Ruling 351

Chapter 351

A car outside their window flew past them at a rapid speed. The sound of its screeching tyres pierced through their ears. The sound of it was very abrupt, a stark contrast to the silence in their car.

Arianne did not reply, but her answer was self-evident.

“F*ck!” Tiffany cursed. “I should have known! Now I finally understand why you can’t seem to fall in love with such a drop-dead gorgeous and wealthy man like Mark. You’re a harmless and innocent little lamb, and he’s a wolf who takes a bite out of you whenever he’s upset. Yet, despite everything, you still must be grateful to him for raising you!”

Arianne seemed relatively calm compared to Tiffany’s righteous indignation, “It’s not as vile as you think. I don’t love him; the only thing that bothered me about his relationship with Aery was her identity. I wasn’t too bothered with his extra-marital affairs. I admit that I was hurt after he had covered up for her, but I… can’t hate him.

“Do you know, he told me that he once loved me, after I was caught in bed with Will… I’ve let down a man who other women couldn’t bear to disappoint. What’s wrong with letting him hurt me? It doesn’t matter, we’re even. I don’t love him anyway… I’ve hurt him more than once, unintentionally. What gives me the right to play the victim?

“To this day, I don’t even know who put that picture of Will and I on the internet, or who framed Will and I the second time. I’ve committed the same mistake twice, and even though I never intended to, I was stupid enough to let it happen.”

Tiffany felt a complicated mess of emotions after hearing her explanation, “You’re still standing up for him, despite everything? Nothing is fair in this world. Do you really think that grinning and bearing it makes you both even?”

Arianne simply stared quietly into the night scenery that passed by her through the window. She remained silent from then on.

The next day, she slept all the way until noon. Mary was preparing a warm meal, afraid that she might be hungry when she woke up, “Ari, you should take a walk in the garden after your meal. It’d be good to move around. You’re expecting twins. Soon you’ll be extremely heavy and won’t be able to walk even if you wanted to.”

Arianne sat down at the dining table and waited for Mary to serve her meal as she nagged, “Many things have happened at our home lately, and Mr. Tremont can’t take care of you at the moment. You’ll have to take care of yourself. I’m old now, so it’s difficult for me to take care of every single aspect. You’re going to be a mother soon. You shouldn’t act like a child anymore.”

Arianne wasn’t too bothered by this kind of nagging. In fact, it felt earnest to her and very warm, “I understand, Mary. Are you talking about my excursion last night? I didn’t go out to fool around with Tiffie. I went to the hospital to see Mark.”

Mary was taken aback, “You’ve gone to visit Mr. Tremont? You should have gone earlier. Who’d visit a patient in the dead of the night? I thought that you young folks had gone to some sort of nightclub. I can’t allow you to make rash decisions, knowing that you’re pregnant. I was too afraid to tell Henry when I realized that you were not at home last night. Otherwise, everything would plunge into chaos, searching for you in the middle of the night. Thank goodness you got back before I had to urge you. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have been able to stretch the truth.”

Arianne chuckled, “You are very considerate, Mary. However, when have you ever seen me at a nightclub? Alright, stop worrying. Go back to work.”

Mary finally stopped nagging and gazed at her belly with a smile, “Based on the shape of your tummy, I’m certain that they’re both girls. Mr. Tremont doesn’t have any particular preference for any gender. He’ll definitely be overjoyed.”

After lunch, Arianne began to feel bored, having stayed too long at home. She played with Rice Ball for a while. Guessing that Tiffany should be awake at this point, she gave her a call, “Are you awake, Tiffie? Come shopping with me. It’s kind of boring on my own here.”

Tiffany seemed to be half awake. “I’m almost up,” she mumbled, “Wait for me. I’ll pick you up. My mom is heading out soon, so I definitely won’t have the car. I’ll take a cab.”

Arianne caught a clear whiff of a roving fragrance in the air after the call — it was chicken soup. She had just finished lunch, so that chicken soup certainly wasn’t for her. She walked to the kitchen and asked, “Mary, is that chicken soup for Mark?”

Mary uncovered it to check, then answered, “That’s right. It’s almost done. It just needs to cool for a bit before I can pack it up and have Brian send it to the hospital. Ari, did you know that Mr. Tremont stayed by your side day and night while you were in the hospital? He’s not good with words, but he’s really done a lot. Would you like to come along?”

She stared at the chicken soup in silence, “No need to trouble Brian, I’ll send this over to him later. I’ve agreed to go shopping with Tiffie. She’ll be here soon.”

Mary nodded, “Alright. It smells really good. Would you like some?”

She pouted, “No thanks, I just ate. I’ll puke if I have any more.”

Mary curved her lips reproachfully, “How could that be? Are you saying that my soup tastes bad? I’ll pack it up right now. Remember to take it with you later.”

Chapter 352

Tiffany arrived via cab. Arianne had intended on having Tiffany take one of the cars from the garage, but Henry was nowhere to be found. She had no choice but to take a random passable-looking set of car keys from the drawer in Henry’s room. She carried the chicken soup under the hot sun, waiting for Tiffany to bring the car around from the garage. A dazzling silver streak suddenly entered her sights, shooting through the sunlight. It was altogether breathtaking.

She was shocked. It was a two-seater silver sports car. Her first impression of it was how cool it looked. Driving it out would be absolutely awesome!

Tiffany was sweating from nervousness, “Ari, are you sure you want me to drive this car along with you to drop off the chicken soup? Would Mark kill you if he finds out?”

Arianne wasn’t particularly picky about cars, as long as they could be driven. Hence, she slid inside without any hesitation, “It’s fine. Just take it. He’d strangle me, not you. Besides, we’re taking this chicken soup to him, we’re not going too far. Is this car… expensive?”

Tiffany nodded like a chicken pecking on rice, her shiny almond eyes filled with excitement and joy, “That’s right, it’s not cheap. Not cheap at all. It’s the kind of car that can’t be found just anywhere, internationally limited edition. If you sell it off, you could get a damn good price for it. I was young and naive back then, and forced my dad to buy this car for me. My dad said that I was going to kill him…”

Despite having lived in the Tremont Estate for many years, Arianne had gained quite a lot of worldly experiences. However, she didn’t really understand cars that much. Why did they have to be so expensive? Of course, she had no way of understanding how Tiffany felt right now.

There was no shortage of frenzied car honking along the way from vehicles that were deeply interested in Mark’s sports car. One car even tailed them, refusing to let them go. However, they could not accelerate, as they were in the urban district. Otherwise, they would have been able to shake the car off.

