Ruling 891

Chapter 891

Tiffany sent Arianne a message when she went back to her room: ‘Jackson’s mother visited me today. She brought me food as usual, then somehow persuaded me into joining her company. It’s a subsidiary branch in the Southern Lake District of South Park, which is pretty far from here. I won’t be coming back so often for now, since the journey to and fro will take a few hours. I’m going to take the job, if nothing happens. I didn’t want to go at first, but she’s been so good to me that I couldn’t refuse. I don’t know how to.’

Arianne quickly replied: ‘Since you can’t reject her, you’d better stay. This is between you and his mother. It has nothing to do with him. No need to overthink it. Do your best once you’re there and prove yourself with your own efforts. Don’t let his mother down. By the way, Tanya resigned from Eric’s company after you left. However, she’s still staying in that condo and hasn’t gone out to find a job. It’s very strange. How can she survive without a job?’

Tiffany’s heart plummeted to an all-time low when she saw Arianne’s reply. She would turn into a mess every time Tanya was involved: ‘No need to mention these things to me. How she is doing is none of my business. I won’t ever look at her again, even if she’s dead.’

Despite her reply, she still felt suspicious, just like Arianne. How was Tanya able to survive? Even Tanya’s savings wouldn’t be enough for her to stay idle for a few months. It had been more than a month now… Perhaps… Someone was paying for her? Was it Jackson?

She gritted her teeth at the thought of it. She didn’t want to know. She didn’t want to know anything about them. It would only mess her up even more! But she couldn’t control herself…

Ten minutes later, having received no reply from Arianne, she lost her restraint and asked: ‘Do you know what’s going on with her? Is she dating Jackson now? Is he taking care of her? Then I’ll have to

congratulate her. She's finally made it. She won't have to worry about her basic necessities, now that she's with Jackson. She can show off in front of us now.'

Around five minutes later, Arianne finally replied: 'I was just changing Smore's diaper. Calm down. It's not what you think. Jackson hasn't contacted her at all. I asked Mark to find out all of that for me, which is why I'm feeling suspicious. How is she surviving without a job? That's all. I was just casually informing you. There's no need for such a huge reaction. Rest well and get ready for your new job. I have to pacify my baby now. Good night.'

She replied to Arianne's message with "good night" and had just put her phone down when she received a message from Alejandro: 'Have you finished considering it? Would you like to work for me? I hope you'll agree, but it's fine if you're not interested.'

Summer's arrangement now came into full use for her. She quickly replied: 'No need. I've found a good job. Thanks.'

Alejandro did not ask where her new job was but simply replied casually: 'Good luck with your new job then, do your best. By the way, how's the plant?'

She glanced at the potted plant on her bedroom window. She had brought it back after moving out of the condo. Lillian usually watered it for her, so it was growing very well. She took a picture and sent it over to him. This was more convincing. Otherwise, he might think that she had killed it.

Alejandro did not reply. She put on her earphones and slowly closed her eyes as she listened to some soft music. Nowadays, she had to listen to music in order to fall asleep every night. She had deliberately downloaded songs that helped with insomnia; otherwise, she wouldn't be able to sleep at all. Thanks to her insomnia and multiple dreams, she was beginning to suspect that she had entered an early stage in menopause.

The Tremont Estate.

Arianne was losing her mind from Aristotle's wails. The child was prone to crying a lot these days and simply couldn't be pacified. It was the same thing, every night. She had sent him to the hospital for a check up, but everything was fine.

Chapter 892

Usually, newborns would suffer from colic or other uncomfortable conditions in the first three months. Aristotle was almost three months old, just a few days shy from it too. However, there were no signs of colic. He ate, drank and excreted normally. This really made her feel helpless.

Mark sat next to her with a lifeless look in his eyes, clearly having a headache from all of this noise. This pushed Arianne, who was a new mother, even further into her wits' end. "What should we do? Smore won't let Mary hold him, but he still cries even when I'm holding him. Just what does he want?"

Mark rubbed the space between his brows in an attempt to massage his headache away. "Give him to me. I'll take him for a walk around the garden…"

She really was at her wits' end and was willing to try anything at this point. Mark wasn't the nurturing type, but she was exhausted. Having some peace and quiet sounded like a good idea.

During the past month, she had voluntarily set aside all intentions to start work again because as Aristotle's cries grew increasingly severe, she realized that she really didn't have the energy to go back to work again. She couldn't bring herself to follow her dreams if she couldn't even take care of her own son. As expected, life wasn't as smooth-sailing as it seemed.

