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Chapter 261

Mary pondered for a moment then replied, “George Slone.”

Arianne was taken aback. “George Sloane? Are you sure?” George Sloane, George Levin. How could it possibly be that coincidental?

Mary slapped her thigh. “I remember now, I’m certain that I’ve gotten the right name. It may have been ten years ago, but I’m not that senile yet. His name was George Sloane. He wasn’t particularly good looking, but he was an honest man. He was always industrious and conscientious in his job. He was pretty quiet too. Now that you’ve mentioned it, he was pretty lucky. He was supposed to be in the plane too, but his stomach was hit by gastric pains just before he got onto the plane. He was purging the entire morning, so the Master gave him the day off.”

For further confirmation, Arianne had asked the private investigator for George Levin’s information from the convalescent home. She had also managed to obtain a small photo. She showed it to Mary, who squinted her eyes and stared at it for a very long time. “He’s much older than he used to be, but based on his facial features, it’s definitely George. I wasn’t able to recognize him at first because of my age.”

Arianne’s hands were shaking from excitement. “Mary, have a good look. Confirm it for me, please!”

Mary was afraid that she might have been mistaken too. Hence, she showed it to Henry as well. Henry remembered everyone who came and went from Tremont Estate very clearly. He recognized him at first glance. “That is definitely Mr. Sloane, the Master’s chauffeur.”

Arianne's heart dropped all the way into her stomach when she heard this. Even though the private investigator hadn't discovered if George Levin had changed his name, that wasn't as important anymore. The fact was, George had lied to her! Since he was the Tremont Estate's former chauffeur, it wouldn't be too surprising if he had inside information. Besides, based on Mary's description, the chauffeur, George Sloane's, narrow escape from death prior to getting onto the plane felt extremely suspicious. Could it be that he had already known that something might happen to the plane?

She wanted to head to the convalescent home immediately to question George, but it was already late and he was in poor health. She was forced to leave it to the next day. There was one more suspicious aspect—George's current residence at the high-class convalescent home. How could a chauffeur possibly afford staying at such a high-class convalescent home? That is, unless his children had achieved success. After all, there were nutritional supplements and fruits in the ward. It was easy to tell that someone had given them to him.

In order to get further confirmation, she went to Henry for a more in-depth conversation. However, Henry replied succinctly, "George hadn't started a family yet when he left the Tremont Estate that year. Even if he did start a family after he left, his children wouldn't be old enough now and should still be pursuing their studies. They can't possibly shoulder the fees of a high-class convalescent home."

Arianne couldn't sleep that night, as her head was plagued with a million concerns. Her mind was always weighed down by the airplane crash from that year. Once upon a time, she shouldered this heavy burden that suffocated her.

Just as she had been tossing and turning in bed, her phone suddenly rang with a message notification. She tapped it open—it was from Tiffany, containing a screenshot of an update from Aery via a social networking application. It was a large picture of her with Mark. The background in the picture was a high class restaurant. The pair were very close together. Even though Mark's face seemed apathetic, Aery was smiling happily. There was even a caption that read: Indeed, you're always happier when you're with someone you love.

She stared at the picture, going into a daze. Wasn't Mark on a business trip? What was he doing with Aery? So, did he only promise to cease all contacts with Aery in front of her but was secretly longing for her behind her back?

Noticing her long silence, Tiffany immediately called her. "Did you see it, Ari? That's crossing the line, showing off their lovey dovey pictures in public too! I was casually swiping through my phone when I suddenly saw this. It's extremely popular because Mark's in it, so it was sent to me straight away. Look at that slut Aery, smiling so happily like that. It's nauseating! She's your half-sister, yet she's seducing your man. Doesn't it concern you?"

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Ari had always kept Mark and Aery's relationship from Tiffany, but there was no use in keeping it from her now. "Tiffie, I've been aware of this for a long time now. Aery was close to Mark at some point, but he promised that he won't contact her anymore. Don't do anything rash. I can take care of this. Promise me, don't kick up a fuss."

Tiffie was dumbfounded. "What the hell are you playing at? And I was just wondering why Aery never got along with you. So, it's not because of family issues after all, but that she's been eyeing your man! Mark is certainly formidable—marrying the older sister then stringing along the younger sister. I used to think that he was just mean to you. I never thought that he'd turn out this way. What a shame, the whole world puts him on such a pedestal, but he's actually scum! Seriously, men are all pigs!"

