Ruling 761

Chapter 761

Just as Mark dreaded, Zoey Harris's scumbag of a husband was so gratified by the ill-gotten money that he was encouraged to demand it again. Mark had optimistically thought that $750,000 could last until Arianne gave birth to the child, but he thought wrong.

To get that much money in one go was to compel a man to lose all of his sensibilities. Harris, already a disgustingly greedy man, managed to lose every single penny in a series of gambling fiascos. After a night of spectacular losses, the broke man came back knocking on Mark's door like a soulless husk.

Mark was never known for his patience. He could stretch his limits for Arianne's sake, but to be threatened by the same person over and over again was just a bare-faced challenge to his control. $750,000 was only enough for a few days? Someone had a hole in their pocket!

Mark stared at the man, who emanated the stench of failure, in his office and placed his hand over his nose. "I gave you $750,000, Mr. Harris. I gave you $750,000 just a few days ago! What do you think this place is?"

Endangered by more gambling debts than he could clear, Harris wore a look of desperation. "No! Just think of this as helping me for the last time, okay? The last time! I'm never coming back after this!"

Mark furrowed his eyebrows. "Is that so? Or perhaps I should be more cautious of the words of a gambler? You had the choice to conduct a legitimate business, yet you chose to be involved in gambling instead. Supply you any more money, and I'll be an abettor to your vices," he rebuffed. "The only reason why I conceded to your demands the last time was that you're Arianne's uncle. Yet, time and time again, you held this against me."

Harris fell onto his knees in a loud crash, groveling. “I s-s-wear, I’m never gonna gamble again, promise! I’ll s-spend my days with Auntie Zoey properly after I’ve cleared all of my debt. I swear I’ll change! Turn over a new leaf! L-L-Look, I didn’t want that old woman to die, I swear! I just wanted her to be sufficiently sick, but never in my heart did I want her to die! I regret it all! And I swear, I’ll never tell Arianne about this, so please — for the last time, I beg of you, help me! You… You wouldn’t want Arianne to live through her uncle being lynched on the streets because of some gambling debts, right?”

Mark called out to Davy. “Give him a cheque.”

Davy was stunned. He had been stunned the first time Mark agreed to the man’s request, but to do it the second time so easily? It was just not how Mark usually did things. In fact, his boss never displayed such a meek nature to anyone before.

Still, none of these questions escaped his mind. Outwardly, Davy obeyed Mark’s order quietly.

Upon receiving the cheque, Harris asked tentatively, “How much am I allowed…?”

Mark lit up a cigarette. “You’re allowed any amount you like. It doesn’t matter; this would be your last, anyway.”

Davy’s heart skipped a beat. Mark had never picked up a cigarette under any circumstances since Arianne’s pregnancy.

A palpable flash of joy flitted through Harris's eyes, who unabashedly filled up the blank with "$750,000." In other words, the amount Harris had leached from Mark totaled up to $1.5 million.

Mark's facial expression remained unchanged. "That amount should be more than enough to cover your gambling debts, wouldn't you think? From now on, live your life properly. I would very much hope that we never cross paths again. Agreed?"

Harris bobbed his head gushingly. "Oh yes, I hear you, loud and clear! In my head! Thank you so much, dear nephew-in-law. I'm leaving!"

Mark snuffed out the ember off his cigarette with his fingers immediately after the man left. The storm in his mien was so striking that Davy was mortified into silence.

A few moments later, Mark's default mood seemed to have returned. "Cancel the meeting in the evening."

"But Mr. Tremont," Davy began, his tone reluctant, "that meeting is critical. It has been arranged since way back."

Mark rose to his feet and tidied his collar. "Nothing is more important to me than my wife and child. Do you understand me?"

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Davy quickly answered, "Y-yes! I'm on it right away!"

The first thing that came into Mark's line of sight once he stepped into the Tremont Estate was Arianne. Suddenly, all of his stress melted away.

Only her presence could dispel every dark cloud swirling in his mind. Relaxed, he cooed, "Has the kid been kind to Mommy? Or are we expecting a little troublemaker, Ari?"

His gentle, loving tone struck true to Arianne's soft spot. Chuckling softly, she looked down and traced invisible circles on her belly. "Oh, the child's been good. No one could be that much of a trouble at this size and age, right? Now, why are you back so soon today? Don't you have anything at work? Either way, you're just in time for lunch. Are you going back to work for the evening?"

Mark crouched, placing his ear as closely as he could to her belly, hoping to catch any indication of the child's movement. All he could hear was a series of burblings not dissimilar to the sound of bubble-blowing.

It was nothing interesting nor novel, yet for some reason, to hear it was a most wondrous feeling.