Tiffany’s vanity was swelling so much that it was bursting, “What an awesome feeling. I’ve never driven such a great car or experienced anything like this. Look at that Maserati behind us, it’s been chasing us down the entire way. I never pegged Mark for a wild adrenaline demon, especially since he’s always so calm and collected.”

Arianne smiled and said nothing. She had noticed that most of the cars in the garage were sports cars. However, she had never seen Mark drive them. He probably enjoyed them when he was younger, then rarely used them as the years passed and he grew more mature. However, that didn’t mean that he no longer liked them. They were probably sentimental to him.

They arrived at the hospital and walked past the white walkway. Tiffany felt scared at the sight of the bodyguards in front of Mark’s ward, “Ari, you go. I won’t be going in. I’ll wait for you outside. Here, take the car keys. Take good care of them. I’m afraid that I might accidentally lose them.”

Arianne took the keys and walked into the ward. She had expected for Mark to be lying on the bed, still sickly after suffering heavy wounds and needing help. However, he was already sitting up and typing away on his laptop, doing his work to boot.

He shot her an indifferent glance when he realized that she had arrived, “What are you doing here?”

“I’m going shopping with Tiffie, so I thought I’d drop off some chicken soup for you along the way. Mary made it. Drink it while it’s hot.” She placed the soup on the cabinet at the head of the bed. The car keys in her hand clinked against the thermal lunch box, releasing a clear sound.

Mark cast her a sidelong glance, his expression switching into one of heartache, “You drove that car?”

“Yes,” she replied honestly, “Henry wasn’t around, so I took the car keys myself. I think it’s running out of petrol. I’ll refill it later.”

“Uh… Mm. As long as you’re happy,” he simply frowned, turning his gaze back onto the computer screen.

She wanted to persuade him against getting up and working so quickly, as he should be concentrating on recuperating, but she was afraid that he might get upset if she said too much. Hence, she kept her mouth shut and simply placed a pillow behind his back, “I’ll be leaving then. Remember to drink the soup.”

He did not respond. However, just as she arrived at the doorway, he finally spoke up, “Tell Tiffany to be careful when driving the car and don’t scratch it. Make sure to wash the car when you get home.”

Only now did she realize how much he treasured that car. That explained why his facial expression looked so weird, “Oh, got it.”

Before she could step out the door, he stopped her again, “Erm about that… Forget it. Tell Brian to get it washed when you get back. You don’t have to do it. It’s hot, don’t go out so much and try to avoid cold foods.”

She stopped, turned around, and stared at him. Her lips curved into a smirk. Suddenly, she changed the topic, “Aery came to see you at the hospital, but she couldn’t get inside. She asked me about you. It looked like she was really concerned about you. Won’t you consider seeing her?”

He could hear the mockery in her voice and could tell that she was testing him. He cast her a sidelong glance, “What are you trying to say?”

She smiled, “Nothing. I’m just passing a message. Bye.”

He watched her figure disappear behind the doorway then closed his laptop and slowly lay down. A thread of a fragrance wafted from the chicken soup at the head of his bed, but he had no intention of drinking it. Instead, he shut his eyes, exhausted.

Chapter 353

Arianne was in the shopping mall, selecting newborns’ clothes at the mommy and baby department. Every tiny outfit looked so cute. She almost instinctively focused her attention on tiny pink baby clothes because of what Mary said before, about her likely being pregnant with girls. The more she looked, the more she refused to part with them. She was sorely tempted to buy out the entire store.

Tiffany reached out and stroked her belly, “Tsk tsk. Your baby isn’t even born yet, and you already have that maternal look about you. I can’t believe that you’re going to be a mother soon. Time really does pass by very fast. If it were up to me, you wouldn’t be tiring yourself out by walking around and buying these things. Just wait for Mark to be discharged and tell him to come with you. His contributions can’t stop at the boudoir. That’s letting him off too easily.”

Her words shocked Arianne so much that she blushed. She hurriedly covered Tiffany’s mouth, “Stop it. Don’t just say whatever you want. Do you really think that someone like him would come to a place like this, just to buy baby clothes? I wouldn’t even dare dream of it.”

Tiffany’s mind immediately crafted an image of Mark with a face full of paternal love, standing there clothes shopping for his children. She immediately shivered, “You’re right. Let’s just buy a few random pieces. Then I’ll walk around with you. The water heater at my place is spoilt and I have to go home early to get it fixed. Otherwise, my mom will nag me again.”

The pair strolled from the mommy and baby department to the jewelry department. The jewellery sold in this shopping mall was all under the Tremont brand. Despite the negative press, customers still arrived in droves. After all, it was an old brand that had been around for many years, and it wasn’t like a short and tiny scandal could really gather an overall aversion.

Tiffany’s eyes were glued to a necklace, unable to turn away. That necklace was made from platinum gold, inlaid with a small sapphire gemstone on its pendant. It was shaped like a teardrop, and although it had a simplistic design, it was dazzling. When matched with just the right colors, it would look very beautiful. She couldn’t help calling out to the saleswoman, “Could you please show me this necklace?”

The saleswoman, dressed in her uniform and exquisitely made up, glanced at her and Arianne. Her eyes filled with disdain, “This necklace is a little expensive. I can’t just show it to you, and I certainly can’t let you try it on. I’ll only show it to you if you’re certain that you want this, Miss.”

Arianne lowered her head and looked at the clothes she wore — a simple white maternity dress, not particularly branded. She wore average-priced flats as well. The total amount of everything she wore was no more than $2,000. Tiffany, on the other hand, wore even simpler clothes. Had they just been given the cold shoulder?

Tiffany widened her eyes, enraged, “What do you mean? Hmm? You think we can’t afford this? How would I know if I even want to buy it if you don’t show it to me? Look, everyone here is allowed to try it on, why can’t I? You’re even showing items worth millions to your customers, and letting them try them on. You’re putting on airs just because I want to have a closer look at a $10,000 necklace? Do dogs put on airs in front of humans?”

The saleswoman rolled her eyes at her, throwing her manners out the window, “Please mind your tone, miss. Don’t stare at it blindly if you can’t afford it. A single glance from you requires payment too. I’m afraid you’ll lose your entire family’s fortune now. If you go outside and turn right, you’ll find the dollar store. You should go look around over there.”

Arianne frowned. She was about to speak up when a quiet and exquisite woman’s voice chimed in, “I’ll have that necklace. Wrap it up for me.”