Arianne's head was aching, and she was panicking from feeling depressed. She had to change the topic. "By the way… I suddenly had a thought that maybe Mr. Sloane from the letter was acquainted with my father. Mr. Sloane's full name is George Sloane. He used to be a chauffeur for Mark's dad. I've also shown George Levin's picture to Henry and Mary. I can now confirm that George Levin is George Sloane. We've been tricked. Come with me to the convalescent home tomorrow after work. Get an early night's rest."

Success! Tiffany's attention shifted. "Are you serious? So it was right under your nose! We should've asked Henry and Mary in the first place. Alright. You get an early night's rest. This is more important. We'll take care of Mark later!"

Arianne had totally lost the ability to fall asleep after the call had ended. She felt her heart twist every time she thought of Mark and Aery together, doing who knows what. She never used to care about these things, but didn't he promise her? Why did he have to go back on his word?

Plagued with thoughts of the past and future, she decided to call him anyway. The phone rang for a long time before he picked it up. Mark's hazy voice answered her through the receiver as if he had been woken up from a dream and wasn't fully conscious. "Hello?"

"Where are you?" Arianne asked, trying her best to control her emotions.

Mark's voice was still hazy. "On a business trip, in the hotel. I fell asleep not too long ago… I'll be back in two days. Why did you call me all of a sudden? Has something happened?"

Arianne found him to be hilarious. This was the first time she had experienced how it felt to blow her own top at him too. "It's nothing. Bye." She ended the call immediately after their conversation. She thought that she would interrogate him angrily or scold him. To her own surprise, she simply gave him a neutral replay in the end.

Perhaps it was because she felt that she didn't have the right to do so. Why should she interrogate him?

The next day, Mark's phone call arrived in a more timely manner than her own alarm clock. She already lacked sleep and had gotten up from the wrong side of the bed. When she remembered the events from last night, she immediately disconnected the call and turned off her phone.

When she finished washing up and arrived downstairs for breakfast, Henry rushed up to her and said, "Madam, Mr. Tremont called and is asking why you aren't answering the phone and why you've turned off your phone…"

She had forgotten that he had another option—he could always call the house if she didn't answer the phone. "Isn't it obvious?" she snapped sulkily. "I don't want to answer his call. I'm hungry, time for breakfast."

Henry was rendered speechless. He lowered his voice to a whisper and said, "Madam… The call is still on hold…"

Arianne stiffened. She knew how the phone at home worked, which also meant that it was highly possible that Mark had heard everything she had said. However, she did not feel any guilt. "So what? I'm busy."

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Henry grunted in reply then picked up the phone again and mumbled a few words to Mark before ending the call. Arianne sat in front of the table, inhaling a bowl of millet porridge, still feeling emotional. "What did he say to you, Henry?"

"Mr. Tremont said 'Just you wait'..." Henry replied, looking completely serious.

“Sure. I’ll wait then… We’ll see which one of us will piss on himself first,” Arianne said guiltily as she slurped on a few mouthfuls of porridge, her eyes blinking along the way.

After work in the late afternoon, she met up with Tiffany and made a trip to the convalescent home again. They had just arrived in front of George’s room when they saw an older woman cleaning up. The room door was wide open, and there was no one inside.

“Excuse me, where is the patient from this room? Where is George Levin?” Tiffany quickly asked.

The woman stopped and stared at them. “Gone. A family member arrived first thing this morning to handle the formalities.”

This felt like a lightning bolt in a clear sky for Arianne. “Gone? Gone where?”

The woman shook her head. “I’m not too sure. I’ve heard that he isn’t transferring to a different hospital or anything like that. All he did was file for a discharge. George Levin’s been here for three years. He has cancer. When he arrived, he was told that the chances for recovery were very high if he went through surgery. I believe that his family refused to go through with it, afraid of the risks. So he’s been staying here; if he survives another day, he gets another day. I’m not sure if they’ve suddenly thought it through and decided on surgery, but it’s no use now. He wouldn’t be able to recover after dragging it out for so long.”

Arianne felt her knees buck. She had to lean against a wall to steady herself, “Ma’am… Have you met any of his family members before? What do they look like?”