As though worried that he would rouse the sleeping child, Mark's voice became featherlight. "I'll be off to the company after lunch since I still have some errands pending, but I'll be back as soon as I finish, I promise. I just… I just have this nagging sense of dread — I felt that I had to see you now. So, here I am."

Since her pregnancy, Arianne's sense of smell had heightened. Quickly, she caught a whiff of tobacco from Mark's shirt and questioned, "Did you smoke?"

He froze then briskly rose to sit on a couch across her. “I’m sorry. I was in a pretty turbulent headspace back in the office, so I puffed a single cigarette. Is it strong?”

“It’s fine, but it’s a bit discomforting to me. In fact… It kinda makes me sick,” Arianne said, shaking her head. “I think it’s best you stop this bad habit once and for all, you know? Second-hand smoke is harmful to young children too.”

“Right, I agree,” Mark answered quickly with a smile. “To be honest, I haven’t been smoking for a long time now…”

It was all because Harris showed his stupid face at his door, slobbering for money. His presence infuriated Mark so much, he had to rely on a cigarette to calm himself. Frankly, Arianne was the only reason why that scumbag managed to leave his office in one piece.

While the two were having lunch, Arianne suddenly piped, “Did my uncle visit you just now?”

Every muscle in Mark’s face tensed. “Who told you that?”

“What’s the matter?” she asked, taken aback by the magnitude of his response. “I overheard Henry and Brian. Did something happen? Why did he come to you?… Is it because of money? If it’s about money, you must not — I repeat! — must not give in to his demands! What, he thinks your money’s harvested from trees? And also… the more I think about it, the more I believe I should bring Granny back to the Tremont Estate after I gave birth — oh, speaking of giving birth! God, Mark, did you know that childbirth is legit dangerous? Even a healthy mother may expect complications such as amniotic fluid embolism or hemorrhage and all kinds of fatal stuff. It kinda makes me worry, you know? I’m a bit too frail, so doesn’t that make me even more susceptible to all these terrifying complica—”

A stormy Mark hurled his utensils to the table before Arianne could finish.

The woman automatically halted herself. She had not seen him in rage for so long that her mind blanked at giving him a response.

The air gelled for a few seconds. Mark visibly took a deep breath.

“Ari, don’t say things like that. Nothing will come to you; I’ll see to it that you birth the child safely. Regardless, I’m sorry for… my outburst; it wasn't directed at you. I’ve been getting so many troubles lately that I’m not in the right mood,” he explained. “Anyway, the time’s almost up. You carry on your own; I have to go.”

At the end of his explanation, Mark stood and left briskly without a moment to lose.

Arianne was hurt. She wondered if she had accidentally provoked him, yet nothing she said was remotely out of line. Then, why did he lash out like that? He said he had been getting troubles lately — but how were those grounds enough to take it out on her? Worst of all, he just excused himself from the table after a cryptic explanation. Was she supposed to play ball and pretend that none of that happened?

Once he stepped into the car, Mark glared at Brian. “Could you be so kind as to make sure Ari isn’t within hearing distance the next time you and Henry gossip? Mark my words — if she hears anything she isn’t supposed to one more time, you can kiss your job goodbye.”

Brian broke out into beads of cold sweat, but outwardly, he answered, “Understood, Sir. I’ll be wiser. But, well, what you did just now… I don’t think Ma’am is going to take it lightly at all, yes?”

Chapter 763

“I get it! I get it! I lost control of my emotions back there, alright? God, everything is pissing me off.” Mark leaned back onto the seat and massaged his forehead. “Every time she mentions Granny, my heart skips a beat out of fear and trepidation. Yet, time and again, that baleful good-for-nothing keeps coming to my doorstep, weaponizing that secret against me. I just can’t possibly let her know, Brian. If this secrecy continues to hang by a thread, nothing good could come out of it. No, there isn’t going to be a next time for him. No more threats…

“Oh, that reminds me. Make arrangements with the hospital so that they’re now standing-by for her childbirth. Ari’s frail constitution makes premature delivery very possible; I don’t want any complication to occur throughout the process.”

Brian let out a silent breath of relief and answered, “Understood.”

Night fell, yet Arianne resisted calls for dinner. Just thinking back on Mark angrily lashing out in the afternoon quickly bereft her of any appetite.

Seeing her like this made Mary panicked. “Please, Ari, pretend that Mr. Tremont somehow lost his marbles back there, okay? There is no reason to get back at him this way. You know how men are — they can’t always be perfectly reasonable all the time, so please, don’t use that small instance as a reason to be mean to yourself and the child! At least have a little bite or two?”

Arianne was lying down on the bed motionlessly. “No. No appetite. He hasn’t come back yet?”

