Ruling 621

Chapter 621

Tiffany almost missed the implications behind Jackson's words. When realization dawned on her, she was pleasantly surprised. He was defending his father. He was clearly worried Tiffany would misunderstand his father. This was a good sign.

"I know, I know. Your dad has a poker-face, and he's quiet so he looks a little intimidating. Honestly, I was just being sensitive since I haven't been living a high-flying lifestyle for a while now. I know how hard it is to earn money so I think it's unnecessary to hire a housekeeper. When your dad said your family is not lacking that small bit of money, I just felt self-conscious. That's all," she explained. "I know my status is a lot lower than yours and that's why I'm working hard to be worthy of you. Don't worry. I know your dad doesn't harbor any ill intention. I'm just being sensitive, that's all."

A smile bloomed on Jackson's face. "Hey, you're more than worthy of me. Don't ever think otherwise."

At this moment, his phone beeped, indicating that he had received a message. Since his phone was connected to the car's Bluetooth-enabled speakers, it was loud enough for Tiffany to catch it.

Her eyes widened in curiosity and a hint of suspicion could be seen in them. There was even a small thrill of discovering a secret. Her eyes darted to him.

"…Fine, you read it for me," he said in slight resignation, "I'm driving."

Tiffany fished out the phone from his pocket without another word and hungrily devoured the content. However, she covered her mouth with her hand when she finished reading the message. Her eyes were wide open. "J-J-Jackson!"

Her reaction terrified Jackson. He was afraid one of his former partners during his escapades in the past had texted him. This would definitely cause a misunderstanding. He quickly pulled the car to the side of the road and snatched the phone away from her. When he saw the sender and read the message, he heaved a sigh of relief. Even then, the sense of relief only lasted for a fleeting moment. “It seems like Arianne beat you to getting pregnant. I can’t believe she’s pregnant again. Heavens, Mark must be incredibly anxious right now,” he said in a concerned voice.

Meanwhile, Tiffany was panicking. “Do you know how much it’s gonna kill Ari if this newborn can’t be carried to term again? God-frickin-damn it, Mark Tremont! He knows she can’t bear a child so why the hell did he do that?! Christ, are all men just creatures who think with their manhood?” She said indignantly, “He said he’s going to bring Ari back to the capital to begin physical examinations, but who knows if she’s willing? Ugh! I’m going to strangle him to death!”

“H-hey, what do you mean by all men are creatures who think with their manhood?” Jackson muttered, clearly feeling it was unfair to be lumped into that category. “I, for one, am not like that? Don’t you know how appalling it is to stereotype an entire gender? Anyway, I digress. The point is, it has happened. Arianne will be coming back to the capital soon. At that time, you should accompany her more often. You’ll definitely be a source of comfort to her.”

Arianne and Mark had come to an agreement in the end.

Arianne agreed to return to the capital for an examination at the hospital, temporarily closing the dessert shop. Truthfully, she did not think she would be able to give birth to the child. She had steeled herself for an abortion. After that, she would return to the shop. Although such procedures were common in the country, Mark was worried about complications and what-nots so he insisted she returned to the capital for the time being.

Early the next morning, Mark and Arianne were already at the airport.

Strangely, Arianne was still exhausted even though she had more than enough sleep the night before. She found herself nodding off while waiting to board the plane. In hindsight, it seemed like she had been exhausted all those days because of the little fellow in her womb. It was not because of work.

Thanks to the child's existence, Arianne's relationship with Mark had regressed. He was extremely caring and gentle, but he still could not thaw her icy exterior. It was ironic that the role had been reversed. Perhaps, this was karma.

Both of them did not waste any time and rushed to the hospital as soon as they landed in the capital. Since Mark had already made an appointment earlier, Arianne's examination began immediately when she arrived at the hospital.

Tiffany took the day off to keep Arianne company in the hospital.

Arianne welcomed Tiffany's presence. Tiffany was her source of support after all. "Tiffie, I'm alright. Don't worry about me."

Tiffany knew how devastated Arianne must have felt inwardly so she replied, "Have no fear, Tiffie is here… always and forever. You go and get checked up, I'll be here waiting, okay? If it's possible, let's try to carry the child to term, okay? We'll make sure the baby comes out healthy! I mean, who knows, maybe this time it'll be better? After all, that incident happened such a long time ago. Your body might have repaired itself somehow. Relax."

Arianne did not believe a single word Tiffany said. As she was pushed into the examination room, an expression of despondence could be seen on her face.

After the extensive check-up was done, the trio sat on the bench in the aisle as they waited for the results.

The silence was palpable.

Tiffany was boiling with rage, she really felt like her temper would fly when she looked at Mark. However, she suppressed those thoughts. What mattered the most was to solve the problem at hand.

Since Mark did not bring anyone with him, he had to do everything on his own; paying the bill, obtaining the result, and so on. He had been running laps in the hospital.

This was also one of the reasons why Tiffany suppressed her anger.

The report was now in their hands, but Arianne found herself lacking the courage to read it. Instead, both of them entered the doctor's office and placed the report on his desk.

The doctor combed through the details before looking at Mark. "Mr.Tremont, your wife is indeed pregnant. She's been pregnant for forty days now," he said, "It's regrettable that Mrs. Tremont's two previous miscarriages had caused considerable damage to her uterus. Since the child is small, there's no harmful effect that we can see. However, we can't guarantee it would stay this way once the fetus grows. There's definitely a risk, but it's not 100% certain that there'll be a complication as well."

Arianne had expected this. However, no amount of mental preparation could stop the tears from brimming in her eyes.

Mark knew how much the child meant to her so he took a deep breath before asking, “Do you think we should keep the child, sir?”

