Ruling 581

Chapter 581

Just as she asked the question, the middle-aged woman who claimed to be her aunt began her bitter lament, “So, we arrive at the purpose of my visit. I came to you because I had no other choice. This is your grandmother, correct? Your father’s gone, so you have to provide support. I can’t be the only one taking care of her, right? You were still too young back then, so we couldn’t let you shoulder that burden. Now, you’re married and to the Tremonts to boot! Shouldn’t your grandmother have a share in your luxury?

“Your grandmother was at odds with your father because she was mad at him for failing to meet her expectations. He insisted on marrying Helen Cameran. Her quarrel is not with you. I’ve been caring for her for many years, and your grandmother has recently been involved in a small accident. At her age, she shouldn’t be suffering so much. She hasn’t been able to walk for more than a month; her legs won’t let her. My son is at university and will be graduating soon. He even has a girlfriend. He’ll need to earn money for his wedding and a house. I can’t take care of both ends. That’s why I’ve come to you, to discuss your grandmother’s welfare. It’s been years, isn’t it time for me to get some rest?”

Oh. It was all to saddle her with the old woman. Arianne now understood. Based on sentiment and logic, she shouldn’t ignore her. Based on her so-called aunt’s clothes, she did not look like someone from poverty. The old woman in the wheelchair did not look too shabby either. She did not seem like a bitterly poor woman.

However, she really couldn’t afford to take care of a handicapped old woman. She had to run her business during the day, so she was only able to come home at night. Otherwise, she would have to get a bigger place and hire someone to take care of the old woman. This wasn’t impossible, as the profits that she had received from the café was enough to cover this. However, she would still need some time to work it out.

At the end of the day, she had never experienced this kind of situation. Ever since she was a child, her father had been the one making all of the decisions for her. Then, she lived with Mark and had nothing to worry about. She lacked the calmness and steadiness that was needed in making big decisions; she

was currently at a loss. Suddenly, she thought of Mark. He should know what to do. However, with the current state of their relationship… she didn't have the courage to say it.

Just as she was consumed with hesitation, her so-called aunt walked towards the door, "I've got to go. I have a ton of work to do at home. I'll leave your grandmother with you. I've already booked my plane tickets, so no need to send me off. Take good care of her…"

Arianne opened her mouth to speak, but the door slammed shut before she could convey her sentences. The woman had left, and she was alone with the old woman, "Uh…" She couldn't bring herself to address her as "grandmother", and she was not equipped to speak to an old woman. She was not prepared at all.

The old woman wheeled herself over to the couch, "Help me onto the couch. My legs are a nuisance."

Arianne quickly helped the old lady onto the couch. She felt mildly distracted, unable to believe that an old woman was now living with her. The old woman seemed to have been well taken care of. Despite her bad legs, she was immaculate from head to toe. There was no weird stench on her, and even though her hands were wrinkly, they were fair and clean. They were not coarse, and there were no calluses. Her complexion was pretty good, as if she had taken good care of it over time.

"Why did you let her go?" the old woman suddenly asked irritably.

Arianne was a little dull, "What?"

The old woman was annoyed with her delayed response, "She wants to saddle you with me because she doesn't want to take care of me anymore. It's true that she is your aunt, but I adopted her from an

orphanage. She is not my biological daughter. Ever since she found out about that, she's been very critical of me. Humans are useless in their old age, so she had more to pick on. After my accident, she began to send inquiries about you, planning to ship me off to you. I thought you wouldn't agree, but you've really surprised me. You've agreed to it so easily too!"

Arianne inwardly corrected her — she never agreed to any of this. She was clearly forced… However, she pitied the old woman. She had lost her son, and her adopted daughter now refused to take care of her, so she was now forced on a granddaughter whom she had never met. Her head was burning. "It's fine… I'll take care of you," she replied, "It's just… Did you only just find out about my father's death? What I mean to say is, why now? I never knew that I had a grandmother."

The old woman lowered her wrinkled eyelids. The emotions on her face were unclear, "I've known for a long time. That incident was such a huge deal. How could I not have known? I also know that Helen had played my son like a fool. My heart broke, and I was angry too. I was waiting for your father to come back and apologize to me, but that day never arrived…

"After finding out about his death and the fact that he had dragged so many Tremont family members down with him, what outcome could I possibly expect if I revealed myself? Our family had a successful business in the past, but it all went downhill after your grandfather's death. After all, your father ran away from us for the sake of that woman and ignored our family business. I couldn't handle it on my own, and the money I had wasn't enough to compensate the Tremonts. I had to endure criticism from every corner too. I was too afraid to step out. You can call me selfish if you want, or whatever's on your mind. Your father was gone and your aunt was still very young at the time. I couldn't completely ignore my responsibilities.

"When I heard of your existence, I considered taking you away, but your aunt objected, saying that your mother was still alive and that surely, she wouldn't completely ignore you. If I showed up, I'd end up having to compensate the Tremonts. So I was afraid. At the time, I was constantly distracted and couldn't eat for many days. By the time I managed to pick myself up, I found out that the Tremonts have taken you in. Living with the Tremonts was miles better than living with me. What reason would I have to look for you then?"

Chapter 582

As expected, that so-called aunt had lied to her. They weren't completely unaware of the plane crash and actually intended on taking Arianne away.

From the sound of it, it seemed entirely forgivable. After all, that incident was pretty severe.

Arianne didn't plan on playing the blame game, and she could understand her, "Actually, my father wasn't behind that plane crash. He was innocent. He never hurt anyone in the Tremont family. I don't want to go into the specifics with you, but I just want you to know that my father was innocent. I've left the Tremonts and started a desserts café. I'm not exactly rolling in cash, but I do have enough for the both of us. I'll find a bigger place and get a nursemaid to take care of you. I have to go out every morning and come home late at night. I'm really sorry that I can't take care of you personally."

The old lady did not ask any more questions about the plane crash, probably because she didn't want to talk about it anymore. She sighed, "Now it makes sense… You've left the Tremonts. It's already good enough that you're willing to take care of me, feed me, and hire someone to care for me. How could I hope to have you do it yourself? After all, I hadn't taken care of you when you were little. I'd never even seen you. I'm completely fine, even if you make me sleep on the floor."