Mary sighed. “He might have a bit more work than he predicted, but even if Mr. Tremont comes back home right now, he would still feel terrible seeing you like this! Come on, Ari, tell me, what do you crave? I’ll make it for you right away!” she urged. “No matter what it is, you must eat something! Just look at yourself — you’re nurturing that little one inside of you, yet you still look so skinny. Your face alone has become unhealthily sharper since your pregnancy!”

Arianne, however, expressed another kind of concern. “I dare not overeat, Mary. It’s risky to have the child grow too large. I know how weak my body is — if the child grows too soon, it might become the bane of me. Plus, I heard that it’s better to deliver the child naturally rather than a cesarean, so… Look, I’m fine, Mary. I’ll tell you if I’m hungry, but for now, I really don’t feel like eating at all. You can leave me be. I’m just gonna take a nap.”

Failing to convince her, Mary left.

Halfway through her descent, Mary met face-to-face with Mark, and all of her frustration poured out before she could adjust her tone. “Where on Earth have you been, young man? You’re usually home by late evening! You acted out against Ari this afternoon, and you still thought it’d be a great idea to come home so late? Do you know that your wife hasn’t eaten a thing for dinner? Christ, it’s almost nine already. Are you not gonna see her and do something?!”

Mary’s words spurred Mark into clambering up the stairs, his habit of changing into his indoor shoes forgotten. Hurriedly, he pushed open the door to the sight of Arianne tucked under the blanket.

He softened his steps. “You’re angry with me, aren’t you?”

Arianne's head slid out from underneath to peep at Mark, but for the most part, she feigned deaf.

Frankly, she was still feeling a little sore from their exchange before. In the past, a furious Mark was so ubiquitous in her daily life that she barely registered any particular feelings about it. However, this time was different — he had not been angry with her for so long that when he expressed a lick of exasperation, it formed a lump in her mind that refused to dissipate.

Mark approached her by the bedside with his eyes tracing his wife's contours under the sheet. The rise on her belly was prominent even when shielded, which formed a rather discordant pair with the thinness of her face.

Mark had wanted so much to tell his wife to abort the child, but he simply could not bring himself to say it. So now, watching her being tormented by her pregnancy made him feel even glummer.

"You'll be hungry if you don't eat, won't you?"

"If it hadn't been you being mad at me, I could have eaten two big meals," Arianne mumbled. "I mean, it's not like I said something wrong that stung you where it hurt, did I?"

Mark was exceptionally patient as he did his best to coax the woman out of her tantrum. "I wasn't mad at you; it was the effect of a slew of particularly bad days. I'd told you — it wasn't directed at you at all. Look, why don't you tell me if you have anything in mind for dinner, hmm? I'll have someone make it for you, okay? Oh, also, I noticed that you're pretty bored at home, so how about we invite Tiffany and Tanya over during the weekend?"

Arianne watched him silently for about two beats before questioning, “What’s troubling you so much lately? Share it with me.”

He shook his head. “No, no. I’d rather be the only one worrying than to drag you into that quagmire. Come, let me help you downstairs.”

Arianne slowly and carefully sat up from her position and, with his help, descended the stairs.

Chapter 764

Mary breathed out a sigh of relief at the good turn of events. Since she had kept dinner ready in the kitchen this whole time, she laid all of it out on the table in a flurry, chiming in, “That’s right, Ma’am. You should never skip a meal! The child needs all the yummy food to grow healthy and strong.”

Arianne was reminded of her child’s ultrasound image and suddenly felt a little insecure. “Mary, do you think I’m gonna, you know, birth an ugly duckling or something? I mean, I’m not gonna dislike my own kid for it that much, but… if the kid turned out to be a bit too heavy on the ugliness, I don’t think I’d like that.”

Mary broke out a chuckle. “Poppycocks! Both you and Mr. Tremont are so handsome, how could any of your genes produce an ugly duckling at all? All the kid needs to do is to take after either of you, and voila, a beautiful child is guaranteed! Oh, Madam, don’t fret over the image in that report; it’s inaccurate. How could it be? The kid’s still enjoying a spa treatment in that amniotic sac. No one’s gonna look photogenic in that!”

Hearing that reassured Arianne a little, for she replied, “I hope you’re right! Or it’ll feel like all this torment is for naught.”

Then, suddenly, her eyes were drawn to Mark and his shoes. “Oh, you haven’t changed into your indoor slippers? Are you leaving later?” she asked.

Reminded, Mark stood and returned to the entrance, slipping his feet into his slippers. “No, no. I’m not going out later. It’s just that… when I heard from Mary that you hadn’t taken your dinner, I got worried and rushed in. Who would have the mood to think about shoes at that time?”

Arianne felt warmth flaring in her chest. A renowned hygiene freak forgoing his usual ritual of cleanliness, just because he was too concerned about her, was simply something as precious as it was rare.