Tiffany and Arianne turned to look at the same time to find a woman dressed in a tight-fitting red dress, carrying a bag in the same color and wearing a pair of red stilettos too. Her hair was curled into the most vulgar type of waves, and no amount of exquisite makeup could conceal her deep seated vulgarities. She was a stark contrast to Nina Moran, who also loved red.

The saleswoman smiled as she quickly took out the necklace. The woman did not forget to grin at Tiffany and Arianne. Her smile had an air of superiority and provocation.

Arianne frowned, reached out and snatched the necklace from the saleswoman, “My apologies, we were looking at this necklace first. I’m buying it.”

The woman in red’s face changed, “You can’t afford it, can you? Why waste your time here? Stop pretending just to impress others. I’m in a rush. Thanks.”

Seeing this, the saleswoman snatched the necklace back and Tiffany quickly said, “Just try and touch Ari. She’s pregnant, and most importantly, she’s the decision maker on whether this necklace gets sold and to whom!”

The saleswoman stared at her icily as she spoke with disdain, “She gets to decide? You sure know how to exaggerate. Any more of this, and I’ll call security.”

A tall figure cut across the crowd and approached them, “Why haven’t you bought it yet? What’s going on?”

Tiffany’s eyes narrowed, instinctively too afraid to look at the man in the eye. Usually, she would never be the one lowering her head at a time like this.

Ethan was dressed in a black suit and wearing an expensive branded watch on his wrist, exuding an aristocratic air from top to toe, completely different from his young and naive style from the past. At first glance, he looked like a young, successful business mogul or someone from a wealthy family. He noticed Tiffany and Arianne, and his gaze lingered on them momentarily before shifting towards the necklace in Arianne’s hand.

“Both of them and I are vying for the same necklace. Seeing as they were taking their time in making their purchase, I told the saleswoman to wrap it. I never thought that they’d stand in my way, Mr. Connor…” the woman in red complained grievously.

Before she could finish her complaint, Ethan cut her off with a deadpan expression, “Wrap that necklace up for me” —he paused for two seconds and looked at Tiffany— “Give it to that woman.”

Chapter 354

The woman in red was shocked. She stood behind Ethan, too afraid to speak. She was only a secretary, and the necklace was supposed to be for a female client.

Tiffany did not expect for Ethan to buy something for her like that. She sneered, “I’ve already eaten the Chinese-style omelette wraps that you previously bought. Forget about the necklace. I can’t afford it, and I certainly can’t afford having you buy it for me.”

Arianne pulled out her black card from her bag, “Swipe it on mine. I’m buying it.”

Ethan insisted on swiping his card, completely unaffected by Tiffany’s rejection and icy words.

He pointed at another necklace as he swiped the card, “Wrap that one up for me as well.”

Tiffany seemed to have been completely upset. She threw the wrapped up necklace onto the ground, “Ethan, are you trying to showcase your superiority to me? Do you find this entertaining? It’s because I used to spend money on you, isn’t it? You saw it as an insult, right? So you’re trying to get back at me?”

Ethan pursed his lips and stared at her, “I am not. You’re overthinking it. You like it, so I’m giving it to you. It’s that simple.”

That humiliating feeling was still fresh in her mind, the scene of their break up playing vividly before her eyes. Tiffany took a deep breath and forced herself to calm down, “No need. You’ve already paid me everything you owed me. We’re done. Stop showing off your wealth extravagantly. I’m now a penniless girl. There is nothing between us now. Take this necklace and give it to someone else.” Then, she turned around and walked away. Arianne quickly rushed after her.

“Mr… Connor, are you alright?” the woman in red asked carefully.

“I’m fine,” Ethan picked up the necklace from the ground and stared after Tiffany as she left and sighed, “Don’t you know who that was?”

He was speaking to the saleswoman.

The saleswoman was confused, “Huh…?”

“The pregnant one is your boss’s wife, Arianne Wynn. Everything here belongs to her. Next time, don’t judge someone based on their clothes. Superficial.” Then, he took the necklace that was meant for Tiffany and headed towards the shopping mall entrance.

The woman in red called out after him from behind, “Mr. Connor, shall I send the other one over to Miss Sanders?”

Ethan did not turn around. Instead, he waved his hand to indicate his approval.

Outside, Tiffany had been stuck in a jam for more than half a day after driving the car out of the car park. There were many people in the shopping mall at this hour, and the parking lot was pretty much full.

She finally managed to drive out onto the road. Arianne had just entered the car when Ethan suddenly popped out again. Tiffany was enraged at the sight of him. She winded down the window and glared angrily at him, “Would you believe that I’d run you over right now? I’d have done it long ago if this car were mine!”

Ethan handed the necklace over to her, “Could you not be so spiky? You were always generous to me, so I’m doing the same to you now. This is a mutual contribution between two people. It has nothing to do with humiliation.”

Tiffany turned her head to one side, and Ethan stuffed the necklace into her hands. Then he turned around and left. She wanted to throw the necklace away, but she restrained herself when she remembered the price. “Men are all bastards,” she cursed, then hit the accelerator.

Once she had arrived back at the Tremont Estate, Arianne took out the tiny clothes and sorted them out. Seeing that she had prepared clothes for the babies so early, Mary smiled and said, “Don’t you think you’re a little too early? What if I was mistaken, and you end up giving birth to two little boys? These pinkish clothes won’t really suit them, will they?”

The more Arianne stared at the clothes, the more she liked them, “This is fine. If I do have sons, they can still wear these. I hope that it’ll be girls though. Daughters will be the apple of a mother’s eye. Sons are too playful.”

Brian arrived home at around six in the evening. Mary did not call Arianne to dinner early today. When he arrived, pushing Mark in a wheelchair, Arianne understood why.

Based on Mary’s expression, it was clear that Mark had been discharged from the hospital today, and everyone else knew. Only Arianne was kept in the dark and had foolishly gone to drop off some chicken soup for him in the afternoon, thinking that he still had to stay at the hospital for a while.

“Would you like to eat first, Sir?” Henry asked.

Mark nodded. His cool and grim face was as calm as the surface of water. Brian pushed his wheelchair to the dining room and Arianne followed suit, “You’re already discharged? So early?”

“Mm. Staying in the hospital won’t do any good, and I have to avoid getting snapped by the press too,” Mark was transferred from the wheelchair to a normal chair with Brian’s help. His hair seemed to have been cut shorter in the style of a crew cut. The bandages around his head wound had been replaced. The haircut was probably to ease the healing process.

Curious, yet unsure of how to tread, Arianne said, “Your leg…” His leg seemed to have been hurt as well.