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The doctor mulled it over for a moment. “What I can do, at this stage, is to list out all possible complications that may occur. If you want to carry the child to term, it’s not completely impossible. However, physical examinations will be mandatory once Mrs. Tremont is four months along. It’s also highly advisable for Mrs. Tremont to rest as much as possible and avoid tiring herself. If you decide to continue with the pregnancy, we’ll have to closely monitor her progress to reduce the complications. The child would most likely be born prematurely, but the survival rate is relatively high.” He paused for a moment before continuing, “Examination result indicates that Mrs. Tremont’s uterus has recovered somewhat. Hence, there are grounds to be slightly optimistic. However, what we do, going forward, will have to depend on both of you.”

As soon as Arianne heard there was a possibility the child might survive, all traces of hesitance vanished into thin air. She quickly said, “I want the child!”

On the other hand, Mark furrowed his eyebrows. “Ari... Can you please step aside for a moment? I would like to have a conversation with the doctor in private. Since this involves your well being, I can’t just let you do as you please. We have to think long and hard about this.”

Arianne was about to throw a tantrum when Tiffany stopped her. “No, Ari. It’s fine. Let’s leave them for a moment. I agree this is something we should think long and hard about. C’mon, don’t be stubborn.”

Soon after, only Mark and the doctor were left in the room.

Mark did not beat around the bush. “Be frank with me. Is the child truly able to survive without compromising my wife’s health and safety?”

The doctor knew who he was dealing with so he was disinclined to say anything that could be misconstrued. After a long moment, he finally said, “Listen, Mr. Tremont. Complications of birth are immutable risks expecting mothers have to face. These include hemorrhage, amniotic fluid embolism, and others. All of these are dangerous so unfortunately, I can’t give you the absolute guarantee that you’re looking for. Setting aside all these common complications, your wife has a few personal risks due to her body being significantly weaker than other women. However, this does not mean that the child cannot be carried to term. it’s just that it would be a very delicate process, demanding utmost caution. Now, if the baby remains well-protected until your wife is seven to eight months pregnant, then, the success rate of this pregnancy is relatively high.”

The doctor concluded, “Based on my years of experience, barring any unforeseen circumstances, your wife won’t suffer from any life-endangering complications during her pregnancy. Naturally, this is not a 100% guarantee. I implore you to think this through before making a decision.”

To Mark, this was a catch-22 situation. Honestly, he would rather Ari be safe than to take the risk and have the child. However, he knew for sure she would not return to him if the child was lost. In the end, he replied hesitantly, “I guess… I’ll need some time to think about it.”

As soon as he stepped out of the doctor’s office, Arianne dashed toward him and grabbed his wrist. “So, what did the doctor say? Can I keep the child? Mark, listen to me. I’ve lost three children. If I lose this one, I… I’ll lose my chance to be a mother forever…”

Her pleading eyes made Mark ball his hands into fists. After a pause, he replied weakly, “Give me time to think about this. For now, you need to rest. I’ll give you an answer as soon as possible.”

Dismay filled her eyes, and her grip loosened.

When he sensed her despair, he gritted his teeth and finally said, “If you want this child, Ari, you need to listen to what I say. And right now, I want you to go home — our home.”

Ariane wanted the child more than anything else, but she knew she would also need Mark’s approval to have the child. Therefore, despite her reluctance, she obeyed him. She would return to the Tremont Estate before she decided what to do next. Moreover, she had to admit she was exhausted by this entire ordeal.

Since this was a private matter between Mark and Arianne, Tiffany excused herself and bade her best friend farewell before returning to work.

When Arianne returned to the Tremont Estate, she did not return Mary and Henry’s greetings. Instead, she just nodded at them listlessly before heading upstairs to sleep. Since she was in a daze, she forgot to greet her grandmother who was in the living room.

The old woman took offense to this. She pursed her lips and complained, “What terrible manners! Don’t tell me you think that attitude is acceptable, Mark!”

This ordeal had worn Mark’s patience down, leaving him with no energy to deal with the old woman’s petty complaints. “Granny, Ari will probably be staying with us. Do you know why? It’s because she’s pregnant. She’s frail so please give her a break. While we’re at it, please avoid unnecessary bickering in the future. This child means a lot to both of us.”

An expression of shock appeared on the old lady's face. She said, "Young man, please. Arianne is my biological granddaughter! How can you even suggest that I'll do something to upset her? Honestly, there's no need for you to worry about this. Now, now, go and keep her company. As for me, I'll go out for a stroll later. The boredom of being stuck at home is killing me."

Mark nodded curtly and made his way toward Arianne's room. He made sure his movements were light since she was already asleep. He quietly made his way to the edge of the bed before he made himself comfortable.

His fingers nimbly tucked a few strands of her air behind her ear. As he looked at her sleeping face, a doting smile appeared on his face. She meant the world to him. However, now that there was a child in the equation, he was put between the devil and the deep blue sea. How was he supposed to choose?

It was five in the evening when Arianne finally roused from her slumber. The first thing she did was to make her way to the kitchen, asking for food. For some reason, she was ravenous as soon as she woke up.

Mary who had heard about Arianne's pregnancy was pale from being worried. She began by saying, "Hey, Ari? Uh, you see, you… you mean a lot to me so I think… I think it's for the best if you give up the child. I understand it'll hurt a lot, but I'm worried you'll suffer another complication. We can't take this lightly."

Arianne looked at the floor. "It's Mark, isn't it? He told you to dissuade me, didn't he? The doctor said it's not certain that I'll lose the baby. As long as there's a sliver of chance for my baby to survive, I'll fight for my baby's chance to see the world."

“No, Master Tremont didn’t ask me to dissuade you,” Mary said, sighing. “He didn‘t tell me anything. He spent the entire afternoon in bed, by your side. After that, he left for the company and hasn’t come home yet. What I just said… It’s my sincere opinion.”

Mary continued, “I watched you grow up from a child to a woman. My heart truly aches for you… Ah, I’ve gone off tangent… I’ll be quick with dinner. Go ahead and help yourself to some snacks for the time being to fill your empty stomach. Careful not to overeat. We don’t want you to be too full for dinner.”