Sleep on the floor? How could she possibly let an old woman sleep on the floor? Arianne had never met an old woman like her in her entire life. She felt that she would be difficult to get along with, but now that she was left in her care, she was forced to summon her courage and take care of her, "I won't make you sleep on the ground. Until we move to a bigger place, I'll sleep on the couch. You can sleep on the bed. Call me if you need anything. How are your legs? Will they recover?"

The old woman patted her awkward legs, "Yes, but I'll need time."

It was late. Arianne helped the old woman to bed before lying exhaustedly down on the couch. A myriad of thoughts were swimming in her mind. She had no choice but to slowly adapt to the sudden appearance of her relatives and consider it her way of fulfilling her father's filial duties. After all, she was her grandmother. Based on the current situation, there should be no doubt over the old woman's identity.

As expected, taking care of a handicapped old woman was not an easy feat. She had been woken up in the middle of the night many times — the old woman would either be thirsty, hungry, or needed to go to the bathroom. By the next morning, there were eyebags underneath her eyes, but she still had to prepare breakfast for the old woman. She even had to come back home from the shop a few times to check on her. She was stretched thin! At the same time, she had to work on hiring a nursemaid and moving to a new place.

Naya, noticing her exhausted state, grew worried, "What's up with you today, Ari? Didn't you manage to get any sleep last night?"

Arianne couldn't be bothered to come up with an explanation, so she simply nodded, "Mm… I've run into some issues. It's fine. I'll get through it."

During her free time at noon, Arianne had no time to eat at the café. She rushed back home to prepare lunch for the old lady. At the same time, Mark happened to call. She answered the phone while cooking, "Hello? I'm kind of busy. Can we talk later?"

Mark guessed that she was in the middle of cooking based on her background noise, "Are you at the café? Would you have time for dinner tonight?"

Arianne glanced at the living room — the old woman was reading. That's right. The old woman liked to read. She carried herself differently from other old ladies too, as if she were born from an aristocratic

family. She had an eccentric and difficult temperament about her, probably because she had come from a pretty good family, and was proud and aloof. She sighed and lowered her voice, “No, I won’t have time. In fact, I won’t have any time from now on. I’ll explain it to you later.”

She immediately ended the call, finished cooking the food, and served it on the table, “Time for lunch.”

The old woman shot her a careless glance, “Who were you talking to?

She was momentarily speechless. “Grandmother…” she awkwardly replied.

The old woman shot her an irritable look, “If you don’t want to take care of me, just say it. Call your aunt and have her take me away. Don’t force yourself. I’m not easy to deal with. It’s not too late for regrets. You don’t owe me a thing. There’s no need to take care of me.”

Arianne rubbed her forehead helplessly. She stepped forward and helped the old woman to the dinner table, “I’m not regretting it. I said I’d take care of you, so I will. I don’t owe you a thing, but my father does. You brought my father into this world, so he should be sending you away. He’s not around anymore, so I’ll take his place. Can you not say such things in the future?”

A faintly discernible hint of emotion flashed across the old woman’s wrinkled eyes. She curled her lips and concentrated on her meal. She even grumbled incessantly over the horrible taste.

Arianne couldn’t shake off the feeling that the old woman was giving her trouble on purpose. She did not protest, on account of the woman’s old age. There was nothing to protest about anyway.

She finally managed to clean up and leave the house. Just as she arrived at the lobby entrance, she paused. Mark was here! He had parked his car right in front of her building, as attractive as ever. She had probably ended their conversation too abruptly and upset him, so he rushed right over.

She really wasn't in the mood to deal with him now. She walked dejectedly up to his car and knocked on the window. Mark winded it down and said, "Get in."

Chapter 583

She stared at the co-driver's seat hesitantly, "I didn't mean to hang up on you. I truly was swamped."

Mark surveyed the look on her face, "What are you busy with that you couldn't even sleep? Talk to me, what did you mean when you said that you wouldn't have any time anymore?"

Now she understood, he was here because of her careless dismissal…

Arianne explained the entire situation involving the old lady to him. Mark was surprised, too, and astonished, "I've done an investigation before, and I've been long aware that you have a grandmother and a non-blood related aunt. I thought they'd never reveal themselves, as they never appeared in the past, so I never planned on telling you. I'm surprised that they came all the way here to see you. What's your plan? Are you going to take care of an old lady all on your own?"

Mark actually knew of her grandmother and aunt! She glared at him resentfully, "Why didn't you tell me? I wasn't even mentally prepared for this…"

Mark's eyes darted back and forth, "If I had told you… You wouldn't have stayed with me, but would have gone off to search for your relatives instead… Besides, they couldn't possibly have been able to raise you at the time."

There was an indiscernible feeling bubbling in Arianne's chest. This man… He had not decided to raise her on a whim. Had he planned this from the beginning? He knew that she had relatives, but he raised her anyway and kept this from her. She was only eight at the time. Suddenly, she began to suspect if he had a special kind of kink, "Is… something wrong with you?"

Mark's handsome face sank. The corners of his lips twitched, "What are you thinking? I knew that your dad ran away from the family to be with your mother. At the time, your grandmother was quite well-to-do and considered a small town girl like your mother beneath her. Considering that you were born after that, don't you think that it'd be pretty normal for your grandmother and aunt to ignore you? I didn't take you in immediately anyway. I took you in after confirming that your grandmother wouldn't be raising you. Under these circumstances, wouldn't telling you about your other relatives be equivalent to telling you that you weren't wanted, even by your own relatives? Wouldn't you feel hurt?"

That explained it… Mark had thought this through, down to its very details. He knew that her father had run away from his family. Now, it didn't sound so strange; he had always been prudent.

She felt slightly embarrassed, "I was just asking… I'm really swamped. I have to find a bigger place and get a nursemaid to take care of the old woman. I don't have time. I've been spinning around like a gyroscope ever since her arrival last night. If it's not too much trouble, could you drive me to the café? I can still take a quick power nap…"

Mark lifted his arm to check the time, "It's still early. Take a nap at the hotel. Most dessert shops get busier after 2pm. I'll wake you up at two. Just a suggestion — take your grandmother and come back to the Tremont Estate with me, and you'll have less burdens. Or, leave finding a new place and the nursemaid to me."