Aristotle's cries continued in the garden downstairs. She stood by the window and watched as Mark patiently paced around with the little one in his arms, gently trying to calm him. This continued for about half an hour before the world finally returned to peace again. Soon, Mark softly and gently carried Aristotle back into the house, like a thief, then handed him over to Mary. "He's asleep… Shh, don't wake him. I'm going crazy."

He had just spoken when Aristotle sniffed and whimpered, then opened his eyes. He realized that he had been pushed back into someone else's arms, and his lips wobbled, ready to burst into tears again. Mark panicked and quickly took him back into his arms. "Okay, okay, okay. Daddy's holding you. Stop tormenting your mommy. You're going to break her small body if you keep torturing her. Go to sleep. Daddy will hold you to sleep."

Aristotle nuzzled against his arms and went back to sleep again. He would open his eyes into a narrow slit from time to time, as if he was still anxious, afraid that they would swap carriers again.

Mary sighed. "The little one is starting to recognize people. He only ever wants you or Mrs. Tremont these days. You're usually busy with work, and Mrs. Tremont is terribly exhausted at home. I'm at my wits' end too. I can still take care of things in the day time, when he's happily at play, but I can't help at all at night. Mrs. Tremont hasn't been able to sleep well these days, and she's lost so much weight."

Mark paused in thought, then said, "How about this, I'll bring Aristotle along to the office tomorrow. You can come along with me. You can help me out when I'm busy, and I'll carry him when he gets fussy. Let Ari have a good rest for the day. This really can't go on. I don't know when this will end… How did we end up with such a demanding baby…"

Mary nodded. "Alright. Actually, it'll be fine once the baby grows up. It should be easier once he's six months old. Just hold on for a little longer. We'll just have to go through it."

Seeing as Aristotle was refusing to let go, Mark sent Mary off to get some rest. He waited for him to fall fast asleep before carrying him back to his bed. Looks like the three of them would have to share a bed for tonight. There was no other choice, regardless of how reluctant he was. Ariane had long fallen asleep at this point. It would seem that she was thoroughly exhausted.

Chapter 893

Surprisingly, Aristotle slept all the way through until 6AM. He didn't even wake up for his night time feed. Instead, he sucked on his fists and fingers when he woke up. His small movements woke Arianne. She stared at the tiny thing next to her. At first, she was shocked. Then, she realized that her son was hungry, so she picked him up to feed him.

This was Aristotle's first time sharing a bed with them, so she was dazed at first. She hadn't been able to get a good night's sleep lately, but she managed to fall fast asleep last night. The little guy did not seem to have cried at all… He had just woken up, and he didn't cry at all. What was going on? Was this her torturous little baby?

Mark suddenly turned in his sleep, probably because he was feeling cold from the air-conditioning. He tugged on the duvet. Only then did Arianne realize that he only had a small corner of the duvet the entire night… And the poor man had to sleep at the edge of the bed too. She used to think that the bed was wide enough, but for some reason, it felt too small with the baby around…

She reached out an arm and tucked him in, then whispered to little Aristotle in her arms, "Have you been naughty again? You're certainly good at torturing others. Watch out, daddy might stop liking you one day."

Aristotle was famished and couldn't be bothered to listen to her. He suckled on his milk, as if he had been starved for the entire day. His teddy bear-like position made her giggle. "Teehee… It's not like anyone's fighting with you…" Just as she had spoken, she felt a fiery pair of eyes gazing at her. She turned to look and found that Mark had awoken at some point and was glaring at the suckling Aristotle…

“Did we wake you?” she whispered. “It’s still early. You can sleep a little longer. Were you taking care of the baby all on your own last night? Maybe you should take the morning off if you’re too exhausted?”

Mark curled his lips into a smile. “No, he slept all the way through the night. He wasn’t difficult at all. Let him sleep with us from now on. That way, everyone’s happy. I’m awake, so I’m just going to get up now. I’ll be taking him to the office later. Mary will be coming along with me. You can stay at home and have a good rest. Go shopping if you’re feeling bored. Consider it a day off.”

Taking the baby to the office? His decision drew Arianne’s suspicion. “Are you sure? He already exhausts me at home, and you’re now taking him to the office. I’m afraid you won’t get anything done.”

Mark had a card up his sleeve. “Don’t you worry, I have my ways. Just relax and have fun with your best friend. I’m just worried that he’ll push you into depression while you’re stuck at home. You should relax from time to time, alright?”