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Arianne nodded. She left the kitchen and went into the living room. At the same time, Grandma Wynn returned with bags filled with infant clothing and maternity products.

“Oy, Arianne! Come and have a look. See if I’ve missed out on anything you might need. I’ve once helped prepare all these things for your aunt when she was expecting so you can trust me on this,” she said. “See these? Just you wait, it’s going to come in handy. Look at these baby clothes I picked, they’re all made from premium materials.”

Prior to this, Arianne only knew her grandma as a relentless bully who failed to provide any sense of kinship or warmth. However, this time, her grandmother almost brought tears to her eyes.

“Granny… You… You really believe I have a chance at becoming a mother?” She asked softly.

The old woman hesitated for a moment. “Well, I’ve heard bits and pieces of what happened. Your body is not the strongest. However, if you really want the child, then, have it. The Tremont business is huge, this legacy can’t be left without an heir, right?” She replied, “Now, if the doctor says you definitely shouldn’t continue with the pregnancy, then, heed the expert’s advice. After all, everything would be meaningless if you lose your life. However, if the doctor didn’t say such words, I’ll definitely stand by your decision.”

Arianne threw herself at her grandmother and cried out, “Granny, I want this child! I want this child so badly. Otherwise, I might not get another chance like this again.”

It was at this moment that Mark came in. The sight that greeted him caught him off-guard. His steps faltered and an unreadable emotion flashed in his eyes. When he regained his composure, he stepped forward. “That’s a lot of things that you bought. You shouldn’t have bought so many things.”

Grandma Wynn grabbed Arianne by the hand and drew her to the seat next to her. “Aww, the money I spent isn’t yours anyway. What’s wrong with spending on your child? Speaking of, Arianne has expressed a strong desire to keep the baby. What do you think?”

Mark averted his eyes immediately, afraid his resolve would weaken if he met Arianne’s eyes. “I’m still thinking about it. I haven’t decided. Let’s leave the question for another time. I’m going to take a shower.”

Arianne’s fingers tightened, and she felt a pang in her heart. Mark had made his stance quite clear. It was obvious he was leaning toward aborting the baby. The thing he needed to think about was probably how to break the news to her.

“Ouch! You’re going to break my hands!” Granny Wynn cried out, “What in tarnation are you trying to do?”

“I-I’m sorry!” Arianne yelped and released her grip, only realizing what she had done.

The old woman's expression regained its calmness, and she turned to tidy the things she had bought. "The child lives in you, no? If you're against the abortion, then, who in the world can make you abort it? Mark Tremont may look like a block of ice, but he's a block of ice with a heart. Heck, even Granny can see how much he cares about you. This is why you should say a few pleasant words to get to his heart. A woman who takes advantage of her feminine wiles lives the life of a queen. So? Think! All he cares about is your health, yes?"

It was a piece of shameless advice, and Arianne knew it. However, she took it to heart. Granny was right. She must speak to Mark tonight. She would not allow him to weasel out of giving her a direct answer. She had enough of vague answers.

During dinner, Mark personally placed a spoonful of every dish on the table on Arianne's plate. "You can't be picky with what you eat at this point," he explained. "You should eat as much as you can."

Arianne looked at the growing hill on her plate and chewed the service end of her fork in silence. Should she confront him now?

Granny Wynn elbowed her. "Eat, eat, eat! This is now the. Time. To. Eat."

Naturally, Arianne understood Granny Wynn's underlying meaning. Her grandmother was telling her that the discussion was best done behind closed doors.

Mark was wolfing down his food much more quickly than usual. Once he finished, he placed his cutleries down and rose to his feet before announcing, "I still have matters to attend to so I'll be heading back to the company. Please rest early, especially Ari. Please don't do anything reckless."

When Arianne saw Mark trying to avoid talking to her, she leaped to her feet immediately. “You’re just trying to weasel your way out of talking to me, aren’t you? You’re avoiding me, aren’t you?” She accused him angrily, “Mark Tremont, you can’t decide the fate of my child. I’m not the idiot and doormat you used to know. I’ll seek divorce if I have to. At that time, whether I live or die is none of your business!”

Various emotions surged through her, completely destroying her rationality at this moment and causing her to speak her mind before thinking twice. She had completely forgotten about Granny Wynn’s advice.

A stormy expression appeared on Mark’s face as he closed his eyes in frustration. “Ari, this isn’t as simple as you think it is. I cannot, I can’t stress this enough, I can’t let you do as you please. I’ll bring that medical report to a few more gynecologists for second opinions. No matter what happens, I must ensure you live.”

Arianne stomped up the stairs. A few moments later, she came down with the report in hand. She tore it into pieces right in Mark’s face.

“I guess second opinions are unnecessary now, huh? Let me tell you something; as long as there’s a chance carrying the child won’t kill me, I won’t give up on the child. Sure, the child might not mean much to you. After all, there are many women who are willing to bear your child.” She bristled in anger. “How dare you deny me this? This is my last chance! You can’t deprive me of my God-given right to be a mother, Mark Tremont! You’ve already deprived me of so many things. Are you still unsatisfied? I. Don’t. F**king. Owe. You!”

The entire place was deathly silent. No one dared to break the silence. A panicked Mary looked at Mark pleadingly.

Granny Wynn, however, slapped Mark's back. "Don't just stand there and watch her fume in anger! Cancel whatever you have to attend to and go to the room. Both of you can argue behind closed doors. I'm not going to allow both of you to act like monkeys in the common room.

Mark massaged the bridge of his nose in resignation before moving toward Arianne. "Alright, I'm not leaving, okay? We'll talk. Just… don't get too mad, please. It's not good for your health."

With reddened eyes, Arianne spun on her heels and stormed up the stairs. Just the thunderous thumps of her steps were enough to show how livid she was. It was as though she was picturing herself stomping on Mark.

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Mark Tremont clicked the door shut, and for a few moments, the air was still.

