry.”

Her smile was so mechanical, her face too ashen. Something flickered in Arianne’s eyes before she replied, “Sure.”

After the revelry faded, Arianne steered her wheelchair to the courtyard. The outward appearance of the Tremont Estate seemed to have frozen in time, which was why being here made her feel so… safe.

Of course, that was despite Henry and Mary's passing. In the end, time passed and things changed, characters and objects came and went, and all these missing years left lingering regrets in their wake.

Arianne espied the silhouette standing alone at a distance and approached her, sighing, "Nothing beats being home."

Raven froze, before turning to face her. "Uh, hi…"

Arianne flashed her a smile. "Sit down. We can talk."

The invitation uneased Raven, but she sat either way. "S-Sure, I guess."

Arianne had always been good at judging characters. She could tell that the young lady before her liked her son. The thing was, this one did not incite even a mote of favor from her—Arianne wondered if it was because she bore the surname "Leigh" like a certain person before. Besides, there was only one daughter-in-law in her mind, and it was Cynthia West.

She went straight for the goal, no preambles planned. "You like Aristotle Tremont, don't you?"

Raven jerked backward a little at the shock coming out of nowhere. "Uh… Um…"

Arianne flashed her another smile. "I don't like beating around the bush, that's all. I can tell by looking at you, which is why I decided to lay the case out for you. I might not understand my son all that much yet,

but to manage to get him to bring you home all the way from France meant that you at least have some wiles about you. Doesn't mean you can design shady schemes from now on," she said. "You saw it back in dinner. He has a fiancée, and she's a woman he likes. The last thing I want is for us to be plagued by some silly debacles because of you.

“I’ve asked him about you. You saved him, and so he let you stay around him. I’ve also done some research and know that your sickness is permanent and lifelong, because you were born with congenital lung malformation, weren’t you? You were sick in the first place; it’s got nothing to do with that stab wound. I mean, thank you for saving my son, so of course, I’ll reward you for that valiant rescue. What do you want from him? You can tell me.”

Raven’s teeth dug into her lower lip as silence poured out of her.

Disgraced. She felt as though she had been humiliated. Every last of these people… None of them saw her as anything more than dirt!

A few moments passed. Arianne added, “Don’t think too hard on this; I mean nothing bad. The reason why I’m telling you to just speak up about your desired reward is because I want to repay you what you deserve. That’s all.”

Raven leaped to her feet. When she spoke, her voice was strained, forced. “I didn’t do it for money, okay? Fine, you caught me red-handed. I like Ares. I just want to quietly stay by his side—I don’t want to ruin his life or his anything, okay? I’ve faced death for him, you know. I… He’s the only warm body I have in my life.”

"But his life doesn't allow your existence. He's going to marry a woman and have kids, and none of those things has anything to do with you. He can't possibly keep you at his side forever. Your little wish is selfish and incredibly childish, not to mention completely impossible. I will not allow anything like that

to happen. I also do not want my son to be plagued by this unfortunate knot, so please, leave him as soon as possible. I'll give you a sum; you may take it as your reward."

Raven was broiling. "You... You think you can insult others just because you have money?! I've told you already didn't do it for money! I can't live without him. Unless he asks me to go, I won't. Y-You don't have the right to decide every little. thing in his life! How many years has it been since you last acted as his mother? You've only just returned and already you're forcing your commands here and there like some control freak! I don't even think he will like you forcing your will into his life like this!"

Her words, unfortunately, only served to enrage Arianne. The woman had, admittedly, been absent in Aristotle's life, but was any of that something she wanted in the first place?

Chapter 1900

Arianne sneered. "You confused, little thing. I wouldn't be daft enough to anger the mother of the man I like if I were you, girl. I would especially not say anything as low IQ as that, too. Let me be completely frank with you: no one who bears the surname of Leigh will ever get the better of me—the last one failed. Hard. I can guarantee that you'll leave us in the span of three days. If I lose, you can stay here forever. Wanna bet? I dare you."

She left her threat hanging at that and turned her wheelchair away, leaving the scorned young woman behind.

Rage came out of Raven as waves of quakes all over her body. She was lurching close to hyperventilation, but right before it became impossible to stop, she came around and battled herself to calm down. She had a feeling that even if she fainted right there and then, no one would discover her, would they?

Now that Arianne and Mark had returned, the Tremont Estate had recovered its vivacity and life. It had become merry.

And Raven Leigh had no part in it.

That night, Arianne—already lying on her bed—found sleep a little more elusive than expected. At this hour, Mark was still talking to his son in the study, while she herself never had the chance to really be with her son since her return.

The night was late, yet she heard a series of soft footsteps inching closer to her room. Thinking it was Mark, the moment the door was pushed open, Arianne asked, “Is our son asleep? What did you talk to him about?”

“It’s me… Mom.”

Hearing Aristotle addressing her, Arianne froze. Suddenly, she was a bit overwhelmed by the urge to cry. “Oh my God, my precious Smore… Why aren’t you asleep yet? What did your father say to you that it went on for so long?”

Aristotle approached her bed and sat by the bedside. “Nothing other than what a father should tell his son, really. Mom, I’m truly happy that you’re awake. And… Thank you for waking up, you know? Everyone’s been waiting for your return for nineteen years, and it’s… great that you didn’t let us down.”

Arianne raised her hand, spurred by the longing to fondle his cheek. Midway, however, she paused and let it hang in the air, worried that Aristotle would not want it.

The young man noticed, so he leaned his face forward to meet her halted hand. His eyes seemed to redden.

“Your hand is so warm, Mom. As it was back then.”

The dams in Arianne's eyes failed her, and the tears escaped and rolled down her cheeks. "But you've changed. You've grown, and God, you look so much like your father, When he was your age. Even amidst the crowd, I saw you. Knew it was you," she croaked. "Don't be afraid, Smore. From now on, this family is reunited and will stay united. I am not leaving. Never again."

Aristotle nodded quietly. The mother and the son then talked for a long, long time.

By the end of their conversation, Arianne thought of Raven. “Hey, about your, ah, classmate,” she began with an attempt to be indirect, “Shouldn’t you do something about her? Given your relationship with Cindy, her being around couldn’t have been proper.”

Aristotle seemed to already have a plan. “Understood, Mom. Don’t worry about it. I’ll talk to her tomorrow and get her to settle down elsewhere. You should get some rest. Goodnight.”

Raven Leigh had disappeared from the house on the very next day without making a splash nor bidding anyone farewell. No one knew how Aristotle did it. Regardless, Arianne was very satisfied with how her son had handled it as expected from a fruit of Mark's loins she realized, The young man was as swift and decisive as his father.

She did not ask how much money Aristotle had to give Raven to get her out of the house. It was just so insignificant.

A few days later, Mark began acting strangely.

Despite the company now in his hand, he was still frequently outside, leaving early in the morning and coming home late at night. Worried that her current state offered no strong defense to her husband's heart against outside temptations, she blocked his path one morning.

"Where are you off to again, eh? You've been acting all shady these few days, as if I'm already dead! If you're not gonna tell me the truth, you bet your name I'm not letting you out of the house."

Mark's eyes seemed to be avoiding hers. "Sigh, Ari... Please don't ask. It's simply a matter that will be solved in a few days' time. I strongly believe it's not something that you must know about-especially since it's something that will incite no interest from you. As compensation, I'll be sure to come home early."

Arianne raised her eyebrow. "Oh yeah? What sort of business would I be disinterested in that you are gung-ho about?"

He hesitated for a second before answering, "It's Aunt Shelly. She's fallen very ill… And I don't think she has much time left."