“Don’t worry. The lower half of my body is functioning just fine. Just a few broken bones in my leg,” he replied, staring at her teasingly with his intense eyes.

She blushed, cleared her throat and banged on the table like a child, “Mary, serve the meal. I’m starving!”

Mary grunted in reply and served the dishes onto the table with a grin, “You’re finally discharged, sir. Now Mrs. Tremont won’t have to run all the way to the hospital in the middle of the night. Mrs. Tremont went and bought a lot of baby clothes this afternoon, they’re all pink and cute.”

Arianne lowered her head as much as possible. Mary was always teasing her like this, making her feel very embarrassed...

Chapter 355

Once the dishes had been served, she picked up her knife and fork enthusiastically, then buried her head into her food before suddenly realizing that there was a certain someone sitting across from her. All of a sudden, she felt embarrassed.

Mark had just been discharged and did not have a very good appetite. He nibbled a little before Brian sent him back to his room. By the time Arianne went back upstairs, Brian had already washed and cleaned him. Due to his wounds, he could not hop into the shower straightaway. This was torture to a germaphobe like Mark.

“I’ll sleep in the guest room.” She found the sight of the wounds riddled all over his body to be very frightening. She was worried about accidentally touching them in the middle of the night. She couldn’t bear to think of the consequences.

“Mm,” he replied casually. He had long been afraid of her belly anyway, so it would be a good idea to sleep in separate beds.

After an unknown amount of time, Arianne was awakened by a noise. She picked up her phone to check the time — it was one in the morning. No one would dare make any noise in the middle of the night while Mark was at home. She got up and went to check at the stairway. A guest seemed to have arrived, and Henry was attending to him.

After a while, the noise died down and she went back to her room to sleep. Sleep soon engulfed her and she awoke past ten in the morning the next day.

She remembered the noises she had heard last night during breakfast and asked Mary, “Did someone visit the estate last night?”

Mary curled her lips, looking bad-tempered, “Yes, a bad seed. Mr. Tremont refused to see him and told Henry to send him away. If you asked me, if you give someone money once, he’ll definitely come again. You’ll never get rid of him.”

“Who was it?” Arianne asked, confused.

Mary lowered her voice, “Mr. Tremont’s uncle. He was always bad news, even at a young age. He committed a crime and was found out by the Old Mr. Tremont—that is, the current Mr. Tremont’s grandfather—then, was chased out of the house. At the time, the house was in a huge mess and many people died. That fellow never showed his face, and I suppose he’s become so poor that he can’t survive any longer, so he’s come to ask Mr. Tremont for some money. After the older Mr. Tremont chased that hooligan away, he left a letter saying that the Tremonts’ wealth had nothing to do with him, and I think he was given some money to ensure that he stayed away. He has probably spent it all and has now gotten desperate. He’s still scum.”

Arianne had no memory of this “uncle” that Mary had mentioned. He was probably thrown out of the Tremont Estate before her arrival.

Initially, she had thought that this was nothing more than a small incident. To her surprise, two days later, the “bad seed” that Mary had mentioned came knocking on their door again. This time, it was during the daytime. Arianne was around too, and this was considered her first meeting with this “uncle”. Honestly, even though Mark’s uncle was much older, he was still rather charming. Genetics were a good thing.

“You’re Arianne, aren’t you? I’ve heard that you and Mark got married. Why, you’re pregnant too. Congratulations.”

Arianne smiled politely and addressed him as “Uncle Jude” but found that the way he looked at her was inappropriate. After all, which elder would stare at a woman’s belly and refuse to turn away.

“Stay away from her, Jude,” Mark appeared at the top of the staircase, still seated on a wheelchair, releasing a suffocating aura. His ice-cold eyes were so intense that they seemed bottomless, like the bottoms of wells in the middle of the night.

Arianne was shocked. Mark would never act this way in front of others. It was clear that he really didn’t like his uncle.

Jude Tremont seemed unperturbed by Mark’s blunt form of address and rudeness to him. He grinned casually and walked up the stairs, “Mark, I’ve considered some things when I got home. I’ve just

returned to the country and I don't have a single cent on me for rent or living expenses. I'll need time to find a job. The money you gave me certainly won't be enough."

Money, again. Arianne sighed. Looks like Mary was right.

Mark wheeled himself to the study with a deadpan look, "Come with me."

Jude was dressed like a beggar, probably to garner sympathy. If one really had to differentiate, he was cleaner than a beggar and was wearing flip-flops. The sight of it did not blend well with such a luxurious setting.

In the study, Mark lowered his voice on purpose. His cold, deep and grim voice sounded as if he had come from the depths of hell, "Do you want to die?"

Jude's expression stiffened. A glint of fear flashed across his eyes. Then, as if he remembered something, he sat on Mark's regular office chair, "Stop trying to scare me, Mark. I know that you're just as vicious as your dad. You two have inherited that old man's cold-hearted mercilessness. I may be useless, but I'm the most humane one in the Tremont family. You can't deny that, right? I just want money, no need to kick up a fuss. It's not like you're lacking in that department. After all, I'm probably your only relative. Oh no, I almost forgot, you have a half-brother, same father, different mother. Although, he's a bast*rd."

Mark gently drummed his slender fingers rhythmically against his wheelchair. His dark eyes rose with ripples of emotion, "That's right, I have no lack of money. However, I don't like being threatened or to pander to someone's never-ending demands. Grandpa gave you money when he disowned you from the Tremont family that year. Aside from your name, you have no connection to the Tremonts. I helped you out of kindness. It's also my prerogative to refuse you help."

Chapter 356

Jude waved his hand with mild annoyance, “Don’t give me that crap. When a man has nowhere else to go and no means of survival, he can only think of how to survive by any means. If you don’t like it, that’s your business. I just want money. What do you think your father would do if word of his son from an extramarital affair ever got out? The perfect Tremont Enterprise, built from generations of Tremont blood, sweat and tears, would be gone, along with your father’s kindly image. This would definitely make headline news. If you don’t give me the money, I’ll have no choice but to sell the Tremont family secrets to the media. Then, the media will certainly help you unearth your long-lost brother, who’d come back to take half of the family fortune. You’d lose even more. I don’t want much, just give me a hundred million and I’ll be off your back.”

Mark’s face seemed to lack emotions. He picked up the phone on his desk and called Henry. Henry walked in and handed him a cheque, “Sir, are you sure you want to do this?”

Mark calmly wrote a sum of money on the cheque, “Do you have a better idea?”