He began, "I've asked; the doctor cannot ensure that you'll survive this. Accidents could happen, always, and that's the last thing I want. To me, you are more important than anything else under the sun, do you understand? Fine, I concede that a lot of things in the past were all my bastardly doing, but listen to me — even if it is true that you can never be a mother, there's no woman out there who's going to replace you, let alone bear me my child. So please, rest your heart. My only concern is you; it always has been. To that end, I can give up on my child."

However, Arianne had hardened her stance so much that nothing could pierce through the walls she had built. "The doctor said the rate of complications isn't a hundred percent, remember? He didn't say this child is doomed!" she countered, her tone resolute. "I was there. I'm not deaf! Here's the ultimatum, Mark Tremont. You either divorce me right now, so that whether the child lives or dies no longer concerns you, or you agree that I can keep it. Your choice."

These two people had been in each other's life for so long that it was impossible for Mark not to understand her character. He must be acutely cognizant that Arianne would do anything, including fighting him, for this child.

She was similarly confident that Mark would never, ever entertain the idea of divorcing her.

A mental battle waged in his chest before he finally said, "Look, you… you can keep the child if and only if you return to the Capital and stay in the Tremont Estate. You must stay by my side and heed everything I say and do not try to leave me.

"This isn't just for me, Ari. It's mostly for you," he concluded. "Aside from me, no one in this entire world would go to the most arduous extent to ensure the child's safe delivery. I alone care that much."

Now it was Arianne's turn to choose. Would she go back to Tremont Estate? To his side?

Arianne caressed her belly and answered almost immediately after a second, "Alright. I'll do it!"

To her, right now, the only thing that mattered was the child. Everything else paled into gratuity.

For the kid, she could abandon everything that mattered to her and jettison the past like it never happened!

Her resolve was so palpable that it relieved Mark from his worries. “You don’t have to be scared, Ari. I’ll send some replacement to the café to help manage things in your absence, so you don’t need to worry about anything at all. At the end of every month, Naya will automatically send you the accounts. From now on, your focus is on nurturing the child inside you.”

Like always, he was a man of his words. On the very next day, a select few of the nation’s top dessert-makers appeared in Arianne’s café.

Tanya and Naya found out from them that Ari would be absent from the café for an extended period, but their shock was mild and purely directed at the fact that this day would come so soon.

Tanya had long planned to go to the Capital, where Arianne was, so she made her wish known to Mark’s people. Once her replacement had arrived, Tanya began her trip to the Capital by public transport since she could not afford traveling by plane.

This would mark her second time visiting the Capital. Knowing Arianne’s circumstances, she decided against asking her for help and called Tiffany, who was in the middle of a work-rush in the company. When Tiffany heard that the girl was at the railway station, she had to put down her work and fetch her.

Tanya did not bring much with her. Though the nipping climate had settled in the city, the poor girl had only her thin clothes on her. Tiffany quickly untied her scarf and wrapped it around Tanya’s neck. “It’s getting colder here, hon, you should wear more than that. Wouldn’t do you good if you become sick,” she admonished before adding, “Arianne’s confined at home. I don’t think she’s coming out anytime soon. So, what do you plan to do?”

Tanya thought for a moment and answered, “I wanna look for a job here, so I’ll probably rent a place to stay and settle down. Um, I don’t really know this place, so could you — if it doesn’t inconvenience you — help me out? It doesn’t matter what job it is, as long as it’s enough to cover my living expenses. As for

a place to stay… Well, I don't need it to be spacious or grand or anything. I know how expensive it is to rent a room here."

Tiffany's mind drew a blank on where to get her a job or a place to stay right now, so her thoughts naturally drifted to Jackson's spacious villa with its many unoccupied rooms. "Well, you could come to stay at my place for two or so days for the time being," she said, the arrangement taking shape in her head. "In the meantime, I'll help keep a lookout for jobs and rooms. But I gotta' warn ya. Work has been very, very busy lately that it might take me a while to dig up anything."

Hearing how busy she was caused a little consternation to Tanya. "Um, uh, it's fine. It's fine, I'll work out something myself. Oh, I know! I can look to Ricky for help. Sorry I bothered you."

Eric? That was a man with quite a track record of trustworthiness. There were little doubts that he could be depended on, so Tiffany gave the man a ring after momentary hesitance.

After hearing about Tanya's arrival, as well as her quest to look for a job and accommodation, Eric agreed to help. Compared to Arianne and Tiffany, his hands were a lot less tied.

Tiffany rushed back to work after sending Tanya to Eric's company, leaving the girl in his care. She tailed the man as he toured the building with slight jealousy on her face. "So, this place is all yours? Lord, it's huge…"

Eric gave a nonchalant shrug. "Naw, this can't compare to Jackson or Mark's. I only founded this company recently, after all… Here, you can rest here in my office for now. When work's over, I'll bring you to my place."

“You know… If you don’t mind, why don’t you stay at my place? I live alone, so I’ve got plenty of guest rooms to spare. You could always move out after you scouted the perfect place for yourself — it’s all up to you. Oh, and about your job, do you have anything specific in mind? Any special talent or skill? I’ll help look for those kinds of jobs for you in the meantime.”

Tanya shook her head. “Nothing specific. I can do physical labor, and I’m open to working overtime. All I ask is that my wage is enough to sustain me here.”

Was physical labor all Tanya could do? It was a little mind-boggling to Eric, but he was too prudent to ask the girl about her educational level. Instead, he asked tentatively, “Uh, if that’s the case… Before we find you a suitable job, we’re hiring a janitor. Would you be interested in filling in the position for now? My company is not too big, so it won’t be too backbreaking. You’re allowed to take breaks when everything’s done.”

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Tanya gave a split-second answer, “Considered the job taken; I’m your gal! It was me who kept my home and Arianne’s café spotless every day, so you can count on me!”