The woman seemed to have a particularly profound impression of George's family. "It was a young man, very good looking. He's tall too and would always come dressed in a suit that didn't look cheap at all. He'd always bring the best things too. You can see it for yourself by the look of George's room, everything's the very best. George certainly has a happy and prosperous life. He's got such a filial son! It's surprising how he looks like that, yet his son ended up so handsome."

This was a large discrepancy from everything Arianne knew. George clearly hadn't started a family when he left the Tremonts. How could he possibly have gotten a son at that age? Even if he immediately had a son after leaving the Tremonts, the child would be slightly more than ten. He wouldn't be an adult.

She had a sinking suspicion that George's departure was somehow related to her continuous visits. He was avoiding her! What secrets would a dying man possibly want to keep? Why must he still insist on ruining her hopes and prevent her from ever having peace after all the effort she had gone through?

Tiffany did not expect this either. "Then… Could you please let us know if George or anyone from his family ever comes by again? Please take down our number. This is very important to us.

The woman was very friendly and happily took down Tiffany's number.

Arianne called the private investigator when they emerged from the hospital. "George Levin from the convalescent home filed for discharge today and left. We don't know where he's gone, but find out as soon as you can. Based on what I've been told, the person who's been visiting him regularly is a young man, very handsome and quite tall. He's good looking and has good finances. He's also been paying for George's expenses. However, he may not be his son. You can approach it from that angle. I don't care what your price is, you have to solve this for me!"

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Of course, the private investigator was elated now that money was on the line.

Tiffany touched Arianne's cheek when the call ended. "Don't be upset, Ari. It's alright. It's not like it's the first setback. We'll find George as long as he's alive. If we had known that he was Mr. Sloane, we would have pried his mouth open and prevented him from ever escaping. This man is wicked. Your life was pretty peaceful, yet he insisted on jumping out all of a sudden to tell you that your father was framed. Then he plays hide and seek with you when you arrive enthusiastically. He must think that he's off the hook just because he's dying. Why must the living have to suffer?"

Arianne smiled into the cold wind. "I will find him. He's worked for the Tremonts for so long, and I've managed to get information on him. I'll keep on looking for him as long as he's not dead."

Tiffany's phone suddenly rang. She began complaining before even looking at the screen. "My god, how annoying. I've already told my mom to get takeout and have even given her the money for it too. Why is she calling me now…" Then she looked at her phone screen and her sentence trailed off, as she was stunned. "It's not my mom. It's a stranger's number."

Arianne wasn't even paying attention. She slowly walked towards the convalescent home's main gate. Suddenly, Tiffany called out to her from behind. "Ari, your man!"

Arianne jumped in shock. "What?"

Tiffany covered the mouthpiece, completely shocked. "Mark! He's calling me now! He gave me such a fright!"

Arianne frowned. This was the first time that Mark had searched for her in such an unscrupulous manner. She took the phone from Tiffany and said, "What?"

Mark's voice exploded from the receiver, "You're asking me? What are you doing? Why did you call me all of a sudden last night and end the call? Why didn't you answer my call this morning, and turned off your phone to boot? I wouldn't have found you if I hadn't called Tiffany. I'm on the way home. You'd better come up with a good explanation before I get back."

Tiffany, having pressed herself against Arianne's ear, heard everything very clearly. She couldn't stay calm for very much longer. "You're the one who should be coming up with a good explanation! You son of a b*tch. I've never met a scumbag like you. It's already bad enough that you've been prancing around in public acting all lovey dovey with some b*tch. That social media post is trending now. Have you gone completely blind? Did you not see it at all? My Ari's certainly blind for staying with you!"

Arianne immediately ended the call in shock. "Tiffie! What are you doing? Didn't I tell you to stay calm? This is between me and him. I don't want to drag you into it. The retribution will be horrible if he gets mad. I'm certainly not scared, but I'm worried that something might happen to you."

Tiffany picked up her skirt and twirled around, flashing an angry and clearly fake smile. "I'm not afraid. My hands are clean anyway. I'm so poor that I have to rent a place. Why should I be afraid of his retribution? At the very most, he'll file a complaint to Jackson and make me lose my job. I'm not scared. I will survive, even if I have to wash dishes or become a bar hostess!"

Arianne giggled. "Honestly, you… Forget it. Forget it. Come on, let's get dinner. I have another battle to face when he gets home. How am I supposed to fight on an empty stomach? My treat. I'll use his money. Eat whatever you like!"