She was ordered to return to bed immediately after dinner, but since she passed too much time lying on her bed in the day, Arianne was quite reluctant to retire so quickly. “Can’t I stretch my legs around with a walk or something first?” she pleaded.

“Nope, no can do,” Mark answered, shaking his head solemnly. “It’s past ten o’clock. You need to sleep. Now, if you’d excuse me, I’ll be going to my study. Good night.”

Mark’s destination aroused the woman’s suspicion. “Hold on a second. Why are you going to your study at this hour? Something’s keeping you this late?”

Mark’s eyes dodged Arianne’s. “Yes, but it’s a very small business. It’ll be done in no time. Go ahead and sleep. No need to wait for me.”

Arianne acutely caught his dodginess, but she decided to let him off. “Alright, then. Godspeed.”

Just as she expected, Mark did not return to the bedroom the entire night. He also left to work very early in the morning. Hence, Arianne went to Mary for some insider’s info. “Did he really stay in his study the entire night last night?” she asked quietly.

“He slept in the guest room,” Mary replied in the same quiet voice. “I suspect it’s because he worries that he might do something with your body against his better judgement, which I must say, is astoundingly caring of him. He makes sure everything is comfortable for you — you ought to feel honored, heh! I’ve watched him grow up and never would I have ever expected him to be like this one day. You know, Ari, young men, being themselves, can be passionate, fiery creatures. To see what they want in front of them, yet unable to fulfill what they desire is quite a torment, so I hope you remember instances like these and be kinder to him in the future.”

When it came to matters of the bedroom, Arianne was always a little too bashful to discuss them with Mary. Still, she could engage in one or two conversations about it before turning red. “Oh, so this is why he was acting so bizarrely last night! You know, he could have just told me he’d liked us to sleep in separate beds, instead of acting so secretively and making himself look so suspicious.”

Mary smiled. “Ha! That’s our thin-skinned Mark to you. Can’t blame him for being a little coy about this, can we? Oh, Lord. Look at how old you’ve grown — you’ve even become the second head-of-the-house! I feel like this is all a dream! When you first joined this family, you were only this size; hardly taller than my chest, tiny and petite in frame, but god, you were so beautiful and brilliant. Back then, Mr. Tremont was already so tall; he’d towered above me by a head and more! Who would have thought that the two of you would end up together? Lord above knows that after all these trials and hiccups, the only thing I want the most is to see the two of you live happily ever after. As long as that happens, there will be no regret in my life.”

Arianne thought of the first time she stepped into the Tremont Estate and found that that memory was no longer tinged in grief and pain, but rather, heartfelt happiness.

Then she remembered that while Mark was already an eighteen-years-old looking for love, she was just an eight-year-old kid, which somehow brought out an undertone of jealousy. Indeed, while she was still trying to figure the world out, Mark was already exploring the complexities of love and relationships.

In other words, Arianne could not possibly be his first love — or his first woman.

Chapter 765

When Mark returned home for lunch, Arianne commenced an interrogation around the dining table. “So, how many relationships have you been in?”

The question seemed out of nowhere. Nonplussed, Mark asked, “Why do you ask?”

Arianne raised an eyebrow. “Nothing. Just curious. Am I not allowed to pursue a topic of curiosity, hmm? Or is your past off-limits?”

He did not answer her directly. Instead, Mark cast another tentative question into the court, “You’ve been a witness to every moment in my life since I turned eighteen. Is there even a need to ask?”

Arianne started to get irritated. “All I’m asking is this: how many relationships have you been in? Must you swerve so off-course to the topic?” she replied before pursing her lips.

Mark’s eyes darkened a little. When had he ever seen her purse in coquettish anger before? And to look so illegally adorable while doing it —

He forced down the urge to smooch her puckered lips by feigning coughs. “I don't think it’s something that should concern you. Knowing too much about one’s past often makes a person mad at otherwise faultless partners. So why don’t you, say, shift your interest to something else?”

Unfortunately, her curiosity had been roused by his evasiveness, and now, her mind clung to the question. “No, I won’t let you pivot, because I really wanna know, and I want you to tell me about it now! I mean, how is it fair that I know nothing about yours while you’ve made it your business to leave no detail of mine behind?”

Mark placed a slice of pork rib on her plate. “Hence what I say: it makes a person mad at otherwise faultless partners. Better to not know.”

The way Mark put it made Arianne realize that he admitted to seeing her infatuation with Will Sivan as a source of fury. She bit the tip of her fork before answering, “I’m not gonna get mad or anything, okay? I’m just kinda bored so, yeah, tell me. Satisfy my curiosity before it stops me from eating.”