Henry kept his mouth shut from then on. Jude impatiently snatched the cheque from Mark’s hand, “I always knew that you were a good nephew. Don’t you worry. I will never breathe a word about the Tremonts. Aside from your father’s bast*rd son, there are also a few rotten scandals from two generations of the Tremont family. I’ll let them all rotten in my stomach then.”

Mark curled the corners of his lips into a half-smile, “I believe that you… will let it all rot in your stomach.”

Once Jude had left, Henry spoke up, “Asking for a hundred million dollars from the moment he opens his mouth, he certainly has a big appetite. This won’t be the last time, sir. Is there a need for… special management?”

Mark gently raised his handsome brow, “What do you think? I’ve avoided doing this for many years, but he’s dug his own grave. He’s an illegal immigrant, half alive and half dead. No one would even notice if he disappears. Don’t let him into my sight again.”

“Yes,” Henry nodded.

Just as Henry opened the study door, the cup of black tea in Arianne’s hand crashed onto the ground. The glass shards shattered onto the ground. Her eyes were filled with fear and concern, “I… I was just bringing Mark his tea. I didn’t hear a thing…”

Henry’s face stiffened. He turned towards Mark, who was still in the room.

Mark rubbed his brows in frustration, “Go on ahead, Henry. It’s fine.”

Henry called for someone to clean up the mess. Arianne wanted to leave with him, until Mark stopped her, “Come here, Arianne.”

She stiffened. The conversation that she had accidentally overheard outside the study was still playing in her mind on repeat. Her impression of Mark was a man who was kind to everyone and harsh only to her. However, she also thought he was good to her sometimes too. All of his “wickedness” would be directed solely at her. He was only a businessman. Despite being bossy and domineering due to his wealth and power, she never thought that he would be capable of doing anything so terrifying. What did he mean when he said “make Jude disappear”? So the half-brother that Charles Moran had mentioned actually existed.

She gathered up her courage and stepped forward, “Shall I get you another cup…?”

He reached out and grabbed her hand, the expression on his face unreadable, “You heard everything, haven’t you? Ask your questions then.”

She bit her lips, “What are you going to do to Jude?” She was too afraid to ask about the ba*tard son since Mark was extremely conflicted about the matter when Charles Moran brought it up. He had reacted as if he had no idea about it. Now, he didn’t seem too surprised. He had probably launched an investigation then. He had always been prudent in everything he did, so it was no surprise.

He gently shut his eyes, “Is that what you heard? I just don’t want him to ever come near me. That’s all. What else? Am I supposed to kill him?”

She secretly heaved a sigh of relief, “That’s good… He’s still your uncle, regardless of his sins. You shouldn’t be too cruel. By the way, how are things going with your company?”

He stared into her pure, shining eyes, then massaged the back of her hand with his thumb, “My company has always been fine. That small trick is nothing to me. The international branches will close if I want them to, and open if I want them to. That tiny, insignificant flea will show itself soon. Focus on taking care of the babies, you don’t have to concern yourself with anything else.”

She thought that she had been hearing things. She stared at the clam look on his face and felt slightly distracted. He had clearly been beaten black and blue a while back, just for the sake of his company. In fact, he was so busy that he couldn’t contact the house. He had even gotten into an accident, just to see the information that Helen had gathered as soon as possible. She thought that he looked wretched when he was faced with media interviews over the collapse of his international branches. Now it seemed that he was not.

Bright Incorporated, the company under the West family.

Tiffany had grown haggard from her workload. Jackson suddenly sent her a message: Come with me to a party. You'll be paid for your efforts.

She admitted it — she was a money-grubber. When she saw the words "you'll be paid for your efforts", she immediately agreed. She wrote: Same rules. I will come, but you'll have to arrange the rest."

Jackson replied to her with an "OK". The pair had reached a consensus.

Tiffany did not go home after work. She changed her clothes in Jackson's office and did her make up. She was very well versed with high society parties. This was easy money.

Chapter 357

The fact that Jackson left Tiffany alone as soon as they arrived at the banquet hardly bothered her. She was content with simply enjoying her time there and all of the luxuries the party had to offer, even if she was surrounded by strangers.

The banquet hall, glowing in its opulent, golden glory, was the perfect site for the highfalutin ado typical of the upper-classes. Here, one could find famed elites in stylish garments as well as gentlemen and ladies in their most debonair manners. They were actors, all of them being perfectly aware of their roles and being more than keen to play them flawlessly.

Some of those mingling among genuine genteel, however, were also looking for a shortcut to high society — even if it meant having to sacrifice what little they had to complete the ruse. These types of men were business hawks, and the women gold diggers. Masked under layers of expensive brand-wears and jewellery, there might as well be an indulgent husk piloted by a compromised soul.

“What a coincidence seeing you in this part of the world.”

An oddly-familiar voice waltzed into Tiffany’s ears from behind, startling her. Steadying herself, she spun around and met Ethan Connor’s gaze.

“Why? Can someone like me not appear in a place like this?” she countered. “Honestly, these kinds of occasions are made for girls like me. Who knows, I might meet my Prince-billionaire-Charming right here and spring up the social ladder, don’t you think?”

Ethan gracefully nabbed two glasses of champagne from a waiter standing nearby and handed one of them to her. “Now, now. Whatever’s between us doesn’t warrant that much hostility.”

Tiffany accepted the glass. She could feel faint tinges of glum welling up in her chest, but it did not stop her from delivering another barbed repartee, “Unwarranted, you say? Ha! I beg to differ. What now? You put on a branded suit and some expensive watch after kicking me to the sidewalk, which makes me wonder, who’s the new sucker you’re currently mooching to get here? Have you brought her along? Frankly, I’m interested to see just how filthy-low you can go. Many gold-digging men won’t mind kissing the lips of some old, ugly, fat b*tches if she’s rich. Will you prove yourself to be one of them, hmm?”

The corner of Ethan’s lips curled up into a smile, utterly unbothered by her flippant accusation. “I didn’t come here by mooching on anyone. In fact, the only person who ever seemed like a ticket up society was you — and even then, I’ve never seen you like that.”

Tiffany's eyes darted aside awkwardly. Her heart still could not stop accelerating whenever she espied every little blink of his eyes or the curvature above his jaw. Was it a cursed after-effect of having loved him with all of her being before? It pained her to admit it, but the Ethan now who had replaced his past, unruly waywardness with a suit and refined gentlemanliness was plain heart-throbbing. And now here he was, saying these ridiculous words that, even more ridiculously, made her heart thump.