Tiffany's heart burned with passionate revenge when she heard that they would be spending Mark's money, "Good. Let's go to White Water Bay Café. It'd be a waste not to spend the jackass' money."

Arianne wasn't sure if she should laugh or cry. White Water Bay Café wasn't cheap at all. However, she was eager to spend that money today.

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When they arrived at White Water Bay Café, they were informed that all of the seats had been reserved. Tiffany promptly threw a tantrum. "I was already prepared for a huge meal, and now you're telling me that there are no more tables left? What on earth is this restaurant's boss thinking? Business is booming, yet he couldn't have thought of expanding into two branches? He's got no business sense at all. He must not have a high social status. He'll be stagnant for the rest of his life!"

Arianne didn't respond. She wanted to tell Tiffany that this café belonged to Jackson, but it seemed that it was better to keep her mouth shut…

"Forget it. Let's eat somewhere nearby. We'll go shopping after our meal. Let Mark stay at home and wait." Tiffany was reluctant to leave just like that. She enjoyed the meals at White Water Bay Café. The meal she had at Jackson's house made her crave it. To this day, she still wondered how Jackson had managed to come up with dishes that tasted exactly like the ones at White Water Bay Café.

Arianne saw right through Tiffany and couldn't bring herself to disappoint her.

She scanned her surroundings, locking onto a seat near a window. A middle-aged man was sitting there and had two dishes on his table. Her heart stirred when she saw the man's style of dress, which didn't seem too expensive. Besides, the dishes he had ordered weren't exactly the most expensive ones on the menu. She walked up to him and said, "Excuse me, sir. There are no more seats left. Could we share a table? There are only two of us. I'll pay for your meal. Would that be alright?"

The middle-aged man agreed without any hesitation. “Alright. Do as you like. I’m nearly done and will be leaving very soon. No need to pay for my meal. By the time I’m done, your meal will have arrived anyway. It won’t clash.”

Arianne smiled, “Thank you.”

The middle-aged man smiled shyly and didn’t say anything more. Arianne’s gaze landed on a small cake on the corner of the table. The cake was enough for one person’s share and had the words “happy birthday” written on it. Overall, it looked rather exquisite. It was clear that this cake was from White Water Bay Café. That would explain why the man, who seemed to have average finances, would come to a place like this for a meal. It’s sad to celebrate one’s birthday alone, so it was a pretty good choice for him to treat himself to a meal in a place like this.

She made an excuse, saying that she needed to use the toilet, then secretly paid for the middle-aged man’s meal. When the man left and found out that his bill was already paid for, he turned towards Arianne, looking utterly mystified. Then, it suddenly hit him. He quickly pulled out some money from his wallet. “I’ve told you that there’s no need to pay for my meal. We’re only sharing a table. It’s alright. I can’t just take the money.”

Arianne picked up the small cake and gave it to him. “Happy birthday! Consider it my treat. This cake must be a complimentary gift from White Water Bay Café, right? I’ve heard that it’s pretty delicious. Made by a high class pastry chef.”

The middle-aged man’s eyes started welling up. He quickly thanked her and rushed out of the door.

Tiffany had been watching Arianne with surprise. “You really do repay all debts, don’t you? You’ve even managed to find out that it was his birthday. I never noticed at all. I just watched him eat and leave. Don’t tell me that his table manners were impressive…”

Arianne sniggered. However, in two seconds, her smile froze in place. She noticed a tall man with good posture and a distinct aura walking into the restaurant. Who else could it be, but Mark? He actually managed to find her here!

She snatched up her bag and shielded her face with it. Tiffany did not notice Mark, so when she noticed Arianne's reaction, she immediately raised her voice and exclaimed, "If you want to laugh, just laugh. Why are you hiding your face?"

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Mark overheard her and immediately turned towards them. Death sounded pretty good to Arianne at this point. "Mark is here!"

Tiffany realized her idiocy and lowered her head, keeping silent. Mark approached them and stared at them with a forced smile. "You certainly know how to enjoy yourselves. Should I ask Jackson to personally make a meal for you?"

Arianne pricked up her ears when she heard this and mumbled glumly, "No need. I thought you'd only be coming home in two days?"