Arianne’s heart melted. At least, someone was willing to do what’s best for her. Despite his reluctance for her to rejoin the workforce, he wasn’t entirely blind to her feelings. She agreed, in spite of her misgivings. Let the father and son bond for the day.

The baby’s items took up half the space in the trunk of Mark’s car before he left. They were mostly the baby’s stroller and his diapers, stuff like that. Those aware of the situation would know that he was simply going to work. Those who did not would think that he was taking the baby for a vacation…

Arianne waited for the car to drive off before excitedly calling Tiffany on the phone. “Tiffie, let’s go out and have fun. The baby’s taken care of for today. I’m free!”

Tiffany was still in bed, feeling drowsy. “Ah? Who’s taking care of him? Doesn’t that little one recognize people now?”

“Mark’s taken him to the office,” Arianne answered with a smile. “He’ll call me when he surrenders. So, we have to take advantage of this and have fun! Get ready. I’ll be arriving downstairs soon.”

Chapter 894

Tiffany paused then said, “Ari, I think I might need you to come with me somewhere. That large refrigerator from Jackson’s mother is still in the condo. The condo has a small fridge too, and it should be enough for Tanya alone. What if she decides to move out one day? Would the fridge be given to the landlord or would she sell it off? I can’t waste someone else’s gift. I have to send someone over to move it to my mom’s place for me. As it happens, my mom was complaining about our small fridge.”

Arianne agreed. She hailed a cab on her way out instead of asking Henry to drop her off.

Tiffany had already contacted the moving company when the pair met up. She drove her car and led the way, while the moving company’s small truck trailed behind them. Arianne sat in the front seat, fanning herself with her hand. “It’s so hot. More air-conditioning, please.”

Tiffany laughed sheepishly. “It’s already at full blast. It’ll cool down soon. We’ve just started our journey anyway. I’ve sent a message to Tanya beforehand. She gave me a ‘mm’ as her reply. I actually laughed. It’s like I owe her a debt. I’d owe anyone but her!”

Arianne pursed her lips. “What else could she possibly do? She’s already revealed her true colors. Remember to focus on the move and try to avoid any quarrels. There’s no need for that. The weather is hot enough. There’s no need to make it hotter.”

“Don’t you worry,” Tiffany scoffed. “I won’t touch her. I didn’t even touch her when I caught her with Jackson. Why would I do it now?”

Arianne was confused. She turned to the side and looked at her. “You didn’t fight? She hit you on the head, didn’t she? She’s wounded her hand too. I’m not blaming you for it. Anyone would lose control in that situation. You both managed to hurt each other. Consider it even.”

Tiffany looked helpless. “Who told you that I hit her? She smashed my head with Jackson’s ashtray. I ran off with a bloody head. I did not retaliate at all! I was about to hit her, but when I thought of how she had travelled all the way here, with no relatives or friends, with only us to rely on, and acted as if I’d been the bully all along after she was exposed, I held it in. Who told you that I hit her?”

Arianne rubbed her forehead. “I paid her a visit… I thought it had come to blows between you two. I never thought that she’d be that good of an actress. I’ve really made a mistake.”

Tiffany was all riled up now. “What the hell? She actually tried to get your sympathy too? How disgusting! And there I was, thinking that I made the right decision when I avoided slapping her. Looks like I should have beaten her to death! I’m not being cruel. I just think that she’s a really horrible person!”

Arianne stayed silent. However, she felt as if she had seen right through her. Tanya seemed really scared of her at the time. Was that why she made up that lie? Regardless, it was all in the past. After today, they would never have to speak to each other again.

Tiffany led the movers as she stormed into the condo, once they had arrived downstairs. Arianne had initially intended on staying in the car and enjoying the air-conditioning, but she was worried, so she followed them upstairs. Tiffany had left her keys behind after moving out, so Tanya opened the door.

She went back into her room after opening the door for them. She seemed exhausted, as if she hadn't been living in peace at all.

Arianne decided to use the toilet while the movers were moving the fridge. Suddenly, she noticed a pregnancy test kit in the trash can. Her heart sank. Tanya was the only one living here. Tiffany's old room hadn't been rented out yet, so the pregnancy test kit must belong to her.

She covered her nose as she bent down to check the results on the screen of the test kit. There was more than one pregnancy test kit in there, as if she had been taking more than one test. There were quite a lot of them. Based on her observations, there were more than ten. The topmost of the pile, which was also the nearest, had two distinct lines.