Mark understood that he had failed to shift her attention, though it was unsurprising. When a girl loves her partner a lot, she usually becomes very interested in his past relationships.

He leveled her with a most solemn face and answered, “I’ve never dated anyone before you. Are you surprised?”

Arianne's eyes remained nailed to him, but her gaze was increasingly wrought with suspicion. Just when the wild conjectures brewing in her brain were reaching the crux, Mark cried out to stop her, "I do not have any deviant kink or psychosexual problems, please! Can you please imagine something more wholesome?"

She was unconvinced. "But how could you, of all people, manage to never involve yourself in a relationship all these years, huh? The number of women vying for you could form a line all the way to, I don't know, France? You kept yourself pretty well in your pants, huh? I mean, trust fund kids and rich lads should act more like Jackson West with his extensive gallery of women, right? But the fact that you remained single all your life like that just… It's just kinda suspicious. Isn't it more normal to have dated a girl or two before?"

Mark closed his eyes lightly. "It's simple: I didn't believe in relationships. I don't trust any of its forms. If it's going to end up with a betrayal anyway, then I'd rather never start one."

Arianne turned quiet as the realization hit her. He had never been in a relationship for years because he was traumatized by his parents' marriage.

Suddenly, she wished she had never started this conversation. Quietly, she lowered her head to stare at her meal.

Mark suddenly broke out into a chuckle. "Hey now, what's with the sudden silence? You could have asked me why I'd decided to start one with you. Or what you did that made me believe in love."

Ariane shook her head. "No, no. I think we should just, um, focus on eating."

Chapter 766

He put his knife and fork down and looked at her. “Now that we’re on the subject, let me clarify this with you, all at once. That’s how I used to think; I never planned on trusting any other woman. Of course, I only saw you as a child at the time, a strange, good-looking child… As you slowly grew older, I realized that my feelings for you had changed. One day, an idea came to me — if I raised you on my own, you would turn out to be pretty obedient and would not betray me. From that day onwards, I waited for the day you would become an adult. Unfortunately… you later fell in love with someone else. How could someone like me possibly put up with having someone else take away what should be rightfully mine? About Will… You’re not still hating me over that, are you? That’s fine too. It won’t matter once you’ve fallen in love with me completely. Let me reiterate once more, I don’t have any weird kinks. The first time I developed feelings for you was after you’d already entered puberty. You were not considered a ‘kid’ by then. I’m only ten years older than you, so put your suspicions away and stop imagining things!”

Did she still hate him over what happened with Will?

Arianne asked herself the same question. Now, her answer was — no.

At the time, she was a little repulsed. Her revolt came purely from the fact that she refused to be manipulated by him, not simply because of Will.

Now that she thought of it, her feelings for Will were largely different from her feelings for Mark. She was even beginning to wonder if she really loved Will at all. Perhaps she did, but it was only puppy love, nothing but a crush, not exactly love. All she could say was that Will had tugged at her heartstrings before.

Mark’s candidness had brought on her honesty. “I just hate being controlled and manipulated by you. I didn’t hate you just because of Will. Besides, I don’t hate you anymore. Will has his own life now, and we’ve been living our own lives in peace. There’s nothing to regret.”

Mark was very happy with her answer. The curve of the smile on his face was very natural. “That’s good. He’s married now. I think his child will be born a few months before ours. I heard about it during my last business trip out of the country; I did not procure this information on purpose.”

He paid close attention to the change of expressions on her face as they spoke, but she seemed normal. “That’s good. I’d feel burdened if he never got married or had kids. This is good…”

“So, have you decided to stay with me happily ever after? You’re not going to run away anymore?” he teased.

She shot him a weak glare. “Yes, of course. But if you ever make me unhappy, I’ll leave you and never come back.”

He stopped smiling. “Could you… stop scaring me like that? You can torture me however you like, except leaving me.”

Arianne giggled. “Hehe… I was joking. I’m done eating. I’m going to call Tiffie and Tanya to see if they’d like to come over.”

Mark lifted his hand and checked the time on his watch. “Do it in the afternoon. I’ve contacted Tiffany. Knowing how much she enjoys procrastinating, they’re probably going to be late. I won’t join in on your chat with your best friends; I’m going to the office in the afternoon. Don’t stay seated for too long, and try to lie down. The little one is growing pretty fast. How many months has it been? Your tummy has really grown. I wonder how much more it’ll grow by the time of its birth…”

Arianne lowered her head and looked at her large bump, feeling very worried. “I think you’re right… It’s really grown… I’m really going to have a lot of stretch marks now. I won’t be able to get rid of them once the baby is born. I’ve heard that the skin on my stomach will loosen. Every time I think of it, I…”

“It’s a small price to pay for the child you’ve always wanted,” he consoled. “You want it, don’t you? Don’t worry, it won’t repel me. Let me help you to the couch. I’m leaving soon. Remember what I’ve said, try to lie down as much as you can.”