He sat down right across from them. "That was the plan, but your tantrum put me off work. So, I had to come home early. Can we discuss what you're so mad about now?"

Tiffany pulled out the screenshot that she had saved in her phone and showed it to him. "Look. Look at it yourself!"

Mark's eyes sank when he saw the update that Aery had posted up on social media. "We just happened to bump into each other. She took the picture, and I didn't reject her nor allow it. I had no idea that she had posted it up and shown it to the public. Besides, I didn't even have a meal with her. That is my explanation."

"Who're you trying to kid?" Tiffany questioned in a peculiar manner. "Would you be willing to call and confront Aery about this?"

Arianne was afraid of her going overboard, so she tugged at her sleeve from underneath the table. Mark pulled out his phone and dialed Aery's number without hesitation. Tiffany clapped her hands, "You still have her number! Why bother explaining? Hypocrite!"

He had accidentally fallen into a trap. Mark was taken aback. He cut the call and said, "Tiffany Lane… Do not start trouble…"

"Did I start this?" Tiffany snapped sulkily. "You and Aery clearly started it. Even if you're concerned about having your own reputation crumble from whatever Aery does, I'm worried about upsetting Ari. This is a family matter, so I won't say anything. If Ari decides to divorce you, I will certainly support her. Once a cheater, always a cheater. You cannot be forgiven!"

Mark's face blackened. "I did not."

The sight of Mark being scolded yet unable to blow his top greatly amused Arianne. She really wanted to laugh but was too afraid to. Her only choice was to smooth things over. "Alright, alright. You haven't eaten, have you, Mark? You're paying anyway, so…"

“Don’t feel like eating,” Mark glumly said, “You two enjoy yourselves. We’ll talk tonight when you’re home.” Then he got up and walked into White Water Bay Café’s manager’s office. It looked like he really wasn’t here to see Arianne after all.

Tiffany was feeling suspicious. “Wasn’t he here to see you? What’s he doing here then?”

“Probably to see Jackson,” Arianne replied honestly.

“Jackson? Jackson West is here?” Tiffany panicked.

“Jackson owns this restaurant.”

Tiffany was completely messed up when she heard this. “And I was just wondering why the food at his place tasted so similar to this restaurant’s. Is there a hole in his brain? Doesn’t he have enough work at the office? He even runs a restaurant. Serious…”

As expected, Jackson was in his office. He emerged soon after with Mark. Jackson glanced at Arianne and Tiffany, said a few words to the cashier at the front desk, then left with Mark. “Do you think that Jackson’s exempted the bill for us?” Tiffany asked in a lowered voice.

Arianne was unperturbed by this. “Mark would never owe anyone anything. If the bill is exempted today, he’d pay him back with another meal on a different day.” She was now more worried about her confrontation with Mark when she arrived home tonight…

Tiffany was completely satisfied after they had eaten the meal and left the restaurant. “A free meal is always awesome. Ari, I never expected such a profit from hanging out with you.”

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Arianne had completely lost the will to laugh at this point. “Alright, alright. Next time, if you have anything you want to eat, just let me know. I’ll take you there. I have to go home now. Mark’s going to nitpick at me if I get home too late.”

Tiffany noticed a taxi driving towards them from not too far away and raised her hand to flag it down. “Go on. You go on ahead.”

…

White Water Bay Villa.

Mark was smoking out of frustration, finishing his cigarettes one after another as if he had no intention of stopping.

Jackson couldn’t resist opening a window for ventilation. “Alright. What’s going on?”

Mark pulled out a file from his briefcase. “Have a look. Someone’s setting me up.”

Jackson lit up a cigarette as well then skimmed through the file. “F*ck!” he exclaimed, unable to resist blurting out a swear word, “Who’d have the balls? His objective is pretty clear; he’s after you. He’s managed to sway a few of your long-term partners in just two short months. This guy’s definitely formidable to be able to persuade your partners into abandoning you and choosing him. Who the hell is this guy?”

Mark shook his head. “I’ve checked. The opposition’s company is in a different country. The boss is a foreigner, but it’s clearly just a company-in-name. I can’t seem to find out the real puppetmaster’s identity. There have been many people who’ve tried to set me up over the years, but this is the first time anyone’s ever caused a huge distinct loss for me. Help me check things out on your end. I’ll find some time to make a trip out of the country. My international company branch offices have suffered the worst losses.”