Chapter 895

She pulled out her phone and took a few pictures then walked out the door as if nothing had happened. The fridge had already been moved towards the door. She had no chance to have a private conversation with Tanya, so she could only leave with Tiffany.

On the road, her heart sank every time she remembered the pregnancy test kits. Tanya was pregnant. Was Jackson the father? There were so many test kits, which probably meant that she had been waiting for the results, hoping that she was pregnant, right? Things would be complicated if it actually hit the jackpot after that one time. Jackson would be in trouble…

Once the fridge had arrived downstairs at Tiffany's place, Arianne insisted on staying in the car and did not follow her upstairs. She waited for Tiffany to leave, then sent Tanya a message: 'You're pregnant? Who's the father?'

Her reply arrived very quickly: 'You saw the pregnancy tests in the trash? You're smart enough. You should know whose it is. I've only ever done it with Jackson.'

Arianne frowned when she saw her reply: ‘What are you going to do?’

Tanya’s response was cold and distant: ‘Is that any of your business? I’m aware of the authority you hold, but you don’t have to concern yourself with this matter, do you? Tiffany and Jackson have cut ties. Why should you care about what I plan to do with the baby in my womb? Don’t be a bully, Arianne Wynn.’

Arianne did not reply. Since Tanya considered her a bully, there was nothing more to say. She wanted to tell Jackson but was hesitant. In the end, she decided against it. She wanted to find out Tanya’s next move.

By the time they had finished their tedious move back and forth, it was already 11AM. Tiffany was in a pretty good mood. “Come on, bestie. Let’s have lunch. What would you like? I’m paying. No need to be modest. Since I won’t be coming home so often once I’ve moved to South Park, we won’t have too many chances to have a meal together.”

Arianne smiled. “I don’t have any particular cravings. What would you like? You choose. I should be buying you a meal, since you’re leaving for work. You choose a place. Oh… By the way, what if… And I’m saying ‘if’, Tanya got pregnant with Jackson’s baby after that one time? What would you think?”

Tiffany’s body stiffened. Her expression froze as well before quickly reverting to normal. “I had sex with Jackson almost every day and every night back then, but she got pregnant after that one time? How fertile she would be. It’s a pity that she’s not a surrogate! She’d be lucky if that happened. She’d have a chance to marry into an affluent family. I won’t be jealous, that I’m sure of. Jackson’s mom has always hoped for a grandkid. Perhaps she’ll like this ‘daughter-in-law’?”

Arianne knew that she was only putting on a calm facade, so she did not pursue the subject any further.

Suddenly, Tiffany's phone rang — it was a call from Alejandro. She answered the call via the bluetooth function in her car. Arianne could hear Alejandro's voice as well.

"I've spotted your car. How about lunch today?"

Tiffany looked all around. "I don't see you. Come along then, since we've bumped into each other. My best friend is here. You don't mind the extra company, do you?"

Alejandro paused for two seconds. "You and Tanya had a horrible fight, so… it must be Arianne, this time?"

Tiffany smiled. "You're right. Don't you know me like the back of your hand? It's about time you met my best friend. Let's go to that Chinese restaurant. Their food is pretty good. We'll meet up there."

"What's going on… between you and this… Alejandro?" Arianne asked after Tiffany ended the call.

Chapter 896

Tiffany shrugged. "Nothing special between us. Our relationship remains in this tepid state. Basically, I see him as no more than a friend who I sometimes have a drink or meal with, but I don't care what he thinks of me. Ya know, I don't even go out with him that often, and I suspect that I'll have even less time to do that in the future… C'mon, Ari, I have zero opinion about him, so stop shooting me that look. It's seriously rubbing me the wrong way, hon."

The pair reached the Chinese restaurant of their choice and found Alejandro and Jett already waiting for them. After the women took their seats, Jett passed the menu to Arianne, saying, “We’ve ordered some of the dishes, but you may add anything else you fancy, Mrs. Tremont.”

Arianne scanned Jett carefully, ignoring the menu. “I’m fine if you’ve made your orders. Tiffie’s favorite dishes are my favorite, too.”

Jett nodded in understanding and passed the menu to a waitress standing nearby.

It was then that Arianne finally took the time to take a good look at Alejandro Smith. Immediately, he conjured a strange unease within Arianne, though she could not explicate the reason.