Knowing that he was about to launch into a nagging spree again, Arianne pulled a face of reluctance. “I know, I understand. Stop nagging. I’m tired of hearing it…”

At around 2PM, Tiffany and Tanya sauntered into the house. Arianne was lying on the couch, going mad with boredom. She sat up upon their arrival. “Did you arrive late on purpose to have dinner? It’s so difficult to book an appointment with you now.”

Chapter 767

Tiffany casually sat down next to her. “We’re from the working class. We’re too busy trying to earn money to support our families. Unlike you, lying at home with someone who can pay everything for you. We don’t have a choice, do we? If you want me to keep you company every day, tell Mark to pay me for my services in chatting with you, and I’ll keep you company 24/7. I’ll chat with you until you get tired of chatting with me, until you can’t stand the sight of me! Alright… Actually, I was binge-watching last night, ‘cos it was Friday. I nearly didn’t wake up last night. Forgive me, best friend!”

Arianne snorted. “I’d love to pay you as my personal companion… You have drive. You won’t come anyway. How are things at Eric’s? Have you adapted to the working environment?”

Tiffany glanced at Tanya. “Of course, with Tan around, I got used to it easily. Even the boss is my friend. I’m like a fish in water at the company. How could I not get used to that?”

Tanya smiled as she chimed in, “That’s right, we’re doing just fine. Ari… Your tummy has grown. It’s like it’s been inflated…”

Arianne frowned when she heard this. “Really? It wasn’t that big at first… Why is it growing so fast?”

Tiffany saw nothing wrong with that. “Isn’t this normal during pregnancies? Your belly’s skin is like a balloon; it’ll grow bigger as you go along your trimesters. You’ve done an ultrasound picture, right? Let me see. I want to see who the little guy looks like.”

Arianne pulled out the results from the report. Tanya flashed a very “kind” smile. “How cute. It’s got a sharp chin, just like you, Ari. Look at those eyes and brows, just like daddy. I think it must be a boy, and a very handsome one too.”

Her remark surprised Tiffany and Arianne. Tanya was surprised at the look on their faces. “Why are you two staring at me? What’s with those looks on your faces? I’m telling the truth…”

Arianne pointed at the little one’s picture and honestly said, “It’s clearly ugly. How can you tell that it resembles me and Mark? I would have fallen apart if I didn’t think that there was hope for its development after its birth.”

Tiffany nodded in agreement. “It’s true; I think it looks ugly too…”

Tanya was rendered speechless. “Have any of you ever seen a fetus in a womb? The baby is still submerged in amniotic fluid. You can’t tell if it’s good looking or not. It won’t look pretty when it’s born either. Wait until it’s past its first month then you’ll know the meaning of surprise. I can’t speak for someone else’s baby, but Ari and Mark’s baby is definitely going to be a beautiful one. Don’t believe me? Let’s make a bet. I’ll buy you two a meal with three months of my salary if it’s really ugly. If it isn’t, you’ll buy me a meal. Deal?”

Arianne stroked her belly eagerly. “I don’t think it’s a good idea, is it? To make a bet out of my child? But I kind of want to make that bet…”

Tiffany smiled like a madwoman. “Haha… Look at you, Ari. You obviously want to make that bet. What a mother! Fine, it’s a deal for me. Based on this picture from the doctor, I bet that the child will turn out ugly. Because it really is too ugly…”

Arianne joined Tiffany’s side. “I’m joining in too. Ugly…”

“Then you’re going to lose,” Tanya forewarned. “We’ll have a few months before the results of the bet anyway. Let’s just wait and see.”

Noticing their happy chatter, Mary chimed in, “I wonder how Mr. Tremont is going to react if he finds out about your bet on his child’s looks…”

The entire living room was immediately rendered speechless.

After a while, Tiffany rubbed her nose. “It’d be good if it turns out to be a boy… If it is, he won’t have to worry about his looks. With the Tremont family’s wealth in his pocket, he won’t have to worry about

finding a wife. But it's fine if it's a girl too. We have money, so she'll certainly find a good husband. She'll have good backing…"

Arianne giggled so much that she couldn't get up. "Are you saying that Mark's been working hard for so many years, just in case of foreshadowing in his future generations? Tiffie, you're hilarious…"

Chapter 768

Mary grew worried at the sight of Arianne laughing with such reckless abandon. "Ari, be gentle. You're laughing so much that your belly is shaking. Be careful…"

Arianne forced herself to stop laughing. "Okay, okay. I'll stop laughing… I just lost control… Mary, could you bring us some snacks and drinks?"