Jackson nodded. “Got it. Better leave Eric out of this. He’s in trouble himself. I’ve heard that his company will soon be subsidized under his second brother. It’s already confirmed. They’ll be arranging for a merger soon. Eric is making preparations to leave the family and do his own thing. With his connections, starting up a new company should be easy enough.”

Mark had enough troubles of his own. He couldn’t spare the time to concern himself with Eric. “Alright. I’m tired. Update me if you find anything.”

The Tremont Estate.

Arianne heard noises signalling Mark’s return. She was feeling apprehensive. It was already 11PM. She didn’t have the energy to quarrel with him.

As usual, he had a shower immediately after his return. Then, for some reason, he lay down and went to sleep.

Arianne was puzzled. Had he lost the ability to start a fight?

Soon after, he suddenly shifted closer to her and wrapped his arms around her. She felt slightly breathless. Remembering his picture with Aery, she turned her back against him, undoubtedly sulking.

“What is it? Are you angry?” he asked, despite already knowing the answer.

“How could I possibly have the balls to be angry with you? I just don’t understand why someone as trustworthy as you would go back on your word when promising me that you would never contact Aery again. Isn’t what she did considered contacting? Even if you actually bumped into each other, like you’ve claimed, how could you indulge her in taking a picture with you and posting it up on social media too? Look at that caption. Anyone would think that you had some kind of special relationship. It’s trending on social media now. I’d love to see how you plan on explaining this one, since you’re so protective of your good guy reputation,” she grumbled in a low, muffled voice.

“Hehe… The truth will speak for itself. There’s no need for any explanations. So… You’re actually sulking at me over something like this?” His voice was tinged with hints of delight.

She was angry at him, yet he had the balls to be happy about it?

Arianne lost it. She wrenched his hand on her waist away as if this were the only way to show her displeasure.

Mark did not make any more attempts to get any closer to her, probably because he was too tired. He shuffled into a comfortable position, and his breathing gradually turned steady.

Chapter 268

Early in the morning, the very next day, Mark had disappeared. Arianne was feeling listless because of George Levin. When she went downstairs for breakfast, Mary stepped forward and began nagging. “Ari, have you been fighting with Mr. Tremont again? He just returned from his business trip last night, and he looked upset when he left this morning. You looked gloomy as well.”

Arianne shook her head, “I didn’t quarrel with him. I don’t know what’s up with him either. I’m just in a bad mood, but it has nothing to do with him. Don’t worry, Mary. I’ve been busy lately. I’ll have to work overtime over the next few days since I haven’t been working overtime lately. Please do me a favor and watch over Rice Ball.”

Mary heaved a sigh of relief. “I’m glad you haven’t been fighting. Don’t worry. Rice Ball eats better than I do. I’ve let it try every delicious thing in the house that it likes. It’s all fat now, and its tummy is nearly sweeping the ground when it walks.”

Arianne naturally trusted in Mary’s care for Rice Ball. She rushed straight to her company after breakfast. However, when she arrived, she felt something was amiss. Everyone seemed distracted. They would look toward the office from time to time. Feeling suspicious, she asked the person next to her, “What’s going on?”

“The chairman’s family has arrived,” her neighbor replied mysteriously, “They’re in the middle of a fight. You happened to arrive at the right time, it’s gotten better now. None of us are bold enough to find out. Why don’t you take a look? You’re Mrs. Tremont after all. No one would dare to do anything to you. I heard there’s going to be a change of management in the company again. Honestly, life’s been much

better for us ever since the current chairman took over. The company's been enjoying remarkable achievements and improvements. If we switch management again, this might not be the case. We're all feeling pretty apprehensive. How about you use an excuse like… sending off a document or something, to go in and have a look?"

Arianne was not the kind of person who liked standing out. However, under these circumstances, she hoped that Eric would continue managing the company as well. This had all come from Eric's painstaking efforts. It would be crossing the line if he was forced to bow out just like that. She put down her handbag and picked up a random document before walking to the office. After knocking on the door and receiving Eric's permission to enter, she pushed the door open and went in. She was taken aback at the sight of the person in his office. It was not Eric's second brother, who fought with him the last time, it was an old man with sideburns. He was currently sitting in Eric's seat, and Eric was standing next to him. This position seemed rather exaggerated.