“Mrs. Tremont, your eyes appear to be glued to me as though… we’ve met before?” Alejandro remarked with a faint smile.

The corner of Arianne’s lips twitched. “You stole the words out of my mouth. I do feel like we’ve seen each other before.”

Alejandro raised an eyebrow. “Oh, that so? Then do tell me, among your acquaintances, who do I bear semblance to?”

Arianne paused for a second before replying, “No, outwardly, you don’t look like anyone I know, but the vibes you’re giving me is very reminiscent of someone from the past. Who exactly? I won’t divulge. That person would only be another stranger to you anyway, I bet.”

Alejandro folded his hands on the table before himself, his fingers tightly clasped around one another as though he was Arianne's interrogator. Meanwhile, the woman noticed a small reddish patch on the skin between his left thumb and forefinger, a discovery that significantly alleviated the concern in her mien.

"So, Mr. Smith, you bought a plot of land from the auction recently, didn't you?" she said, changing the subject. "That was quite an area brimming with potential. Are you looking to expand your empire here in the Capital?"

A spark flitted through Alejandro's eyes. "I don't care much for plans made for the distant future, Mrs. Tremont. I've always preferred the short-term — crossing the bridge when I see one, in other words. You're not pointing fingers at me angrily because of that purchase, though, are you, Mrs. Tremont? I'm well aware that if it weren't for me, that plot would have belonged to the Tremonts."

Arianne smiled serenely. "No. It's just a conversation starter from the top of my head. I wouldn't overthink this if I were you, Mr. Smith."

Alejandro appeared just as relaxed and unruffled. "No, I won't, neither. You're Tiffany's good friend, which makes you my friend, as well. There should never be pointless suspicions and overthinking things between friends, I always say. Isn't it better to hang out with one another, hmm?"

It did not sound at all like something spoken for himself. Instead, it was framed as though Alejandro was warning Arianne not to "overthink" and dig around specific topics.

Alejandro had Jett send him away after the meal, citing unfinished business as the reason behind his prompt leave. Arianne went to the counter to foot the bill, only to find that Alejandro had beaten her to it.

Tiffany acted as though this was entirely within expectation. “He’s like that. But hey, it’s just a meal. No need to fixate on it. Just let him do whatever he likes,” she explained before shifting to a different topic. “Say, Ari, you mentioned that he reminded you of someone you used to know. Who is it? Can’t be someone I don’t know if it’s your acquaintance.”

Arianne shook her head quietly. Frankly, she saw signs of Ethan Connor in every gesture, speech habit, and demeanor Alejandro had exhibited. All of the little things, including his tics and the way he carried himself, were dead ringers for Ethan. Alejandro might look different, but those hands echoed the man in the past so much that it was freaking Arianne out. The only thing that had stopped her from plunging into a rabbit hole of ludicrous what-ifs was that tiny scarlet birthmark on his left hand.

Naturally, Arianne would never tell Tiffany of her suspicion. Ethan was the root of Tiffany’s suffering; it would be unkind to her to invoke him. Besides, from the looks of it, there was not a modicum of spark between Tiffany and Alejandro, and it became evident that there was nothing more between these two. In this light, Arianne concluded that there was simply no reason to say anything at all.

Tiffany, for her part, abandoned her interrogation almost immediately. Instead, she suggested visiting the Tremont Tower solely to see Smore — and perhaps to see if Daddy Mark had been driven mad by the Boss Baby.

It was also what Arianne had wanted, especially since her breasts had become so full with unfed milk that they were starting to hurt.

Chapter 897

The pair arrived outside Mark’s office and found a very idle Davy seemingly bored out of his wits. When he noticed them, his eyes shone. “Hello! You’re finally here, Madam!”

Arianne flashed him a coy smile. “Whoa. That’s not the kinda expression people make when everything’s going well, is it? Don’t worry, I’m here to save the day.”

The situation inside the office, however, shocked her. Smore was neither bawling nor throwing tantrums. Instead, he was perched in his father’s arm as the latter focused on his work. The little boy had somehow seized a pen and was having a lot of fun playing with it with his dewy eyes twinkling with alacrity as he babbled unintelligibly to himself.

The reality flew in the face of the baby-screaming chaos Arianne had in mind. While she stared in surprise, Mary supplied from the side. “Oh, hello, Madam. I just changed Master Aristotle’s diaper, and all is well. Go ahead and do whatever you like. There is nothing to worry about here. Turns out, Mr. Tremont and I are more than enough to handle the little fella. Just look at him! Master Aristotle is exceptionally well-behaved today—no tantrums, no tears. Heck, it’s probably better if he doesn’t see you! It might get his screaming fit started… That settles it, then! Off you go! Don’t go near him! Peace is too valuable. No one here wants it gone!”