“Didn’t we agree that we’d only discuss moving back to the Tremont Estate after a year?” Arianne immediately asked.

Mark raised his brow, “That’s right. Then you won’t have to worry about finding a new place or a nursemaid.”

She finally came to a realization. He was afraid that she would reject his kind offer to help out… She didn’t want to owe him anything more, but based on the current situation, she could no longer put on a brave front, “Alright… Thank you.”

Mark suddenly leaned forward, and she instinctively tensed, “What are you doing?”

He turned to the side and stared at her. The distance between them was so close that the tips of their noses were close to touching. The air filled with romanticism. There was a half-smile in the depths of his eyes, “Seat belt.”

She blushed and let him buckle her seatbelt for her, then heaved a sigh of relief once he sat upright again, “I think you should take me back to the café, I don’t want to go to the hotel anymore…”

He didn’t answer and completely ignored her request. He sent her back to his hotel, as originally planned. Afraid that she would over analyze the situation, he conveyed his intentions, “There are a lot of people around in the café. You won’t get a good rest. Just relax and go to sleep. I’ll wake you up at two. As it so happens, I need to get to the office by then.”

Arianne was completely burnt out. She couldn't bring herself to be bothered by too many things. She fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow. At that very moment, she laid down all of her resentment towards Mark, and it seemed as if things might go back to how they used to be between them…

In less than half an hour after she had fallen asleep, her phone rang. Mark immediately silenced her phone, looked down, and saw the name on the screen — Grandma.

He stepped aside with the phone in hand and lowered the volume. Before he could form a complete sentence, the old woman's harsh voice rang from the other end, "Where are you? Come home. I need to use the toilet!"

Mark held his breath, "Ari is asleep. This is Mark Tremont. Please wait a moment, I'll send someone over immediately."

The old woman paused in silence for two seconds, but only two. Then, she continued to display her skills in torment, "I can't wait!"

Mark was speechless. He immediately ended the call. He saw that Arianne was still fast asleep, so he turned off her phone, grabbed her house keys, and drove off to the condo. There would be a long delay if he sent someone over now. The old woman was fierce. He had to do it himself. It seemed like a prickly situation, but it was still better than waking Arianne.

Chapter 584

Right when he stepped into the condo, he received a bolster that was flung at his face. The old woman reclined on the couch, railing at him, "If you can't take care of me, why did you ask me to stay?"

Mark's gaze sank as he internally recited a mantra: 'No matter what happens, this is Arianne's grandmother.'

He had to address her as "grandmother" too. He had to contain his temper…

He picked up the bolster and walked towards the couch, "I'll help you to the toilet."

The old woman casually locked her arms around his neck and hung off his body, "You're pretty solid, kid. I thought you and Arianne had a divorce? Why are you still trying to gain brownie points?"

Mark's mind was buzzing, "We did not get a divorce… She's still my wife. I did something bad, so she's angry with me."

The old woman shot him an irritable glare, "What did you do? Did you have an affair? You rich men are all the same. You can't even handle your own shit; why are you concerning yourself with me? I've been cooped up here all alone with no one to talk to, and I have to wait half a day just to get a glass of water."

Mark did not bother to explain too much. All he wanted was to fix the problem in front of him. He now had a rough idea of how exhausted Arianne was after pandering to this old woman at every moment of the day.

Actually, the old woman wasn't completely immobile. She could pretty much do everything herself once she was sent to the bathroom. Once she was finished, she called Mark again and asked him to send her back to the couch. Mark sensed something, "You don't actually want to stay with Ari, do you? That's why you've been making things difficult for her."

The old woman stared at him serenely, “You truly are a businessman. You’re smart enough. Arianne doesn’t owe me a thing. She’s still young. Why should she be saddled with an old woman like me? She’s as kind as her father. She still took me in, even though I never came for her that year… I feel guilty. How could I take advantage of her like that?”

Mark fell momentarily silent and said, “You are her grandmother. Of course, she’d take care of you. Don’t overthink it. The Tremonts can take care of you too. Except, she doesn’t want to come home with me just yet… We had a few cracks in our relationship; that’s how things ended up this way. If you really do have her best interests at heart, tell her to come home. Then, you’ll have an army of servants at the Tremont Estate for you to order about as you please.”

The old woman was now suspicious of his actions, “Shouldn’t you be hating us? That plane crash was pretty scandalous. Why are you turning around now? I’m not afraid of you laughing at me, so I’ll just say it. I was afraid of being made to compensate you Tremonts. That’s why I stayed away and didn’t take Arianne with me. She says… that her father was innocent in that plane crash?”

Mark frowned, “It’s all in the past. I love her, that’s enough. Besides… you really don’t owe the Tremonts a thing.”

He was reluctant to give her the full story. The old woman could see it, so she did not prod him any further, “You just want Arianne to go back to the estate, don’t you? I don’t intend on relying on you for the rest of my life, but I can’t leave until my legs get better, so I’ll give it a try before then. Naturally, it would be best if she could go back with you. What girl wouldn’t want to be a Tremont? All of her basic needs would be taken care of, and she’d have no worries. She’d have everything she could ever want and more.”

…

The capital.

During lunchtime, Tiffany put on an eye-mask and a neck pillow, then leaned against her office desk to take a nap. The strength she held for the day depended on this short period of rest. She wouldn't have any energy for the rest of the work day without this nap.

The entire office was initially quiet, as everyone had gone off for their lunch break together. However, later on, some people leisurely strolled back into the office after having their lunch outside. They talked as they walked together, bringing noise into an initially tranquil world. It was unbearable.

Tiffany stayed silent despite feeling annoyed, as she knew that her nonconformity would be punished. She was still a newcomer and could not afford to cause a scene.

Suddenly, an ear-piercing statement assailed her ears, "I saw it myself. She's a new intern, still on probation, but she carries a handbag worth five figures. She may look decent on the surface, but who can say if she's someone's mistress?"