As Mary slipped into the kitchen, Tiffany pulled out her phone and checked out a food delivery app. "It's been a while since I've had fried chicken. I kind of want some. Are you allowed fried chicken, Ari? It should be alright to have just a little bit, right?"

After a bout of hesitation, Arianne shook her head. "I don't think I should. I crave it, but I can control myself… You know. Just order whatever you want."

"I'm not eating either," Tanya said. "Order what you want. I'll get fat if I have too much of it."

"Tsk tsk tsk, Tan is about to start a romance," Tiffany said in a sour tone. "And you're afraid of getting fat too. You never went on a diet before. Now, I'm the only one who isn't on a diet. That's fine. You can watch me eat and be jealous."

Arianne looked at Tanya. “You’re dating now? Who is it?”

Tanya felt bashful. “It’s not set in stone… Don’t listen to Tiffany’s nonsense.”

Arianne wasn’t that much of a gossip, so she didn’t pursue the question. She got up to go to the toilet, but felt something off as she got up. She felt a sharp pain in her abdomen, followed by a strong kick from the baby. She stood on the spot for a long time, too afraid to move. Tiffany noticed her standing dazedly on the spot and asked, “What are you doing?”

She carefully sat down again, with the help of the chair. “M-my… stomach was hurting. The baby is moving a lot now. Is something wrong? It’s still hurting now…”

Tiffany looked very serious. “What do we do? Do you want to go to the hospital? I didn’t drive today… How about I take one of Mark’s cars in the garage and take you there?”

Arianne was worried about raising another false alarm and wasting a trip to the hospital, so she decided to just wait and see.

Mary emerged with three glasses of fruit juice. “What’s wrong, Ari? You look very pale…”

Arianne was panicking. “No… I think we’d better go to the hospital. Tiffie, you drive. I’m feeling horrible and dizzy…”

Tiffany helped her out the door without another word. Tanya tagged along. Mary was horribly frightened and called Mark. “Hurry! Ari is having a stomach ache. Tiffany and Tanya have sent her to the hospital. You’d better get over there!”

Mark immediately abandoned his work and rushed to the hospital, running past god knows how many red lights along the way. He kept trying to assure himself that it was only a false alarm, but he was still worried.

He finally arrived at the hospital. Arianne was still under medical examination. “What happened?” he asked Tiffany. “She was fine when I left!”

Afraid that she might end up getting the blame, Tiffany explained, “It’s not my fault. Don’t frame your questions like that; it’s scary. We were just sitting and chatting when she got up and suddenly complained of a stomach ache, So, I drove her to the hospital. There was no bleeding, and her water hasn’t broken. Don’t scare me…”

Chapter 769

Mark forced himself to calm down. “That’s not what I meant… I thought that she had fallen down or something… It shouldn’t be a big issue if nothing big happened.”

After the examination, the doctor said, “There are signs of premature labor. You have to be careful now. These conditions are expected, and there are risks to keeping this child. She’ll have to stay in the hospital for now to protect the fetus. We’ll have to observe her. Worst case scenario, she’ll have to stay in the hospital until the birth. Chances of a premature birth are very high, but as long as the baby survives into the seventh month, chances of its survival are also very high. There’s no need to worry too much. Of course, the longer we keep the fetus in the womb, the better.”

Mark was mentally prepared for this, so he was considerably calm about it. “Fine, I’ll deal with the hospital admission procedures. I want a VIP ward. I’ve already scheduled this.”

The doctor nodded. “Alright, we’ll make the necessary preparations.”

Arianne was depressed over the sudden prospect of having to stay at the hospital. “Did I laugh too hard? Why do I have to stay in the hospital…”

“You gave me a fright,” said Tiffany with a bitter look on her face. “Don’t ever say that I made you laugh; Mark would gobble me up! You would have at least had some freedom if you were on bedrest at home. Now that you’re in the hospital, you’re going to suffer. I hope you’ll get out of it soon. I’ll take you out for some fun once this baby is born and make up for your months of imprisonment. You’d better be more careful from now on and bring that ugly little thing into the world, safe and sound. Tan and I are waiting for the results of our bet.”

Arianne smiled. “Got it. Don’t you worry, I’m fine.”

Since Arianne’s admission into the hospital, Mark had Mary stay with Arianne, 24/7. The latter trimesters would be the hardest to endure. His heart ached at the thought of it, but there was no choice. After all, he couldn’t endure the pain in her place and could only provide her with the best environment and the best conditions.

Tiffany and Tanya left the hospital. Tanya was feeling guilty. “Do you think that Ari wouldn’t have needed to stay in the hospital if we hadn’t visited her today?”