Tiffany, however, prided herself as someone who would not only let the past go but also never deign to plead for someone to come back to her. "Please, save your breath from those cheesy pick-up lines. Really missing your old flame after hanging out in the hedonistic world for a while, aren't you?" she snapped. "Unfortunately for you, I'm not a deb who will spread her legs for any man who says pretty words and spends a little cash on her, so I suggest you move on to whatever agenda of the day you have right now. I don't care if it's to expand your business or social-engineering, I just don't make a habit out of wasting time with someone like you."

Ethan shrugged in blasé. "Understood. I'll take my leave now."

Tiffany watched his back disappearing in the distance and drew out a sigh of relief. She had so much more acerbic and tart remarks to say to him, yet she could not shake the mild feeling of guilt and do it. Tiffany felt as though she owed Ethan some leeway just by holding onto the necklace he had forcefully gifted her, though she never planned to wear it. Of course, she very much wanted more to return it, but having not expected to see him here, she left it at home.

Time trickled. It was now a little past nine, and the hubbub in the banquet was starting to heat up. Tiffany, however, was beginning to feel bored.

She scanned her surroundings and discovered, to her displeasure, that Jackson ("that no-good jerk," she huffed) West was deep in a cordial conversation with Ethan. It was by no means a one-on-one discussion, yet Tiffany felt self-conscious watching them interact. She was here as Jackson's partner, for crying out loud — how could her partner chat so happily with her ex-boyfriend?

The more she watched them, the more miffed she became. She grabbed a glass and drank it clean, then went for one shot after another until her cheeks began to burn a little.

A middle-aged man with a prominent potbelly sauntered toward her with a greasy, perverted smile under his coy eyes. “Good evening, mademoiselle! What is a fine young lady like you doing, drinking alone like this?” he drawled.

Tiffany’s first instinct was to rebuff the man, but her boredom spurred her into striking a conversation instead. “You look like my father’s age.”

The middle-aged man laughed wryly before patting her shoulders. “Your father? Oh, no! Believe it or not, I’m young enough to be your brother! You might think I’m old, but I’m only thirty-five.”

Tiffany felt her stomach churn at the brazen lie. How could someone “thirty-five” look like a fifty-five-year-old? Still, she let the man’s farce slide past and asked, “Okay then, Mister. Do you know that guy over there?”

The man followed her eyes to Ethan. “Oh-ho, interested in him? He’s just some so-called ‘rising star’ in the business world who came out of nowhere half a year ago and became pretty big. Pretty big,” the man explained. “I’ve never even heard of this punk before, but he’s young, and he’s quite nice to look at, so I guess he’s a banger for little chicks like you. I heard he bought some cheap estate that nobody wanted, and then a few days later there’s suddenly news about its development, and all of a sudden, the price went skyrocketing. He’s got a sharp eye; I’ll give ‘em that. That plot of land was like trash he picked up during a walk, you know. It wasn’t worth anything because nobody knew that there’s still any value in that godforsaken place. But now? If he sells it, oh, if he sells it…”

Tiffany was not sure where the urge to fish for Ethan's information came from; nevertheless, she was hardly surprised by the exposition. She had always thought that there was more to Ethan than he let on. He had a knack for making things work for him, and no small detail was ever lost to his eyes, no matter how nondescript.

He was now a rising star — while Tiffany had fallen into the nadir.

Chapter 358

An unwanted hand snaked around her waist suddenly before the middle-aged man's breathy voice loomed close to Tiffany's ear, "That kind of sleaze won't give you the time of their day, my dear. But I will. I know girls like you very well, like the back of my hand. You're all looking for a sugar daddy, aren't you? How about I be direct with ya—let's spend some time together tonight. If you make me a happy man, I'll make you a happy woman, starting from a luxury apartment."

Tiffany's face twisted into a glower a split second before she decked the man's face hard. As a stark, scarlet handprint surfaced on his cheek, she shrieked hotly, "Fat chance if I'll sleep with a disgusting horndog like you!"

Their altercation silenced the room instantly; every pair of eyes was now turned to the pair. At a distance, the conversational smile on Jackson's face froze before he approached them quickly, "What's the matter?"

The look on the middle-aged man's face was of one desperately evading scrutiny. "M-Mr. West! N-n-nothing's happened! I was just pulling her legs… Is she a friend of yours, by any chance?"

Shadows crossed into Ethan's eyes. Silently, he shuffled his half-started step back to himself. At the same time, Jackson tilted his head slightly and bristled, "The door's over there."

The middle-aged man's face was bright red. Too embarrassed to stay, he glumly dashed out of the banquet.

Tiffany was not any less embarrassed. After all, she had come to the party as Jackson's companion, yet she ended up causing a scene. "God, how much longer are we going to stay here? I don't wanna be here anymore," she whined.

Jackson combed her silky hair with his fingers and replied gently, "Give me ten more minutes. Don't worry, just stick close to me."

Blushes — red enough to raise eyebrows — stained her cheeks. She snaked her hand to an elusive spot on his arm and gave a meaningful pinch. "You better not try to take advantage of me, bigshot," she growled through clenched teeth. "Touch me like that again, and I'll have you for breakfast."

Jackson could only mask his annoyance under an "everything-is-fine" look. Drawing her hand into a hook around his arm, he said, "Let's just go."

Jackson brought Tiffany back to his spot before the commotion, and the men resumed their discussion. Ethan stood to Tiffany's left, but she avoided his eyes by staring at her shoes.

She fidgeted with Jackson's sleeves to stave off her self-consciousness, but the more she felt Ethan's gaze, the less she wanted to raise her head.

Then, out of the blue, she heard Ethan announce, “I still have some matters to attend to tonight. Please, carry on without me.” With that, he turned and headed for the entrance.

Barely ten minutes later (or possibly only about five), Jackson fulfilled his promise, as he too abandoned the conversation. “Excuse me as well, lads. There’s somewhere else I need to be,” he declared.

Tiffany was nonplussed. “I thought you said ten more minutes?”

“Ten minutes as the max, really. Pragmatically, it’s not so different to end this within ten minutes and at the tenth minute. Look, weren’t you whining about leaving just a few moments ago? Can you appreciate me being considerate for once?”

She rolled her eyes. “Quit bullsh*tting and pay up.”

They headed to the car. While Tiffany was taking her seat, instead of starting the engine, the young man began furiously typing away at his phone as he stared in the direction Ethan left.

Tiffany commanded matter-of-factly after buckling up, “Send me home right now. Wearing stilettos for long hours is killing me.”

Jackson obeyed, taking his eyes away from whatever was interesting him before stepping on the pedal. Then, in a flash, his phone beeped.