"Seriously? She already has monetary support. Why is she working? What's wrong with being a bird in a gilded cage? Why is she running around for us?"

"What? Are you pitying her? So what if we make her our runner? The fact that she's that kind of a person allows me to order her around with a clear conscience. I want her to understand that while she is treasured among men, she is an errand girl in this office."

Regardless of Tiffany's level of intelligence, she knew that they were talking about her. One of them was obviously Henrietta, the woman who had kicked up a fuss with her. When had Jackson become a man who would put her in a gilded cage? She couldn't take it anymore.

She let out two dry coughs on purpose. Henrietta and everyone else immediately stopped talking. However, they only paused momentarily. They then lowered their voices and continued their discussion, "So what if she's overheard us? What, she can do whatever she pleases, but we can't talk about it? This is going to bring bad vibes into our working environment. The sooner she leaves, the better!"

"Okay, that's enough. We can talk about these things in private."

"I want to say it in front of her. Otherwise, she'll think we're talking about her behind her back. She's guilty and too afraid of confronting us. Otherwise, she would have jumped at us immediately after overhearing us."

Chapter 585

Tiffany couldn't stand it any longer. She pulled off her eye-mask, "Come on, speak a little louder. I can't hear you. I was only carrying a bag worth more than $10,000, right? Does that give you the license to talk about me for more than half a day out of jealousy? Your salaries might not be much, but you should be able to afford it if you saved for two years, right? There's no need to be jealous. By the way, I bought this bag on my own. It wasn't a gift from some man. I have a huge pile of handbags that I bought a few years ago. Altogether, they'd cost enough for a good few years of your salaries. There's no use in being jealous. Stop for a while. Otherwise, how am I supposed to run errands for you if I'm too tired?"

Henrietta mockingly said, "Since your family is so rich, why not stay home and enjoy your life of luxury. Why are you running errands? You can't even do your errands right. Aren't you just giving us more work?"

Tiffany's small universe was close to exploding. She was here to work as a fashion designer, not an errand girl. It was bad enough that they were ordering her around, but now they were grumbling that she wasn't doing her work well too. She had agreed with Jackson to hold on for a week, but now it seemed that she couldn't stand more than two days, "Henrietta, even a dog shows gratitude to its master. I seem to remember getting most of my orders from you. I've only rejected you once. Does that give you the right to bite back at me? Looks like you really are a b*tch. You can't be spoiled. I mean, I can't even stand how spoiled you are, shouting and grumbling all the time like that."

Henrietta lunged forward, glaring at her and scolding her, "Who are you calling a b*tch? So it's alright if the department supervisor gives you errands instead? Why don't you talk to the supervisor if you're not happy! Quit showing off!"

Tiffany glanced at Henrietta's handbag, amplified her voice on purpose and said, "So you're using an imitation bag. That's why you can't stand someone carrying the real deal… It's true that the orders came from the supervisor, but she's not the one giving me orders, you are."

Henrietta's face turned red. She instinctively put her bag behind her, "You… How dare you call my bag fake!"

Tiffany clicked her tongue, "I've been dealing with all sorts of luxury brands from a very young age. I can differentiate a real and fake product from a single glance. You should at least figure out who you're up against, before spreading wild gossip. My family may not be as rich as it used to be, but mine is still better off than poorer families. I may have lost most of my dignity, but I can still attack a wicked b*tch like you."

Their argument reached a boiling point. Henrietta grabbed Tiffany by the collar, ready to attack, when the department supervisor appeared at just the right time, "Stop this! This is an office. What are you doing? Henrietta, Tiffany, follow me. Now!"

The pair were called into the pantry for a good scolding, as there were a lot of people who were still resting in the cubicles.

The horrible Henrietta was the first to launch her complaint, “She started it, saying that she hated how we’ve been making her run errands every day, and that she doesn’t want to run errands for us any more! I asked her to help me with photocopying a few documents yesterday, and she didn’t. She couldn’t get over her annoyance, so she started a fight with me today. It’s not my fault.”

The department supervisor waved her hand, “Alright, I understand. You can leave, Henrietta. Try to control yourself next time.”

Henrietta shot Tiffany an angry glare and left, clicking her heels along the way. Tiffany was about to explain when the department supervisor immediately cut her off, “You don’t have to explain. You’re new. I wanted you to establish a good relationship among your colleagues, but instead, you ended up fighting with everyone, not long after your arrival. You can’t even get this simple task right, so how am I supposed to trust you with actual work? I heard that you’re known for your misconduct, but I didn’t agree. I don’t like listening to groundless gossip. However, if you really are from a wealthy family, go home and enjoy your life of luxury. Don’t come into this company to lower your status, and resent us for making you run errands for us. Why don’t you get a better job? You’ve only interned for a day and a half here. It’s been less than three days, so you won’t be receiving a salary. That’s all.”

Tiffany laughed in spite of her anger. She was clearly covering up for Henrietta; she never even asked for her explanation, “Hehe… You never asked me a single question, and you’ve already concluded that it was my fault? I don’t think I raised my hand against her at all, right? I never even touched her… Fine. I’ll keep my thoughts to myself. There are all kinds of birds in the sky, but birds of a feather usually flock together — that means both of you. You’re just the same.”

Then, she turned around and left, ignoring the many ugly shades on the supervisor’s face. She packed up her personal items and left the office.

She wasn’t as strong as she had thought herself to be. It had taken her a long time to find a job, and it wasn’t easy for her to get this one. She wanted to prove to Jackson that she could do it, but she ended up slapping herself in the face. And it wasn’t even her fault. Her heart filled with grief, and she threw all of her useless things into the trash can next to her. Then, she pulled out her phone and called Jackson.

Once the call was connected, a familiar voice answered. She could no longer hold back her tears and moaned, “I got fired. It wasn't even my fault. I only rejected a colleague’s request to do her overtime work after working hours, then someone began spreading rumors that I was someone’s mistress, just because I was carrying a $10,000 bag. They even called me a bird in a gilded cage. I ended up quarreling with them, and it almost exploded into a fight, but the department supervisor covered for them. She concluded that it was my fault without even asking for my side of the story. It’s disgusting. Is that how this company works?”