Before Arianne could say anything, Mary shoved her out of the office. She was given no chance to mention her breasts being a bit too full of milk and that she wanted Smore to relieve some of it.

Tiffany snickered. “Oopsie, who knew that he could take care of kids just as well, too? You’re not missed by anymore, honey. Hell, your son doesn’t seem to need you!”

Arianne sighed. “Fine. I don’t care, then. Come on, Tiffie, let’s go shopping.”

Several miles away from them in the city, in a rented apartment unit, Tanya read, then re-read her conversation with Arianne, her anxiety gnawing. Arianne knew about her pregnancy. And she would not brook this.

Tanya had always regarded Arianne as a dangerous character. That woman's meek, kindly exterior belied her shrewdness and swiftness in action.

Tanya's morning sickness had exacerbated lately, depriving her of the reprieve of food and sleep. She had initially planned to complete a pregnancy test in the hospital early the next morning before making her next move, but Arianne and Tiffany's action forced her to bring the plan forward.

A simple pregnancy test required very little time. Soon, the report was in Tanya's hands, its conclusion causing her heart to sink so low that she wondered if her stomach had swallowed it.

Tanya took a photo of the document and sent it to Jackson, but she received no reply. Frantic, she called him, only to realize that the man had placed her on his list of blocked numbers.

Tanya had always thought of Jackson as an even-tempered, amicable man who treated her with nothing but cordiality wrapped in a gentle, warm package. Who would have thought that he was capable of such cruelty? She did not predict him having found her so undeserving of even the slightest benefit of the doubt.

The woman took a cab to the West family residence. She had heard Summer mention how much she yearned for grandchildren before, and now, it was Tanya who bore the fruit of Jackson's loin. Summer could not possibly reject a woman pregnant with her grandchild, could she?

The West's patriarch and matriarch were her only hope now.

Tanya stood before the gate to the residence, her eyes taking in the grandeur of the house. She caressed her belly as her heart swole with bravado. She had taken the less noble path and dirtied her hands with underhanded means, but she did it all for the day when she could finally become the mistress of this house.

It was the only way to depart from her painful, mocked past—or rather, it was the only path her decisions had left her.

Tanya pressed the bell. A woman who looked like a caretaker quickly came out of the house and asked, “May I know who you are looking for?”

She donned her best behavior and smiled politely. “Good day, ma’am. I’m here to visit Auntie Summer and Uncle Atticus. Are they home?”

The visitor’s intent prompted the caretaker to open the gate, letting Tanya, whose courtly demeanor had earned points in this woman’s mind, into the house. With a thanks, Tanya followed the woman into the residence's interior until they reached the living room.

There, the caretaker informed Summer, who was sitting on the couch, “Madam! Someone’s here for you.”

Summer looked up from her magazine. When her eyes met Tanya’s face, she looked visibly surprised. “Oh, Tan! Why are you here? Did you come alone?”

Chapter 898

Tanya nodded self-consciously. “Y-yes, Aunt Summer.”

Tanya wondered if Summer believed she should only appear when Tiffany was also with her. That was the tragedy of her life, Tanya reckoned—she was always a tack-on to someone else. But not today. Today, she came as her own person.

Disappointment poured into Summer's eyes. "Oh, I see. Uh, then… How can I help you?"

Tanya took a brave step forward and fished out the pregnancy test result from her bag. "I've just received this medical report. Please, have a look."

Summer was baffled. Why a medical report all of a sudden? Why should she be bothered with it? Still, out of courtesy, she took the document from Tanya's hands and read that it was pertaining to her pregnancy.

"Ah. Congratulations, my dear!" Summer noted with a slight smile. "You got yourself a good man, haven't you? When is the wedding?"

Tanya paused for a beat before dropping the news. "The father… is Jackson West."

Summer's smile froze into an uncanny curve. "W-what? Is this a joke? I know what kinda person my son is, but more importantly, you're Tiffie's friend! How could the two of you do this?"

Summer's reaction was utterly removed from what Tanya had imagined; the shocking disparity put the woman at a loss of how to react. Summer, meanwhile, bore storm clouds in her mien when she shouted upstairs, "Atticus West! You get down here right this instant!"