A while later, after hearing that Tanya had arrived, Arianne gave the girl an inquiring call, who gleefully reported everything from her new job to her new residence without failure before concluding cheerily, “So you see, Ari, there’s nothing to worry about. I’ve just got a job as a janitor in Eric’s company and will be staying at his place until I find a room or house for myself, so yea. You focus on nurturing that baby and don’t worry about me, okay?… Oh! If there’s ever a convenient time, I hope we can meet up!”

Arianne knew not if such convenience might ever exist; all she knew was how stringent Mark’s stay-at-home order was — she was even denied a stroll out of the house. Consequently, no one came to see her at home, either.

“Er, about that… Let’s just focus on your new job and settle down for now. We can always plan meeting up over a meal some other time,” she replied.

She had just hung her phone when she heard the butler knocking on her door. “Your aunt is here, Madam. Shall we let her in?”

Arianne was slightly stunned. Her aunt — the same aunt whom she had seen for only a moment or two, who came just to dump her granny in her lap? That aunt? Why was she suddenly here? To pay Granny a visit?

Arianne gave an acknowledging hum and descended the stairs to figure out more. There, the old woman was sitting in the living room with a rather sour mien.

“Hey, Granny. Have you heard? Aunt’s here. Aren’t you going to say hi? Or welcome her in?” Arianne began.

“Pssh, what, you really have no idea why she’s suddenly here?” Granny Wynn harrumphed surlily. “She thought I was a bothersome little waste of space back then and then used the excuse that I wasn’t her biological mother to abandon me at your place! Why else would she be here now if not because she heard that you and I are part of the Tremont family, eh? Now, all of a sudden, we’re blood relatives again, praise the Lord! Urgh. Fine, the only tie we have is that I’ve raised her since she was a kid. She was never my biological daughter. Since she’s decided she’d taken care of me enough and abandoned me, then why should I see someone who has no ties to me? Just get her off the property.”

Arianne nodded before impassively crossing through the front yard and arriving at the gate to the mansion. There, bracing the chilly gale, stood a woman whose face lit up with a gushing smile when she saw Arianne. Through the crack in the gate, she lurched a bag full of healthcare products at Arianne’s direction and cooed, “Oh, Ari darling! How’s Granny doing? I’m here to see her!”

Arianne demurred from her gift and instead stood still at her spot, replying coolly, “Granny’s walking again. She’s eating well, sleeping fine, and capable of going out for walks. She’s as spirited and zesty as can be. Oh, and I asked her about you, and she said she’s not interested in seeing you. I guess this is goodbye, then.”

The look on Zoey Harris’s face stiffened. “God, is that woman still salty about me leaving her in your care? Sigh, how could Mom not know that I was pressured by circumstances? My family is running into a financial bind right now. God, it couldn’t be helped! Unlike you, Arianne — you’re living an envy-worthy life. Isn’t it ultimately a good thing that I left her in your care? Hell, it would be a travesty to make her suffer the financial constraints that are now binding my family! Christ, Ari, you gotta’ let me in. It’s cold here, and I gotta’ go inside and explain my position to her!”

They might not share any real blood relations, but she was still Arianne’s aunt. Too indifferent to care about the validity of her claims, Arianne let out a soft sigh and gestured to the guards to open the gate.

Zoey instantly sprung, zipping past Arianne and into the house. By the time the woman, in a snail-like pace, finally returned inside, she heard Zoey’s howl-like weeping a few steps later. Everything that fell out of her mouth was a litany of how sorry she was.

“Please, mom, you must understand how difficult it was for me to make that choice! How could you — how could you so heartlessly deny my identity as your daughter? You’re the one who raised me since I was a kid, and I haven’t repaid the wealth of your love until the last of your days yet! Please, Mom, why wouldn’t you welcome me by your side?”

“Oh ho ho, you didn’t sound like this back then at all!” Granny Wynn retorted hotly. “You said you couldn’t afford to have me in your family and that I’ve been staying in your home for so long that it’s high-time Arianne takes over the responsibility, huh? That good-for-nothing you called your husband has not even been subtle about calling me a leech. Ha, Lord Almighty, someone forgot who was the one

who paid for your damn car and your damn house with all of her savings! Had it not been my help, you wouldn't even be able to live the way you do! Oh, but when I've got no money to my name, you people start alienating me. Like, what in God's name? That son-in-law ain't my son, fine if he hates me. But you… You! I raised you through hell, and this is how you treated me? Out of my face, now! Get the hell out of here right now!"

Already much perturbed by Zoey's ceaseless sobs and whines, Henry warned with a frown, "Please keep your voice down. Our Madam requires peace and quiet for her baby."

Zoey eyed Arianne's flat abdomen, and a sharp glint flitted through her eyes. "Ohh, you're pregnant, Ari?" she cooed. "Where's Mark? Must be busy at work, huh? Hey, you know, it's a long, long way I've traveled, so I should probably stay here a while longer. We haven't actually visited each other for years; we should definitely rectify that!"

Her attitude elicited an internal smirk in Arianne. The old woman was right; Zoey was not here to apologize. She was here to ingratiate on her relatives of higher standings. "Oh, you shouldn't have, Auntie. We weren't close back then, and we don't need to suddenly start doing that now. I have, after all, gotten used to the idea of being all alone. Granny is living pretty nicely with me here, and since you're reluctant to take care of her, I'll gladly do so in your stead, which means she's not related to you anymore.

"I guess I should say thank you for your sacrifice all these years, Auntie. You certainly repaid the debt you owed Granny, so now, the two of you are even. From now on, let us live our separate lives happily."