Chapter 586

Jackson took a deep breath. His woman had been suffering under someone else’s hands and was driven to tears. Aside from heartache, he felt enraged as well, “Alright, alright. Don’t cry. Where are you? I’ll come over and pick you up right now. Stay right where you are and don’t move, okay? What kind of a horrible company are they? Don’t be angry, forget them!”

Tiffany sniffed, told him where she was, and waited for him at the side of the road. The weather was gradually turning cold and it wasn’t hot anymore. Sometimes, a gentle breeze would pass and put her emotions slightly more at ease.

Soon, Jackson’s luxurious sports car stopped at the side of the road. When she got into the car and saw him, she broke down again. She leaned against his shoulder and sobbed, “I feel so useless, I’ve been fired… I’m so pissed…”

Jackson patted her on the back soothingly as he turned towards the office floor, not too far away. That company wasn't even fit to lick his boots, yet they'd brought grief upon his woman!

On the way home, he carefully asked, "If you… still want a job, how about coming over to my subsidiary company? It's just a little far off in the northern district. Since you're not comfortable with working in the main branch, the subsidiary branch should be fine, right? Don't worry, I won't have any influence in the hiring process so you can expand on your own. You don't have to worry about the working environment. It's definitely good. I'll leave the office two hours early every day to pick you up; after all, it's a little far off. It'll take two hours to get home. Stay at my place, okay?"

Tiffany hesitated, "Won't that be troublesome? The northern district is a bit far. It'll take around four hours, to and fro. We can do a lot in four hours, but it'll be wasted on travel time… I don't mind working at your main branch, but you mustn't reveal our relationship, or people will think of me differently. We'll have to keep it a secret, at least until the wedding…"

Jackson cheered up once she relented, "That's more like it. I promise to follow your wishes. Then it's agreed, right? You can go over to human resources for your interview tomorrow. Since you've worked there before, you'll receive priority."

Tiffany nodded, "Okay, I'll go tomorrow. I'm sorry for disturbing you at work. You can drop me off at home and go back to the office. I'd like a big meal tonight to feel better, you can keep me company tonight!"

Jackson reached out and stroked her long hair, "It's fine. I won't go back to the office. We'll do whatever you like."

Tiffany suddenly felt sluggish, "I… want to sleep now."

Jackson was surprised that she was still in the mood for sleep at this time, “Uh… Then come over to my place. You can sleep, and once you’re up, we can have a big meal.” Only she was capable of doing such a thing — crying from anger, then going to sleep and enjoying a big meal. He was beginning to wonder if she really had been in shock… Wouldn’t a normal person be depressed?

The dessert café.

Arianne went back to the condo once she had some spare time. She now had an old woman who required her constant care and attention. She was always worried.

She was stupefied when she arrived at home. The old woman was gone!

The house was small enough, so she could tell at a single glance. Where could a handicapped old woman have possibly run off to? She panicked. She had rushed straight to the shop from the hotel and had been preoccupied until 5pm. The old woman did not call her during this time. Only Mark had contacted her, telling her that he would be going back to the capital.

It had been less than five hours since she left the condominium. Where could she have run off to?

Just as she was fumbling over her phone to call the police, she realized that she had received a message from Mark. She did not have time to read it, as she had been busy: ‘I’ve taken granny back to the capital. She asked to come with me. It’s inconvenient for you to continue to take care of her anyway. I’ll do it for you. We’re leaving. You can visit her in the capital whenever you miss her.

She heaved a sigh of relief. However, at the same time, she felt that the situation wasn't as simple as it seemed. Regardless of whether the old woman had agreed to leave with Mark or not, Mark Tremont would certainly have had some benefit from agreeing to this. Was this one of his ways of persuading her to go back to the capital?

After calming down, she poured herself a glass of water and downed it. She hadn't even had time to drink water, and she had received a terrible fright…

Mark's phone was still turned off when she called him, which also meant that they were still on the plane. She felt that the situation had grown complicated. She had initially intended on dragging the time out, then having a civil conversation with Mark after a year. Would she still have a choice now that the old woman was with him? Perhaps she might end up having to go back to him in the capital in less than a year.

She gave Tiffany a video call instead. In times like this, talking things out with someone else would allow her to relieve her mind from its frustrations. When the video call was answered, Tiffany still had her eyes closed. "Ari…" she mumbled, looking like she was still asleep, "I'm sleeping. What is it?"

Arianne swallowed her bitter grievances, "Why are you sleeping at a time like this? Alright… Go back to sleep. I'm fine…"

Chapter 587

Tiffany blurrily grunted a reply and ended the video call. Arianne irritably threw the phone aside.

At past 8 pm, the old lady called Arianne. Based on her tone, she seemed to be in a good mood, "I'm at the Tremont Estate, and everything here is great. Much better than that bird cage of yours, around the same size as our old home. It's comfortable, living here. You don't have to worry about me. Mark is here."

Then, she hung up. It was done very neat and tidily.

A shiver ran across Arianne's heart. The old lady was not easy to deal with. How did Mark manage to familiarize himself with her in such a short time, then persuade her to go back to the capital? Something must be wrong…

Mark had never met the old woman prior to this. She checked through her call records and found that the old woman had actually called while she was asleep in Mark's hotel room. Of course, she wasn't the one who answered the call, which could only mean that Mark had gone back to the condo to help the old woman out for her while she was asleep. They had probably discussed returning to the capital during that time. How sneaky!

Everything was set in stone now, there was no use in her saying anything. The crucial thing was that the old woman was happy in the Tremont Estate. How could she persuade her to come back? Feeling slightly depressed, she called Mark again. The call was soon answered, and his voice sounded indolent, "Hello?"

"Why couldn't you have at least informed me that you'd be taking my grandmother away?" she asked in a muffled voice, "Do you really think that I'd go back to the capital just because of this?"

"My Ari is certainly clever," Mark replied. He seemed to be laughing. "I was afraid that you'd break your promise to me. This way, we'll both have some sort of insurance. Your grandmother is my grandmother. There's nothing inappropriate about me taking care of her. You can still enjoy the temporary freedom you wanted, don't worry. I'll take good care of our granny."