The old man seemed too old to be Eric's father, but considering Eric's father only had kids at a slightly older age, she was not too surprised.

"Mr. Nathaniel, I heard from my colleagues that something big has happened in the office this morning. What's going on? There's a huge workload in the company at the moment so it's best to avoid affecting the employees," she said indirectly to Eric's father. She believed a biased father like him did not deserve her respect. The memory of how Eric had been beaten up greatly angered her.

Eric looked upset as well. His emotions did not seem too stable. "It's fine. Tell them to concentrate on their jobs. This is a family problem. I'll take care of it."

Eric's father cast Arianne a measuring gaze and snorted. "When did an employee gain the right to butt into our Nathaniel family affairs? Do your job. You're not paid to meddle in our affairs."

Initially, Arianne had simply intended on checking out the situation. She did not expect Eric's father's explosive temper to extend to her. She took a deep breath and said, "You're correct, sir. I'm just an employee. However, my husband and Eric are friends. I'm sure I'm not overstepping my boundary just because I made an inquiry, right? Since you brought this up, let me try reasoning with you. If you're unable to treat your children fairly as a parent, you should at least stay well within the limits. This is unfair to Eric."

Chapter 269

Eric's father brandished his walking stick forcefully. "Are you giving me parenting advice? Eric, you shouldn't bring your disreputable friends into the company. You won't be able to manage it that way. I've made my decision. I'll give you a week to hand Glide Designs over to your second brother!"

Eric balled his hands into fists. "On what grounds?"

"Because I am your father! Whatever I say, goes. Do as I say. If you're not happy, you can leave the Nathaniel family home!" Mr. Nathaniel was extremely enraged, his wizened face was completely red from anger.

Arianne was suddenly reminded of Helen. While Helen was not openly hostile, she had chosen Jean and Aery and abandoned her. Aery enjoyed everything that she did not have. She hated parents like these. Her heart burned with rage as she said, "Mr. Nathaniel, are you saying that my husband, Mark Tremont, is a disreputable friend? The Nathaniel family certainly has high standards. Us Tremonts are certainly unworthy of you. Even your own son is unworthy of you. I won't meddle in your family affairs. You're right, it has nothing to do with me. I hope you don't regret this!"

Arianne was certain no one in the capital would dare claim to have a higher social status than Mark. The Nathaniel family might enjoy wealth and high status, but their influence was not wider than Mark's. This was the first time she had ever heard anyone call Mark a disreputable friend.

As expected, various expressions flitted across Mr. Nathaniel's face when he heard Mark's name. However, as an elder, he could not bear to humble himself to apologize to Arianne. He simply turned to Eric and said, "That explains why Glide Designs performed so well after you took over. You had help from the Tremonts."

Eric felt ridiculed. "So what if I did? Mark isn't my only friend. I'm also friends with the son of the West family, Jackson West. There's more to this than you can ever imagine. I can tell you this with utmost certainty, if you hand Glide Designs over to my brother, I'll take every single one of my resources away. This includes the partnerships with the Tremonts and Wests and the company employees. I'll take anyone who's willing to come with me. When that happens, you'll undoubtedly be left with a terrible mess. Let your precious second son deal with that!"

A muffled noise rang in the air as Mr. Nathaniel raised his cane and hit Eric. "You horrible son! That's your second brother!"

Eric endured the pain as he gritted his teeth and said, "Have any of them ever treated me like a brother? My eldest brother takes care of the family business, there's no doubt that he's highly capable. However, my second brother is a useless piece of gluttonous shit. And yet, you want me to step aside and let him run the company that I've been running all on my own? I won't accept this! Am I not your son too? Why should I bear my mother's sins? Is it really all that strange to you that a woman whom you'd punched and kicked every single day would make a mistake after meeting a man who actually treated her right? If I had a choice, I'd prefer it if my mother never married you. I'd rather not be born into the Nathaniel family!"

Arianne was shocked. She did not expect the reason behind Eric's mistreatment was due to his mother's extramarital affair! She did not expect Mr. Nathaniel was a domestic abuser either. She did not think she should hear these things, but she was hesitating over leaving. She was worried Mr. Nathaniel would continue to beat Eric. Knowing Eric, he would never retaliate. This old man would definitely be more violent than Eric's second brother!