Zoey wiped away the crocodile tears she had put in so much effort into squeezing and took Arianne's hand with a coy grin. "Oh please, darling, you misunderstand me. I care about Mom, and I care about you as my family! Your dad is gone now, so I'm more or less you only relative left, no? I mean, I don't even know where the hell your no-good mom went… Anyway, every woman who has married must still retain connection to their original family, don't you agree? I get that I was wrong, which is why I'm going to bring Mom home and treat her well! But of course, my family is not even a fraction as good as yours, so we might need some of your generosity…"

Chapter 626

When Arianne heard the subtle meaning behind Zoey's words, she scoffed even more. She just wanted to take the old woman back so that she could get paid every now and then. She wasn't an idiot. Besides, she was the only person who was allowed to scold Helen. This woman in front of her was not worthy. She pulled away her hand expressionlessly, "My mother has contacted me. I know exactly where she is. I do have a family of my own, so you really don't have to concern yourself with that. I'm afraid that Granny won't be going home with you. You can ask her if you don't believe me."

Zoey could tell that Arianne wasn't easy to deal with, so she had no choice but to try and persuade the old woman, "Mom, you can't let someone from the younger generation hate me like this. Regardless of the things I've done, I'm still your daughter. Come home with me…"

The old woman was annoyed, "Stop changing your tune all the time. I'm old. I don't have the energy to deal with this. I'm not going back. I've been enjoying my days in the Tremont Estate. Why should I go back to an ingrate like you? Leave, now. You're not fit to eat the food off the Tremont Estate's tables!"

Seeing that the situation was pretty much at an end, and unwilling to have a stranger disturb Arianne during her pregnancy, Henry stepped forward and grabbed Zoey by the arm, "Allow me to escort you."

Now Zoey was upset. She slapped Henry's hand away, "You're a Tremont family servant, aren't you? Is it your turn to speak? I'm Mrs. Tremont's aunt. We share the same maiden surname! Don't you dare use your position to bully me!"

This thoroughly annoyed Arianne. She could not tolerate having her aunt, who had appeared out of nowhere, scolding Henry, who had taken care of her since childhood, with such arrogance, "Shut up! It is not your place to speak in the Tremont Estate! Leave. Get out, now!"

Seeing her rage, the old woman raised her walking stick and smacked Zoey with it, “You immoral thing, you’ve caused a disaster and now you want to drag my granddaughter down? She’s pregnant! So don’t you dare enrage her. Get out!”

Henry waved at the bodyguard outside. Zoey was immediately dragged out, along with the presents that she had brought. Zoey may have hideous features, but she had received high level education through the old lady. Humiliated and resentful, she kicked the entrance door, “Who gives a shit? You think you’re all that, just because you have money? Didn’t you weasel your way back to the Tremont Estate, using that child in your belly? Since you’ve managed to get pregnant, you’d better make sure that child can be born!”

The bodyguard threatened her until she finally relented and left.

Arianne sat on the couch for a while to calm herself after hearing her vicious remarks, “Granny, as long as you promise not to contact her anymore, I’ll stop being courteous to her. One more thing, she was rude to Henry. I cannot tolerate that. She, an aunt whom I’ve never even ment, is nothing compared to Henry.”

The old lady was enraged too, “Ignore her. How dare she curse you? My sentiments for her have long ended! I’ve lost my daughter. I’ve allowed her and her husband to empty all of my funds because of my soft heartedness. I gave up on her a long time ago. No need to be courteous to her. By the way, you’ve mentioned that Helen’s contacted you… Does she still have the nerve to see you? She never took you away when your father died.

Arianne bit her lips at the mention of Helen, “Maybe she had some sort of unexplainable pain, like you. It’s fine. My life turned out alright. She regrets it now and has given me a house and quite a lot of savings. She’s divorced her second husband too. That man and her younger daughter are rotting in jail now. This is considered a form of punishment for her. It doesn’t bother me anymore.”

“Are you saying… that I’m just like that woman?” the old lady asked in a muffled tone. “Yes, I admit it, I didn’t take you away back then. It was such a big mess then, and I was dragged down with a family to feed. How could I possibly have had the courage to step out and acknowledge you? You can hate me if you like, I'm reaching the end of my life anyway. You won’t be able to hate me for very long.”

Arianne felt helpless. Old people are really crafty. She could say one thing wrong and they’d split hairs with her. That wasn’t what she meant; she just didn’t want the old woman to disapprove of Helen too much. She didn’t want the old lady to curse at Helen either. After all… she was her mother.

Mark returned home at three in the afternoon. The first thing he did was ask about Arianne. Henry took off his coat for him and gently replied, “Mrs. Tremont and Mrs. Wynn are both having an afternoon nap. They’re still asleep. Mrs. Tremont has been eating well, but… her aunt caused a huge ruckus today. Mrs. Tremont was very angry.”

Mark’s expression stiffened. “From now on, lifeless idiots like these are not allowed to disturb Ari. This must not happen again.”

Chapter 627

Henry lowered his head and mumbled a reply. Mark went upstairs straightaway, walking on tiptoes, afraid that he would wake Arianne.

He walked into the room and headed to the bed to check on her. Confirming that she was fast asleep, he changed his clothes and went to the study.

…

That night, Tanya waited for Eric to get off work before following him home.

Eric had always lived on his own, so he preempted Tanya, “My house is pretty messy, and I’m usually at the office. I don’t come home sometimes, so it’s only cleaned by a temporary worker once a week.”

Tanya patted her chest, “Don’t worry. Leave the house to me from now on. I’ll make sure that it’s neat and tidy! You won’t have to waste your money on a temporary worker anymore!”

Eric smiled bitterly, “That’s not what I meant… I’m saying, please don’t get annoyed.”

Tanya smiled at him and flashed her cute canine teeth, “No, I won’t! By the way, I’ll pay you for rent. In fact, I’ll transfer the money over to you right now. You can cut it from my pay if it’s not enough.”

Did she have to pay him for this? Eric couldn’t take it anymore, “Hold it! I don’t need money. Didn’t you say that you’d keep the place clean? Consider that your rent. Temporary workers are expensive these days, enough to pay rent.” This was, of course, a lie. His house was in the urban district. No temporary worker could possibly afford the rent here. However, he really didn’t see a need for rent. Tanya wasn’t familiar with the landscape anyway.