The commotion spurred Atticus to spring out of the study hurriedly. "W-what's the matter, dear?"

Summer tossed the pregnancy report onto the coffee table and bristled. "Tiffie's friend here claims that she's bearing Jackson's child! Would you believe this malarkey? How on earth did this even happen? What kinda person would do this?"

It seemed that Summer was delivering a j'accuse toward her son on the surface, yet Tanya could not help but feel the stinging jab herself. It was as if the real target of Summer's rage was her instead.

An ordinary girl raised from an unassuming, plebeian family like Tanya would always feel pressured whenever she faced upper-class people, such as Atticus and Summer, in a genteel environment like the West family residence. All of the bravado she had mustered before entering the gate had dissipated, leaving a pathetic wretch silently standing in the living room while she waited for their verdict.

Atticus looked positively distressed. "Oh, uh… Tanya…? Why—no, how did this come to be? We don't know what happened that led up to this, do we? Besides, this is a personal issue between you and Jackson. What is your intention for coming straight to us over this matter?"

Tanya could not describe the shameful process in detail, so she chose to give a brief rundown. "Whatever your impressions of me are now, I can accept them. But you must also recognize that Jackson and Tiffany had long broken up. He is single, just as I am, too. Sure, this happened because he drank too much, but the fact is that I'm now pregnant with his baby. I… I love Jackson, I really do. So please, I hope both of you can accept my child as part of your family!" Tanya beseeched. "No matter how hard I try, he won't let me contact him. I was left with no other choice but to come see you."

Her words, however, received a sneer and a snicker of contempt from Summer. “Well, well! If he’s avoiding you, then I bet he has his reasons, wouldn’t you agree? What do you expect us to do? Force him to marry you or something? Puh-lease, darling. I’ll make this very clear right now — I don’t like you at all. The only daughter-in-law I’ll accept is Tiffany Lane. And I’d know if the relationship between my son and Tiffany were truly over. It doesn’t matter if they split or not. Doesn’t change the fact that you injected yourself into a relationship between your friend and her man, Tanya, and that… Well, it will never be okay. Now, if Jackson does not give a damn about the baby, then the choice that’s best for all of us is to abort it, wouldn’t you agree?

“I won’t leave you wanting for surgery and recovery treatment fees, Tanya. In fact, I’m going to compensate you with anything you feel is deserving of this upsetting accident!’ Summer continued. “This is all I’ll say in this matter, girl. I’m not going to waste my time beating around the bush. Give me the receipt after your abortion procedure. But before that happens, please leave my house.”

Tanya felt as though she had been waterboarded by a waterfall of ice-cold antipathy, leaving a steely chill in her bones. Seeing how kindly Summer doted on Tiffany had made Tanya hope that she could be the recipient of such warmth, too. But the reality was harsh to her. Tanya could be bearing an offspring of theirs in her body right now, and the family would still see her as no more than trash on a sidewalk.

The rancor toward Tiffany spiked into a new height. Over and over again, Tanya’s livid mind screamed at how unfair everything was. Why was she denied all of the preferential partialities Tiffany Lane enjoyed?! On what basis was she, Tanya, denied them?

Tanya stood still, her feet glued to the spot. Meanwhile, Summer stormed upstairs as though she could not bear to give one more look at the girl.

Chapter 899

Atticus, unlike his wife, felt a lot more sympathetic to the poor woman and thought that Summer had been acting a little too callously to her.

“Um, Tanya? I think it’d be best to go home for the time being and think long and hard about this. You must excuse my wife; she has a habit of not mincing her words, you see,” he said kindly. “Be that as it may, she meant exactly what she spoke, and my sentiments are aligned with hers. If Jackson doesn’t want this child, it is most unfortunate but beneficial to abort it, don’t you think? You don’t have to worry about your compensation, as we will not leave you wanting. For now, you should head back. The weather’s quite arid these days, so I’ll have my driver send you home, alright?”

Tanya nodded and murmured, “T-thank you…”

Amidst all of the antipathy and contempt she had suffered, Atticus’s minute display of sympathy quickly became Tanya’s only comfort over these days.

From the French window in her bedroom, Summer watched a car belonging to their family take Tanya in before heading out and disappearing into the distance.