Tiffany turned to his phone and glanced at the screen out of habit — and froze. Jackson was quick to steal his phone away from her sight, but a second was enough to confirm that Ethan's name was mentioned.

She could not stifle the ensuing curiosity. "Who are you texting? Why is Ethan mentioned?"

"Nothing important; just some usual business dealings. Like you would understand," Jackson answered, deadpanned.

"Are you… are you working together with Ethan?"

"No. The Connors don't actually work in real estate. This Ethan, specifically, deals with housing investments. Honestly, I'm just helping out a friend," Jackson answered, his reluctance to divulge in the specifics growing more apparent.

"Ya know, Ethan was my ex. Do you want my help in messing him up?" Tiffany said half-jokingly.

Strangely, Jackson followed that question with silence. It was only a few seconds later when he said, "I know about that, and the answer is no, I don't need it. Anyway, I'll be sending you home now. The payment will come a little later."

Bringing up Tiffany's payment was a sign that the pair's cooperation — and this conversation — had ended. Tiffany resigned to silence, leaning her head on the headset and closing her eyes.

When the car stopped downstairs, she kicked her heels off and lifted it in her hands, opting to head back into her residence bare-footed. Jackson watched her fading out of his sight before driving away. En route, he called a number.

“The thing’s with me. Come and collect it and send it in for examination ASAP. I’m certain that it belongs to Ethan Connor.”

-

Jude Tremont was incarcerated a month later.

It was the kind of news people would dance to, yet Arianne felt unnerved by it. Somehow, she had the nagging feeling that Mark had something to do with it, especially when he had made it clear that he never wanted to see Jude ever again.

Mary informed Arianne that Jude was sentenced to life imprisonment for a slew of appalling crimes over twenty years. He had two rape allegations, five violent assault cases that severely crippled other parties, as well as a list of several gambling frauds and illegal prostitution. Jude had committed them before the Tremonts had expulsed him, but the cops had been keeping tabs.

What finally landed Jude to a lifetime of prison, however, were the crimes he had done after the family disowned him. He had his hands on every sickening crime under the sun, but most of all, he had extorted Mark for a hundred million dollars.

Chapter 359

Arianne had little doubt that he orchestrated it: Mark Tremont had sent his own biological uncle to jail, collecting every single dime of that one hundred million dollars back in the process.

She was at a loss as to how to judge this turn of events. Sure, Jude was a trashy piece of sh*t and an affront to human decency, so he deserved the deserts he got. However, the fact that it was Mark, out of anyone else, who became Jude's ultimate undoing left a strange taste in her mouth. The way he had given away that much money without putting up a fight made the extortion accusation appear less genuine and more like a bait begging for Jude to bite.

"Mr. West, good day. Mr.Tremont is in his study."

Spurred by Henry's greeting, Arianne looked up from her spot in the living room couch and caught Jackson entering through the front door. He greeted the girl with a curt nod before hurrying up the stairs.

Arianne found it mind-boggling. Mark had recovered tremendously this month; he could now walk around on his own as he pleased and was more than capable of meeting Jackson downstairs. So why did he ask his guest to go to his study instead?

In fact, come to think of it, neither Jackson nor Eric had ever been frequent visitors to the Tremont Estate at all.

Back in the study, Jackson laid the result of a DNA examination before Mark and said, "This is the verdict right here. Any more points of suspicion?"

Mark digested the details in the report thoroughly. “Tiffany Lane’s incident… He’s also behind it, isn’t he?”

Lividity bubbled behind Jackson’s eyes. “No doubt about it; he colluded with a third party to carry out the heist. Then, shortly after their success, he silenced all of his co-conspirators to cover himself, and now this so-called lost stash of jewelry is in his hands. Fast-forward now, he founded a company and bought an unwanted estate at a bottom-barrel price. Then, be it his luck or something else at play, the area around it began undergoing rapid development, and now everything within that plot of land has turned into gold.”

The pages creased at the force of Mark’s tightening fingers. He crumpled it into a ball and hurled it into the bin before looking up with a dangerous layer of frost over his eyes. “I’ve been very patient with him, but no more. He’s invited Death himself.”

“The Lane family suffers the most injustice. I mean, Tiffany had been with him for three years. For three bloody years, the Lanes had been investing money on him to help him grow — and then he turned around and bit the hands that had fed him,” Jackson fumed, his teeth clenching. “I despise trash who mooch on their women, but to commit such an atrocity… This takes the cake. I can only imagine how much it will break Tiffany if she finds out.”

Mark considered the furious man before him, and his lips quivered into a meaningful smile. “Hmm. You’re curiously, positively pissed about this. Are you mad on Tiffany’s behalf, or am I reading too much, and you ‘just’ despise the things he did?”

Jackson looked suspiciously disconcerted. “Don’t make jokes at my expense, would ya’? I feel sorry for her — wouldn’t you be, when you see someone so painfully unaware that the person she had trusted was the one who double-crossed her? …Look, I’ve summed up and delivered everything you needed through email, so I’ll be going now. I’ll leave your next move up to you.”

Mark left his house by six in the evening. It was the first time he was left on his own since the accident, but his injuries had healed well enough that a casual bystander would pass him for his usual, healthy self. The only glaring difference between then and now was Mark's hair, which had yet to grow back to its pre-accident length.

As any keen observant might notice, the way a man wears his hair could define the air he projects. Mark had always been famous for his stoic, steely aura at first glance, but at the very least, his previous hairstyle managed to bring a sense of earnest softness whenever he so much as curled his lips. His current, trimmed hair, however, only succeeded in emphasizing the frost in his mien when his smile was absent.

Arianne, meanwhile, had been feeling lethargic for the whole day; by dinnertime, she had been seized by intense bouts of haziness. It was rather unexpected, as she had not gone to work and had been enjoying the comforts of her home ever since.

Halfway through her meal, Arianne began to notice her symptoms escalating. The daze had turned into a headache, and her stomach seemed to be rebelling against her dinner. She rose to her feet, intending to reach the bathroom before she retched — and felt an alarming deluge of hot liquid thrashing below her.

Arianna fell back onto her chair in horror as the lower half of her nightgown blossomed into gruesome red.

For a moment, all she could do was stare in aghast. Half a minute passed, and she finally found her voice to squeak, "M-M-Mary… Mary!"

The woman dashed toward her from the kitchen, shouting, "What's the matter, Ari?"

Tears had begun coursing down her cheeks. “I-I’m… I’m bleeding…” she whispered.

Poor Mary was confounded. “Bleeding? Where—?”