Tanya suspected nothing, and believed him wholeheartedly, “Oh… Alright then. It’s agreed. It’s not convenient for us to be living together, so I’ll move out once I find a home. However, I can still come over and clean up for you, absolutely free. It’s your fault for being such a nice guy. You’ve really helped me.”

Now that he was home, Eric sat down on his couch, as usual, “You can go upstairs and have a look, get used to your surroundings and see which bedroom you’d like. You can have whichever one you like. Deal with it on your own. I don’t usually cook, so I order takeout. What would you like to eat?”

Eric’s house was a double storey duplex, which didn’t exactly have a wide square footage, but it was pretty expensive, considering that it was situated in the heart of the city. Tanya looked around and chose a small bedroom, “I’ll go tidy up a little. No need for takeout. It’s a waste of money. I can cook. I’ll cook for you.”

Eric did not refuse. He had a long day and only wanted to lie down. He was too lazy to move.

Tanya swiftly tidied up the room and headed straight to the kitchen. She couldn’t find any ingredients in the refrigerator, so she asked for the nearest grocery shop and went out on her own.

Eric was feeling a sort of weird sensation. His life felt chaotic when he lived on his own. He rarely ever used the kitchen. Now that there was someone else living here, a hardworking little worker bee, it felt pretty good…

After more than an hour had passed since Tanya went out, he began to feel uneasy. She couldn’t have gotten lost, right?

Chapter 628

Just as he was about to call her and asked, he heard a knock on the door. He opened it and was shocked. Tanya was carrying bags of ingredients, from top to toe. Her face, however, was still smiling, “I’m sorry. I made a wrong turn so I got back a little late. It’s raining outside…”

He took the grocery bags from her, “Go and get changed. I’ll wash the vegetables.”

Tanya sneezed, “O-okay, I’ll come by as soon as I can.”

Tanya emerged, ready and clean, before he could take the vegetables out of the grocery bags, “I’ll do it. You sit down. Dinner will be ready soon.”

Her optimism seemed infectious. He had never met such a strong girl, “Why didn’t you call me when you got lost? It’s raining too. I could’ve driven over to pick you up. One more thing. The grocery shop is pretty far, isn’t it? Don’t you know how to hail a cab?”

Tanya was wholly focused on picking out the vegetables, “I was afraid that you might think I was an idiot. It’s not that far anyway. I can walk there. Hailing a cab is a waste of money. And so what if it rains? This rain was pretty sudden and a lot of people got wet, but I’m healthy enough. I won’t catch a cold.”

Eric did not say anything more. He turned around and walked out. Soon, he threw a towel on her, “Dry your hair.”

Tanya was taken aback. She turned around towards him. He had already returned to the couch and was fiddling with his phone. The towel in her hands was the only proof she had of his short visit.

Soon, fragrant grilled chicken, potatoes, and vegetables were served on the dining table. There was a wide variety. The food didn’t look good, but the aroma was fragrant. Eric had three helpings, “You’re pretty good at cooking. I haven’t had such a good appetite in ages.”

Tanya's eyes shone. She stared at him innocently, "Really? I just made a few simple, home cooked dishes. Your stomach isn't well, so I didn't make anything spicy. If you like it so much, I'll cook for you, everyday!"

Her answer sounded weird, no matter how you looked at it. Eric did not continue the conversation but coughed awkwardly instead, "Ah… I have some work to do. You should sleep early. Come with me and report for duty at the office tomorrow."

Tanya nodded and sent him to the door. She was even considerate enough to take his shoes out from the shoe rack for him. Then, she gave him an umbrella, "Come home soon."

Once Eric had left, she cleaned every part of the house and finally stopped once she could see her own reflection in the floors. She was exhausted from cleaning. She checked her phone and found a message from Tiffany. She called her back, "I was cleaning up and didn't see your message. I'm fine, Tiffany. I'm alright. Don't worry."

Tiffany heard her panting and couldn't help smiling wickedly, "Are you sure that you're cleaning the house? You're alone in the house with a man. I don't believe you…"

Tanya couldn't bear her teasing and blushed, "Stop that! Ricky has gone back to the office to do overtime. I'm all alone at home! I'll be reporting for duty at his office tomorrow. I'm not going to start anything. I'm fine with being the cleaning lady. I'll change jobs once I find something else. I'll buy you a meal once I get my pay."

Tiffany knew how thick-faced she could be, so she stopped teasing her, "Fine, fine. You should get an early night's rest. We'll talk later. I'll invite you when I visit Ari next time."

Jackson pounced on her once she ended the call, “Who are you talking to? Why is your smile… so wretched…”

Tiffany shot him an irritable glare, “Wretched? How could you describe a gorgeous girl such as myself with that word? You’re blind. It was Tan; I was only asking her if she was alright staying with Eric. Unlike you, I don’t have any ghosts from the past on my phone. I don’t have many friends from the opposite sex like you, either. I’m not as experienced as you…”

The corners of Jackson’s lips twitched. Was this in the past? Was she going to denounce his amorous past for the rest of their lives? She’d always mock him for no good reason…

Chapter 629

It was getting late. Tiffany did not want to fool around with him anymore. She returned to the bedroom and fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow. To have food in one’s belly and a good night’s sleep after a long day of work was the greatest kind of happiness.

Jackson, however, was determined not to give her any peace. “There’s one more thing left to do.”

She was close to flipping out. “People are supposed to be completely relaxed when trying to conceive, right? I’m exhausted every single day. Even if I do conceive, it wouldn’t be a healthy child. I just want to sleep. Behave yourself!”

How could he possibly behave himself? He continued trying to persuade her. “Don’t be like this… I’ve already given up smoking and alcohol, and now, you’re telling me to behave myself? I can’t do it. If

you're tired, you can stop working overtime starting tomorrow, and get ready for your pregnancy. You can always visit Arianne or Tanya when you have time. That way, you can relax and cheer up, right?"