Tiffany was feeling depressed too. “It’s not our fault, stop imagining things. This was bound to happen. Didn’t you see how calm Mark was? With Ari’s health the way it is… She would have had to go to the hospital to take care of the fetus, sooner or later. We shouldn’t visit her too often from now on. After all, she’s in the hospital and it wouldn’t be convenient. We’ll just call her and come over once the baby is born.”

Her phone rang just as she said this; it was a call from Summer. She composed herself and answered the call. “Hello, Mrs. West? How are you feeling?”

Summer sounded very energetic on the phone. “Much better. I’m thinking of dressing up. It’s been so long since I’ve gone out and put on makeup. I never got to see the jewelry you picked up for me. I’m sending someone over to pick it up from you. Are you home?”

Tiffany glanced around the road, searching for a vacant cab. “I’m not at home right now… Ari’s been admitted to the hospital, and I’ve just come out of there. I’ll call a cab and get home right now. Have your pick-up person come over. I’ll be home soon.”

Summer turned to Jackson, who was right next to her, and spoke into the phone, “Fine, I’ll send someone over.”

Jackson felt a little uncomfortable after the call. “What are you plotting? Why did you just look at me like that? You made it sound like I’d be happy to run that errand for you… I was only casually asking if you’ve gotten your jewelry back…”

Summer had seen right through him long ago. “You have a hard mouth; I won’t expose you. Why don’t you think about why you’re suddenly so concerned over this trivial matter of mine. You’re being too obvious. Okay, go and get it for me. You’ve heard it yourself; Tiffie wasn’t out with some guy. Arianne’s been admitted to the hospital.”

Jackson didn't argue. He got up and left the West Residence at once.

A sense of regret formed on Summer's face as she watched him leave. "I wonder if things will ever improve between them. They clearly miss each other, but they're insisting on keeping their pride. How much is pride really worth?"

Tiffany waited for ten minutes in her condo before the doorbell rang.

Chapter 770

She opened the door, with Summer's jewelry in hand. When she saw Jackson, she deliberately pulled a blank face. "You're in a good mood, doing errands for your mom?"

He lifted his chin and stared down at her. "I happen to have the time. Problem?"

She handed the jewelry box over to him. "Here, this is the one."

He raised his brow. "Aren't you going to invite me inside? Afraid that I might find out that you've turned your house into a dog's den?"

He had successfully drawn her ire. "Would you like a slap, Jackson West? Would you?"

Tanya overheard the commotion and poked her head out of the bedroom. “Who is it, Tiffie?”

“My ex!” Tiffany replied through gritted teeth.

Tanya gaped. “Oh… Okay. You guys talk. I’m going back to my book. I didn’t hear a thing!”

Jackson continued his provocation after Tanya shut the bedroom door. “That’s right, I miscalculated. You’re staying with Tanya, so you can torture her into keeping the place clean. Didn’t you agree to go out with Alejandro this weekend? What happened? Cancelled your plans?”

Tiffany put her hands on her hips as she answered in an eloquent tone, “Is that your business? A date should be done at night. You of all people should know. I was just about to put on some makeup and get ready to go out. You’ve collected your jewelry, so shouldn’t you get out of my sight?”

Jackson narrowed his eyes and released a subtle, dangerous aura. “Makeup? Makeup isn't going to cover whatever you’ve got.”

She rolled up her sleeves in anger, as if she was ready to punch him. “Are you implying that I’m ugly? So ugly that I don’t even need makeup? If I’m ugly, you wouldn’t have kissed me and held me and had sex with me at every turn in the past. You’ve got extreme tastes. I’m curious, are you calling yourself blind?”

He suddenly bent down and inched closer towards her. “I am blind. Problem?”

She stared at his magnified handsome face and her heart skipped a beat. She took one step back and nearly stumbled over. Luckily, he swiftly grabbed the lapels of her shirt and helped her stabilize her footing. Once she had stabilized herself, she noticed that his hand was still on the chestal area of her top, so she slapped it away. “Are you sick? Taking advantage of me while picking up the jewelry? How petty are you? Have I ever done anything wrong to you? Aren’t you done?”

He smiled wickedly. “That’s right, I’m not done. After all, it’s my first time getting dumped. I’m still pretty mad about that.”

She took a few deep breaths to restrain herself from slapping his handsome face. “Then may I ask… What should I do to make you accept it?”

“Either I get to dump you once, or we maintain our current situation until I’m satisfied,” he replied without skipping a beat. “I’m not sure when it’ll end, so you should always be ready…”

He had completely defeated her. She faked a wide grin. “Alright, Jackson. Let’s say we haven’t broken up, or that we’ve gotten back together. I’ll let you dump me once. Okay? You should feel more at ease then and stop harassing me from now on. Okay?”