“Our granny” — he emphasized it on purpose.

Arianne was speechless. Then, she answered, “Fine, since you like taking care of her so much, thank you. I won’t be able to take a trip back any time soon, and I’m afraid that I’ll only be able to return during Tiffany’s engagement and wedding. I’m going to wash up and sleep. Good night!” she said all of this in a single breath, then ended the call. She always hated being under his control, having thoroughly experienced his craftiness. He had even managed to spirit the old lady away during his trip here. She had underestimated him!

Mark stared at the dimming phone screen. The corners of his lips lifted into the faintest of smiles. He was getting impatient and wanted to make her come back to the Tremont Estate at once. She would be returning to the capital in a month for Tiffany and Jackson’s engagement party. By then, he would do everything he could to make her stay.

The next day, Tiffany went to Jackson’s office early in the day to apply for a position. She had put extra effort into dressing up in order to achieve a smooth hiring process. She had even put on serious business wear and was immaculate from head to toe. She did not dare use an overly expensive bag.

The human resource manager glanced through her resume and said, “You’re hired. When can you start?”

She could hardly believe that it had gone so smoothly. She hadn’t even said a thing, “That’s it?”

The human resource manager looked confused, “Isn’t that good? You’ve been with the company for a while and would have some understanding of the working environment. So it’s not really a problem.”

Tiffany was still feeling suspicious, “Has… someone spoken to you before?” She was referring to Jackson. Could he have mentioned something to human resources?

The human resource manager got impatient, “What are you talking about? You’re here for a job, and now you’re hired. Isn’t that a normal process? I have work to do. Get back to me on a confirmed time for when you’d like to start, then come over.”

His impatience made Tiffany’s heart leap with joy. If Jackson had said anything, the manager wouldn’t have spoken to her like that. She was happy about that. She finally had a stable job! Destiny was really toying with her. In the end, she returned to this company. She wasn’t Jackson’s fianceé the last time she worked here…

There was no time like the present. “Then can I start today?” she asked excitedly.

The human resource manager was astonished by her enthusiasm, “Of course… you can. Give me your details. I’ll have to make you an employee card and everything else. Since you’ve been here before, I won’t be showing you around. You can make your way to the office on your own.”

“Mm,” Tiffany replied, then happily skipped upstairs. The office was the same as ever, except that there was a new employee in her old desk. She was given a new office desk after reporting to the department supervisor. Everything was blissful...

Suddenly, everyone began to greet in unison, “Mr. West.”

She lifted her gaze and looked towards the door Jackson was walking through, dressed in his suit and carrying an awe-inspiring presence. There was only one thing on her mind — that was her man, he was

so handsome! However, she had to pretend not to know him. She flashed an adoring smile, just like everyone else, “Mr. West!”

Unfortunately, she had spoken too loudly and had not only drawn Jackson’s attention, but everyone else’s as well. She felt slightly embarrassed and slumped down on her seat, remaining perfectly still.

Chapter 588

As Jackson walked past her office desk, he purposefully tapped on it and said, “Hey, newbie, do your best.”

Holding back the urge to burst out laughing, Tiffany nodded and bowed, “I will, Mr. West. I’ll do my best!”

The corners of Jackson’s lips tilted upwards slightly. He walked into his office. Less than two minutes later, Tiffany received a text message from him: ‘How dare you address me as “Mr. West”.’

She replied to him with a “playful” emoji and put her phone into her bag. She was in the middle of working hours now, and it was inadvisable for her to be fiddling with her phone.

The environment in this big company was a stark contrast to her previously smaller company. Aside from its fast-paced environment, there wasn’t a lot of in-fighting at play.

Unbeknownst to her, the human resource manager had slipped into Jackson’s office. Jackson was in a particularly good mood and was smiling radiantly, “She doesn’t suspect anything, does she?”

The human resource manager quickly replied, “She asked, so she probably did, but I managed to ease her suspicions. The more disgruntled I was, the happier she seemed to be…”

Jackson nodded, “She probably won’t be able to figure it out. Good job. She’s your future lady boss, so you’d better take care of her. That’s all for today. Go back to work.”

The corners of the human resource manager’s lips twitched. Had anyone ever spoken so derisively about their own girlfriend? However, he was too afraid to speak up. He mumbled a reply and promptly left.

Jackson pulled out his phone and sent out a message: ‘Get rid of that tiny, insignificant company in three days.’

His temper would rise every time he thought of Tiffany’s weeping face. Those who had wronged his woman would have to pay the price. A tiny little company didn’t amount to anything much anyway; there was nothing wrong with giving them an early send-off.

At noon, everyone in the office went off for lunch. Tiffany secretly slipped into Jackson’s office, “Mr. West… What shall we have for lunch? Something from the cafeteria? Or shall we go out? Wanna have lunch together?”

Jackson shot her an indulgent look, “Stop enticing me.”

Tiffany had been dating him for a while and was no longer shy. She blushed a lot less these days, “Alright, I’ll wait then. You shouldn’t get too confident either. How old do you think you are? Soon you’ll lose your energy. I’m still young.”

Jackson pulled her into his arms, “What are you saying? I’m only ten years older than you, or more accurately speaking, nine years and six months. Nothing like that is ever going to happen. Never, ever, ever! Come, I’ll take you out for a nice meal to celebrate your new job…”

Tiffany collapsed into a fit of giggles. When they arrived at the office entrance, she paused, “Wait! We can’t be seen walking together. What if someone sees us and finds out?”

Jackson frowned, his eyes filled with mild grief, “Hasn’t it always been this way? Can’t we have a meal together, on account of the fact that you’re Arianne’s best friend?”

She shook her head determinedly, “There are far too little people who are aware of our long-standing acquaintance. We’ve already agreed to act like strangers in the office. So if we’re going to have lunch together, either you leave first, or I’ll go. I think you’d better leave first and drive the car out from the parking lot. Wait for me at the intersection in front. Don’t stop in front of the office building.”