Mr. Nathaniel was so enraged that his chest rose and fell heavily. It was as though he had suffered great shame and humiliation. Even his hand that was holding his cane was trembling, and his knuckles had turned white from the sheer force of his grip. A moment passed, and he did not move to hit Eric again. Instead, he rose to his feet and snarled, “Your second brother is going to take over this company. Whether you chose to stay or leave, it’s up to you. I won’t force you! If you think you can survive after leaving the Nathaniel family, leave. Don’t ever think of coming back. The Nathaniel family will have nothing to do with you. Don’t you dare think that you can get a single cent from me when I die!”

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Eric suddenly laughed. “Alright. From now on, I have nothing to do with the Nathaniels. I’ve heard that my oldest brother has been trying to convince Mark to work with him. Do you know that Mark hasn’t agreed to it? Since Mark’s wife is here today, let me make this clear to you; you can all forget about establishing a relationship with Mark Tremont. As long as I am around, it’ll never happen! Profits may be important to Mark, but it’s not as important as friendship. If you don’t believe me, give it a try!”

Mr. Nathaniel stared at Eric before shifting his gaze to Arianne. No one could tell what he was thinking. In the end, he stayed silent and left.

Arianne heaved a sigh of relief. She was really afraid. She was afraid that not only would Mr. Nathaniel beat Eric, but he would beat her as well. That was why she had mentioned Mark in the beginning. It seemed like Mark’s name was very effective. Moreover, Mr. Nathaniel seemed to be unaware that Eric was such good friends with Mark. In a way, she had stood up for Eric as well.

After Mr. Nathaniel left, Eric slumped down into his chair and loosened his tie. “I have nothing now. The old man has allowed me to take the profits that I’ve gained during my management to convince me to step aside. This is considered a fee for my efforts. However, I can’t take a single cent out of the company funds. It’s fine. I can use that small amount as capital to start a small company, and start all over again. I refuse to believe that I’d die by the Nathaniel family’s hands!”

Arianne sighed. “I’m not sure what’s going on in your family, and I shouldn’t jump to any conclusions. However, based on my observations, they’ve crossed the line. It’s a good idea for you to leave and do your own thing. At least, you don’t have to listen to your dad anymore. He can’t make you give your own company up to your brothers after all.”

Eric smiled bitterly. “He’s actually capable of doing something like that. He would probably go on and on about how he gave me life so he wants me to repay him. Just the thought of it scares me. Do you know why he hates me so much? It’s because my mother had an affair, and she committed suicide before he could make her pay for it. For this reason, he poured all his hatred in me. Everything I do displeases him. I’m the only one among my siblings who’s actually good looking, but he hates the sight of me most of all. It’s because I look like my mom. Isn’t it absurd?”

Arianne pursed her lips. “I think he’s a psycho. I hope he won’t regret this in the future. If you’re starting your own business, I don’t mind becoming your very first employee. You know that money isn’t all that important to me.”

Eric glanced at the doorway and lowered his voice as he said, “Lily, the department supervisor, is sent to Glide by my old man. I found out about this long ago so I had a chat with her. She works for me now. Otherwise, my old man would have found out about my friendship with Mark long ago. My guess is, if the old man knew, he would have restrained himself and used me to establish a relationship with Mark. He’s probably regretting he wasn’t nicer in front of you. I’m pretty sure he’ll have things to consider when he gets home. Nevertheless, I don’t give a damn.”

Arianne smiled. “Think it over. You’re not a kid anymore. Regardless of what you do, you should have a plan. I’ll support you in whatever you do. I’m going back to work. You’d better compose yourself. Everyone in the company wants to know if you’re alright. They’re worried about you.”

Eric nodded.

When Arianne stepped out, everyone surrounded her. “What’s the update?”

She smiled and replied, “It’s nothing, but the company… might end up under Eric’s second brother’s control soon. He’s the ignorant, incompetent, and hedonistic son of the family. The company will collapse sooner or later. Eric’s preparing to start his own company. You’d better decide whether you want to leave or stay as soon as you can.”

The entire company was in an uproar.

Lily did not join in the discussion and paid attention to her work. Her future was more important to her and staying in the Nathaniel family business might be the best option for her. The only reason she had helped keep Eric’s secrets was due to her belief that one should be humble when trapped in an inferior position. No one was aware of her true intentions.