Tiffany was slightly moved. After days of working overtime and coming home to have sex, she felt as though she was about to collapse from exhaustion. No one would accuse her of being lazy if she stopped working overtime because she was preparing to conceive, right? She smiled. "Fine. If I don't conceive after all the sex, I'm going to punch you!"

Jackson did not take her threats seriously. No one could guarantee these things anyway. It was not like one could get pregnant just because one wanted to. It was all uncertain. "I'll do my best and increase my efforts!"

He was just about to get to the main point when his phone suddenly rang.

Tiffany was disappointed and irritated, kicking him away. "Go. Answer your phone. Don't disturb me."

He got up helplessly and picked up the phone before walking out. When he saw it was a call from Mark, he could not really complain. "Mark? Why are you calling at this hour? My woman nearly killed me with a kick because of you…"

Mark sounded sullen at the end of the line. "What do you do when your woman refuses to let you get in bed with her?"

Jackson chuckled. "Arianne won't let you get in bed with her? Just wear her down. In any case, it's not like you can do anything now. If you ask me, there's no difference if you sleep together or not. You'd only be a nuisance if you sleep together now."

“Do you ever think of anything else apart from sex?” Mark replied indifferently, “Pretend I didn’t ask. Bye.”

Tiffany was already asleep by the time Jackson hung up. He sighed and did not continue with his baby-making plans. He climbed into bed and held her in his arms. He shifted into a comfortable position before he closed his eyes.

At the Tremont Estate.

Mark was making his second attempt to sleep in the room. He was just about to lie down when Arianne woke up.

She glared at him, “You, sleep in the guest room!”

He paused for a moment and said in a lowered voice, “I won’t touch you…”

She refused to back down. “I don’t believe you. Otherwise, I’ll just sleep in the guest room.”

He was at a loss and had no choice but to get down from the bed, “Fine, I’ll sleep in the guest room. You sleep.” He really just wanted to cuddle her to sleep, but she was so wary of him. It was as though he was a beast. In her eyes, did he seem like he lacked self-restraint?

Arianne turned around when she heard the door close. She was wide awake now. She had slept too much during the day so she could not really sleep now. In fact, he did not wake her up. She just did not want to sleep with him, afraid he would lose control again. She might have agreed to return to him, but it did not mean everything was fine. She needed time to get used to this. Currently, all she wanted was to safely give birth to the baby.

During the weekend, Tiffany brought Tanya along to visit the Tremont Estate.

Chapter 630

Arianne had been stuck at home over the past few days. She felt as though she was going to go crazy from the boredom. Now that Tiffany and Tanya were here, she was a lot happier.

Tiffany had brought two types of food — sour and spicy. “Ari, are you more inclined toward sour or spicy food? According to old wives’ tales, if an expecting mother craves sour food, the baby will be a boy. If the expecting mother craves spicy food, the baby will be a girl.”

Arianne shook her head. “I don’t feel like eating anything. I’ve been feeling nauseous lately, and my appetite is at an all-time low. I barely eat. I have to go for check-ups every half a month, and that’s the only time I ever get to step out of the house. I’m going to die of boredom, but I’m too afraid to go out. Every time I think about being confined to the house until the baby is born, I feel empty inside.”

The old lady chimed in at this moment, “You’ll have to put up with it for your child. Giving birth is a mother’s burden. A man’s efforts are negligible. Those who are kind will give you a few words of comfort. Those who are not will leave you to handle everything on your own. You’re quite lucky that you have people waiting on you.”

Tiffany gave the old woman a thumbs-up gesture. “You’re right, grandma. This is a woman’s burden. I don’t know when I’ll ever get pregnant. I can’t get pregnant no matter how much I want to. I’m going crazy.”

“It’s alright. It’ll come when the time is right,” Arianne said reassuringly, “Your mood will be affected when you’re too worried.”

Tanya had been silent ever since her arrival. Arianne found it strange. “What’s wrong, Tan? Why are you so quiet?”

Tanya seemed absent-minded. “N-nothing. Maybe I’m just not used to the work here so I’m a little tired…”

Arianne was sensitive to the emotions of others. Something was clearly off with Tanya. Eric would never give her an over-exhausting job. She never looked like this back when they were working in the dessert shop, “Tan, what’s wrong? This definitely isn’t exhaustion. You’re the most energetic person I’ve ever met. You can always talk to Tiffie and me. You have no friends or relatives here so don’t keep things from us.”

Tanya shook her head stubbornly. “I’m really fine. I’m just not used to it. I’ll be alright after a while.”

Tiffany waved her hand in a carefree manner. “Stop being so nervous, Ari. She’s probably not used to being away from her hometown. Don’t be so sensitive. She’ll be fine soon.”

Tanya smiled and nodded, echoing Tiffany’s word, “That’s right. Don’t worry about me. You take care of your baby.”

Arianne rubbed her forehead. “Fine, maybe I am being too sensitive. I’ve been stuck at home with nothing to do. Talk to me if you need anything.”

Tanya nodded. “Well, I’m glad you’re alright. I’ve got to go. Ricky didn’t go to work today. He’s at home so I better go back and clean up. I don’t want to be a leech. I’ll visit you again soon.”

Arianne did not insist on her staying, she knew Tanya was prideful. “Alright. Get home safely.”

After sending Tanya off, Tiffany curiously stroked Arianne’s belly. “This little one is really lucky. He or she is destined to have everything before he or she is even born. Since the baby’s parents are good looking, there’s no doubt the baby will grow up into a handsome boy or beautiful girl. Has the fetus moved yet?”

Arianne chuckled. “It’s still too small. I can’t feel a thing. The baby will only start kicking around four months or so.”

Suddenly, Tiffany said in a peculiar tone, “You’re always shouldering the burden. Mark doesn’t even do a thing. If he’s ever unkind to you, I’ll decapitate him.”

The old lady chuckled. “Who would say unpleasant things about someone in front of that person?”