Why did she have to be in command? He had no choice but to comply. Jackson helplessly left the office and drove the car to the intersection. Tiffany soon arrived happily, “Thank you for your generosity, Mr. West, for buying me a meal. I won’t be modest then, and I’ll eat as much as I can!”

Jackson couldn’t be bothered to highlight her manner of address towards him. He knew that she was doing it on purpose, so he teased, “Alright, enjoy your big meal. The more you eat, the more energy you’ll have to moan tonight.”

Tiffany slapped his arm, “Jerk!”

After their lunch, Tiffany got down from the car at the intersection and walked back to the office. Jackson arrived first, as he had driven. The pair ran into each other at the elevator. It was clear that Jackson had been waiting for her.

There were other people around them, so Tiffany did not have the nerve to stand too close to Jackson, “What a coincidence, Mr. West. You decided to go out for lunch too?” she said to him on purpose.

Jackson put on a stern face and cast her a sidelong glance with a smile in his eyes, “Mm.”

There were more people in the elevator now, but Jackson was left with some extra space in his vicinity, as no one dared to crowd him. Tiffany nonchalantly stepped closer to him just to feel more comfortable, and she stood right in front of him to boot. Although her height wasn’t enough to block his view, this seemed like a bold move to everyone else.

A colleague from her department pulled her to the side when they stepped out of the elevator, “What are you doing? Mr. West is our big boss. How could you stand in front of him in the elevator? You even walked in front of him when we got out of the elevator. Aren’t you aware of etiquette? I’m not trying to make things difficult for you, but to tell you this for your own good. We’re all working in the same company, so you have to keep these codes of etiquette in mind. Be more vigilant next time, and don’t end up offending others. Mr. West may not bicker with you over this, but the smaller bosses might.”

Chapter 589

Tiffany scratched her hair, completely unfazed by this. After all, Jackson never complained whenever she stood in front of him or rode on him. “Got it, thanks…” she replied absent-mindedly.

At around 3PM or so, Tiffany began to feel sleepy. Suddenly, she heard Summer's voice, "Tiffie, are you working with us now? Jackson was just talking about how reluctant you were. Looks like you've finally thought things through. It's like I've said, how can someone else's land be better than ours? When did you get here? Would you like me to…"

Before she could finish, Tiffany jumped up, reached out, and covered her mouth.

Both women were in shock. Tiffany broke out into cold sweat. What had she done? Covered her future mother-in-law's lipstick-lined lips with her hand! She could feel the lipstick on her hand, which must be very red by now. She was finished…

"Mrs. West… It's fine," she said, trembling fearfully, "I've spoken to Mr. West. There's no need to do anything for me. I can do this on my own. I don't want to get my way around through my connections."

She slowly released her hand from Summer's mouth when she saw how stunned she was. The bright red lipstick stain on her palm was eye-catching…

There was a long pause before Summer finally came to her senses, "Oh… Sure. Do your best then. I have to speak to Jackson. Will you be coming over for dinner tonight?"

The corners of Tiffany's lips twitched, "Er… I think you'd better speak to Jackson about that…" If this kept up, she'd be exposed…

There were so many eyes on them. Her earlier actions were shocking enough to everyone in the room. In the eyes of an outsider, she had covered the mouth of their boss's mother!

After Summer had walked away, the colleague who had pulled her aside at the elevator stared at her incorrigibly, "It looks like you're allowed to get away with things, standing in front of Mr. West and even putting your hand over Mrs. West's mouth. How admirable of you. You know each other, don't you? Mrs. West mentioned something about 'your own territory'... Are you…"

Tiffany quickly denied, "It's not that… Isn't Mr. West good friends with Mark Tremont? You've heard of Mr. Tremont, haven't you? Mr. Tremont's wife is my best friend. Over time, I got acquainted with Mr. West's mother. That's all."

Her colleague sighed, "So that's it… I was wondering why you had so much nerve. It turned out that you know Mr. West and an affluent figure like Mr. Tremont too. We're going to have to depend on you to cover for us from now on…" her colleague said, half-jokingly.

Tiffany wiped the cold sweat off her brow, "I don't want any special treatment. I applied to this company on my own, having worked here previously too. You should all go back to work and stop asking so many questions. We're still under office hours…"

Fearing that another scene might play out when Summer emerged from the office, she secretly sent Jackson a message: 'Tell your mom not to expose our relationship in front of our colleagues. I was nearly exposed! It's only my first day and she's come to the office for a visit. She really scared me.'

In the office, Jackson burst into laughter when he saw Tiffany's message, "Mom, you've given Tiffany quite a fright. She doesn't want anyone to think that she's gotten this job through connections, so I haven't announced my relationship with her. You nearly exposed her."

Summer curled her lips, “That explains it. I was wondering why she was so nervous. She actually called you Mr. West and covered my mouth. She’s even smeared my lipstick! No one has ever dared to cover my mouth like that. This girl is crazy! By the way, tell her to come over to the house for dinner tonight. Your father’s back. You shouldn’t be away from home all the time.”

The faces of both mother and son changed abruptly at the very mention of Atticus. Summer looked cautious and Jackson looked sullen, “I have no time to go home; I want to spend some time alone with Tiffie. We have the engagement party to take care of too.”

Summer lowered her voice, “I can manage the engagement party for you… Your father isn’t good with words and doesn’t know how to express himself. Don’t stay mad at him. Regardless of the situation, he’s back now. Our family is reunited.”

Jackson sneered derisively, “I know that you’ve always hoped to give me a complete family, but I’m not a kid anymore. I’m thirty now. Do you really think that these kinds of things are that important to me? I haven’t forgotten how it was like for me when he left us, and how it was like for you.”

Summer fell silent. She was well aware of what Jackson meant. Atticus was very determined when he left, and she had no choice but to take care of the company on her own. She was so exhausted that it became a normal occurrence for her to not come home for ten days or half a month. Young Jackson was left all on his own at home. Although he had a nanny, she only took care of his food and clothes; there was a lack of actual love.