“D-down… Down here…” A breathless rattle.

Realization struck Mary and twisted her face into a horrified grimace as she cried at the top of her lungs, “Henry, get the car now! She needs to get to the hospital — right now!”

--

Within the halls of a private dining room inside White Water Bay Café, Mark and Charles Moran sat across each other.

Mark had come to see him with a mission, so he skipped the preambles and went straight to the point. “I’ll cut the chase, Uncle. How much had Dad told you about his bastard son?”

Charles had responded to Mark’s dinner invitation at the presumption that it was going to be a hearty reunion between old friends, so Mark’s question came out like a nuke. “Whoa there, Mark. It was just some interesting tidbit, you know? Did you… did you investigate it?”

Mark flashed him a faint smile. He had known about this for a long time; he only feigned obliviousness because no one had formally told him about his father's escapade yet. "That's beside the point, Uncle. What I'm more interested in is if Dad had ever said anything about it to you? I suspected that very few were even privy to this, yes? Hell, I was quite appalled when you first told me about it! But considering how close you were with Dad, I guess it's not at all shocking that he would bring up his dirty little secret with you — even if it were something as shameful as that."

Chapter 360

Conflicting emotions danced on Charles' face. "You got me, kid. Your dad told me about it before that fateful accident. I was shocked when I heard about it. He had such a loving relationship with your mother, you know? He spared me the details, but he mentioned explicitly that if there ever came a day when his two sons become bitter enemies, he would want me to step in. Now that I think about it, it sounds pretty foreboding, doesn't it? Maybe he foresaw his end, or maybe it was never an accident …Of course, that would be the Tremonts' private matter. I wouldn't understand."

Mark lowered his gaze to the table. His eyes became two perfectly opaque screens masking his aroused emotions, leaving his balling fists as the only clue to his true feelings. "Don't bring him up in the same sentence as my mother, Uncle. He doesn't deserve it," he said. "Regardless, that was his last wish, wasn't it? You honor him as you see fit, then. But I will tell you this: I've never wished harm upon that little crook. He brought it on himself."

Cold shivers ran across the older man's spines. "Oh, but… well, he's your brother, isn't he? Flesh and blood and all that. Both of you have been living in your separate bubbles peacefully for years — and you gotta admit that's good, right?" he admonished. "Listen, you've been carrying the Tremont legacies on your own since you were eighteen; when has your little brother ever come into that picture? If money is what he's after, stuff that in his piehole and watch him leave you alone. Isn't that so much better than—
"

Mark's phone rang before Charles could finish, prompting the latter to gesture toward it and beckon him into answering.

The young man spied Henry's name on the screen and furrowed his brows. His butler would never call him unless it were urgent. "Yes?"

Henry's voice was grim and dour. "Sir, Madam is suffering from a complication. She's currently in the hospital; your presence will be sorely appreciated."

Mark leaped to his feet the moment he heard her name and wasted no time starting toward the exit. "Excuse me, Uncle, but there's something important I need to attend. Enjoy your meal; I've already footed the bill."

Mark soon found himself lumbering down the long, grave aisle in the hospital, his head wrapped in a fog. Ashen white walls, closing around him, reflected light from a column of dizzying lamps overhead, forming a setting so familiar that it hearkened to the last time he had seen her in the hospital.

His brisk pace slowed down into a dreary grind. What lies at the very end of this corridor?

All roads, no matter how long, come to an end. Mark found Henry at the destination, whose head was slumped while his voice was filled with regret. "Forgive me, Sir, she was in a critical need for surgery, so I signed the consent letter on your behalf. However, the children… We… We lost them."

Mark's usually firm shoulders visibly fell. "What about her? How's she doing?"

Henry's lips trembled. "I believe she's relatively saf—"

“Relatively?!” Mark bellowed snippily, broiling. “I want certainty! Why?! Why aren’t my children safe?!”

A nurse rushed out of the operating theater just then. “Good evening, Mr. Tremont, I’ll explain it to you. What Mrs. Tremont experienced is a case of spontaneous abortion caused by a damaged womb, which was also the reason behind her first miscarriage. Mrs. Tremont was expecting twins, but their growth… had become too much for her body. I’m sorry, Mr.Tremont, but your wife might never be able to carry a child ever again,” she elucidated. “We also caution against future pregnancy attempts, as it might end with recurrent miscarriages. Despite all that, your wife is safe. She should be out shortly.”

Mark shut his eyes. A damaged womb — was it referring to the bloody injuries Arianne had sustained from Aery’s pre-mediated crash?

His expression was stormy. “Why has something this critical never been made known to us before? Why didn’t anyone tell us that she can’t carry our twins to terms?”

“I’m sorry, sir, but our hospital didn’t perform Mrs. Tremont’s check-up, so we cannot answer to that,” the nurse replied lamentably before hurrying back into the operation theater.

Mark sank into a couch nearby, defeated. “Henry? Identify the hospital responsible for her previous check-up. It doesn’t deserve to still be in business,” he murmured. “She could have terminated her pregnancy at the earliest stage possible. She could have avoided all of this agony. She doesn’t deserve this… does she?”

Henry nodded obediently and began making calls as he consciously retreated to a corner. Not wanting to disturb his master, his voice was deliberately low and soft.

A few moments passed. A new nurse emerged from the door with a tray covered by a piece of blood-stained linen. “Mr.Tremont, would you like to see them?”

Two healthy but ultimately doomed stillborns were under that cover, Mark realized, as he drew in a long, deep breath.

He lifted a corner of the linen. Two little red balls of tiny humans — and upon closer look, little girls — greeted him.

He averted his gaze after a second, croaking, “Take them away. Don’t let her see them.”

The nurse hummed in agreement and left hastily with the tray.

Henry, too, appeared to have finished his call and approached him. “It is done, sir,” he confirmed.

Silence followed the butler’s sentence. A few seconds passed before Mark finally broke it, “The Kinseys. They will fall after tonight.”

“Sir,” Henry began, startled. “Are you sure Madam will agree to this?”

Mark merely responded with a sneer. There was no need to ask someone whom he knew well. She would not care for the Kinseys’ wellbeing — not since Helen had left the family.

Mark had brought life back to the Kinseys when they were moribund, and he could take it back — this would be the price Aery had to pay. Taking the fact that she had murdered his three children into account, her punishment was almost too kind.

Soon, Arianne, still deep in slumber due to anesthesia, was pushed out of the operation theater. As Mark took in the harrowing contrast between her ashen, bloodless face and her disheveled raven-black hair, his eyebrows knitted closer and closer together.