It wasn’t easy, but they pulled through. However, Atticus returned at this crucial moment. There was a sour taste in Summer’s mouth, let alone Jackson’s. They couldn’t seem to get over what he’d done, but what else could they do, except to accept him? She had never thought of divorcing him and remarrying someone else, despite the many years that had passed. Wasn’t it because she still held onto this small sliver of hope?

Jackson's heart softened when he saw her speechlessness, "I'm not mad at him, or at you. Don't be sad. I understand. Tiffie and I will come home tonight. But let me make this clear — we're leaving right after dinner."

Chapter 590

A smile shadowed Summer's lips. "I knew you still cared about your mommy, which, by the way, you should, since I've hauled my bum just to rear you to the fine young man that you are today. This is why Mom would like you to do something for her," she said sincerely. "Please, don't give you dad your nasty grimaces, okay? He's got a thin skin much like yourself, you know. Anyway! About your engagement with Tiffany, should you need my help, just ask. You know I don't have much to occupy my time these days."

Jackson nodded in understanding and responded with his own advice, "When you see Tiffie, make sure you don't leave any hint that you know, okay? She will kill me if she finds out about my goof."

Summer gave a sprightly okay and left. Passing by the cubicles, she greeted Tiffany as she usually would, "I'll be off. Godspeed in your work."

Tiffany rose from her seat and watched Summer leave. "Thank you, Auntie. Take care."

Evening came. Jackson picked Tiffany up by the curb after work and steered right into the West family residence.

She noticed the route differing from the one they usually took and voiced her realization, "Oh, are we heading to your mother's place for dinner tonight?"

“Yea,” he confirmed with a nod, despite looking slightly upset.

Of course, Tiffany knew the reason behind his mood. Hence, she mimicked what he usually did to her whenever she was the one feeling bummed. “Aww, cheer up! You’re going home!” She chirped and rubbed his head. “You’ve got me for company, don’t you?”

Disinterested in discussing family issues, Jackson consciously swerved the conversation in another direction.

“Say, do you know that Arianne actually has a surviving aunt and granny? It’s true,” he began. “They came to her about two days ago, and that aunt dumped the grandmother in her care. Of course, Mark and his mission to drive Arianne back to the Capital had compelled him to take the old lady into his care. In other words, you’re probably gonna see Arianne very soon.”

This gossip was enlightening to Tiffany. Suddenly, the context behind the previous video-call she had with Arianne was laid bare to her. Back then, Tiffany had been asleep when her best friend called her, so she had not paid much attention, but now that she reflected on it, Arianne must have been very antsy during the call, was she not?

Her best friend had always been a pitiful, lonely girl since they were kids, so why did she only know about her surviving relatives now? Had she not been taken as Mark’s charge on the ground of being an orphan with no living relatives?

The news was hard to swallow. “Are you sure they are who they claim to be? I mean, they could be fake. Maybe they want a piece of the Tremonts’ glory?” Tiffany inquired.

Jackson chuckled. “Since when did you become so distrustful of people? Of course, Mark had vetted their claims, and it holds up. I think it’s good that Arianne still has some blood relatives left, ya know, since it might help resolve the strains in Mark and Ari’s relationship,” he explained. “Mark told me that Arianne was still angry-distancing him for the time being — hell, she didn’t seem to want to return to the Capital to take her granny back. At this rate, those two are probably only gonna solve their hiccups during our engagement! After all, Arianne’s gotta’ come back to the city for you. Oh man, Mark’s not gonna let her escape him so easily once she’s here, you can bet on it.”

Tiffany’s mind was on a different focal point altogether. “But… What if Ari’s granny somehow caught wind that her grandson-in-law killed his son? She can’t possibly let that slide like nothing happened, right? It’s fine if they managed to sweep the truth under the rug forever, but if anyone looked and found it — oh my god. Their family issue is wack!”

For a millisecond, the truth of the tragedy was loaded behind Jackson’s teeth, but he demurred, fearing Tiffany’s loose mouth. Mark had told him explicitly that it was a secret that should never be out. As his best hombre, it was imperative that Jackson honor his trust.

In the grand scheme of things, there might not be any significant disparity between naming Mark or his mother as the real perpetrator. However, to Arianne, it could mean a world of differences; it could even serve as the critical juncture that tipped Arianne into reconciling with Mark. But heaven forbade that Tremont from rightfully assigning the blame to his mother — it was precisely because of this obstinate reluctance that Mark was trapped in his current quandary.

“And here you are, sulking about your family,” Tiffany mused out loud, apparently applying the story to a different person. “Don’t you see? Your bros had it worse than you. Eric had severed his ties with his family, and Mark lost his parents altogether. Meanwhile, yours are still alive and healthy; they are still within your reach. So why can’t you open your heart and forgive them?

“Shouldn’t you feel blessed that your dad left because he was chasing his dream rather than because he fell in love with someone other than your mom? Honestly, who doesn’t dream about a bigger purpose for themselves? Even an indolent bum like moi has one or two; what more could you say about people like your dad? Plus, have you never wondered why your mom continues to stay single and alone all these years after he left? It’s obviously because she’s been waiting for him to come home, duh!” Tiffany continued. “And now you’ve got me. We’ll be making a family of our own soon enough. If familial happiness is what you miss growing up, then go ahead and reclaim them in ours. Look forward and look alive, Jackson!”

Tiffany’s ease at turning away from the worst in her past made Jackson green; how he wished he had at least half of her sanguinity. Indeed, shedding the shackles of past traumas would always be an uphill battle, but it did not mean Tiffany was wrong. He had her as his companion now. They would build their own home soon, and after that, however bad his original one once was would soon cease to be relevant.

Life goes on, and so must those who live it. Besides, it was long overdue for Jackson to respect his mother’s decision. Summer might not have explicitly told him to reconcile with his father, but piecing all those little hints together made her wish become undeniably clear. He should stop going against his mother’s wish and wound her further.

“Fine, you’re right,” he relented finally.

Tiffany scanned her surroundings furtively. After making sure no security cameras were watching them, she pecked him on the cheek. “Now, you focus on driving. Homely dinner, here we come!!”

A smile grew from the depths of his heart and blossomed on Jackson’s lips.

This was all he needed. She was all he needed.

To hell with the ghosts of the past.