She turned to Atticus and grouched under her breath, “What the hell was that for? You really wanted to be the good guy so much, huh? Let me tell you, I saw right through that girl’s act. Don’t buy into that goodie-two-shoes façade she put on, old man. She’s the one who kept doing a little bit of this and a little bit of that to try to sabotage my relationship with Tiffie! And now look at her, appearing with Jackson’s baby so soon! Lord Almighty knows that this young lady is as terrible as she is crooked to the core! I swear to God, she must be the reason why Jackson and Tiffie broke apart! I just know it! I wish I could slap that insolent face right there and then! And she had the gall to demand I accept that child as my grandchild—over my dead body! Go and call your son right now and tell him to get the hell back here this damn instance!”

Atticus saw the flames in his wife’s mien and was choked to silence. Quickly, he dialed Jackson’s number just as he was told.

The father and son hadn't warmed up to each other that much, so Atticus rarely called Jackson. Still, this would be the first time the father had ever called the son, and to the latter's credit, he did not hang up.

His tone was, however, very steely. "Yes, what is it?"

"Please come home right away," Atticus whispered. "Your mom's about to tear a man into pieces — I mean, something terrible happened. You ought to come home… now!"

Jackson said not another word and ended the call immediately, likely bolting toward his family home from wherever he was.

Summer had begun howling and bawling like a banshee by the time Jackson arrived. It was the first thing that clued the younger man that something unsettling had, indeed, occurred. "What now? You didn't call me home just to have me witness to your crying fit, did you? I don't recall having done anything so harrowing and mortifying that justifies all these tears."

Summer lunged toward him. She swung her fist onto his chest with just the right amount of force. "What the hell is this… horrid thing between you and Tanya?! She came to us just now with your seed inside of her! You can't be that kind of person, can you? I've taught you to never, ever, ever get yourself tangled with someone from your social circle, but did you listen? No! You went against me and messed around with the people around you! How could you?! And really, Tanya over Tiffie? Which part of Tanya is better than Tiffie even by a smidge, huh? Are you blind or just very stupid? You're lucky I only kicked her out of the house earlier, so now you're going to tell me what you plan to do, clever boy!"

Jackson cocked his eyebrow. "Tanya came? She's pregnant?"

Summer leveled him with the scowl of a disappointed parent. “Natch! Your father and I were right there, taking in the most terrible news ever! You think we pulled this out of nowhere? Jackson West, I am your mother. I exhausted all of my blood and tears raising you, so an explanation is the least you can do, you hear me?” she fumed. “Tiffie — oh, poor, sweet Tiffie! She was once yours and the only one out of all of your women to ever meet my standards. Can’t you two just be together, happily ever after?”

Forlornness crept into Jackson’s eyes. “She was the one who rejected me.”

The room became silent. Summer’s acute awareness of her son’s feelings, be it mirth or melancholy, made sensing the genuineness of Jackson’s despondence all too easy. When he said that Tiffany rejected him, she could feel the air around them gel.

The admission palpably saddened Summer. “Jackson, Mommy knows you’re hurt from it all, so honestly, I won’t force you to make any decision just because I so desperately wish so. But the baby in Tanya’s womb is yours, pure and simple. So, you’re the one who needs to be responsible for it. You need to solve this; you need to tie up your own loose strings. You cannot turn your back against what you have done. I’m not going to tell you what to do between the two of you now, just… think about it on your own, okay? And oh, uh, if you’ve got the time, do pay your branch company in South Park some mind.”

Jackson nodded quietly, turned away from his parents, and marched out of the West family residence.

The day had crept into the evening. Hence, instead of returning to his office, Jackson drove to the apartment where Tanya stayed.

It was a trip oft-traveled, but his reason had always been Tiffany. This time, however, was the only time he tore through the same asphalt road for Tanya instead.

Chapter 900

When he was at the foot of the building, Jackson pulled over around the curb. He pulled out his phone and drew Tanya's number out of his blocked numbers list before dialing.

When the call connected, he went straight to the point. "Downstairs."

There were a few beats of silence from Tanya's side before her shock poured over. "You're… downstairs?"

He hung up. He was in no mood to say anything more.

It took Tanya less than five minutes to appear. He unlocked the door, and the woman yanked the one in the backseat open before taking her place. "Um, you're here for me…?"

"Or rather, weren't you the one looking for me?" Jackson replied flatly. "You shouldn't have shown your face in the West family residence. What do you want?"

So, he only came to her because she visited the West family residence and not for anything else. Tanya hung her head and gripped the hem of her clothes tightly.

“I don’t want anything other than to bear this baby to terms,” she said. “I know I’m nothing but a piece of garbage to you right now, and even before this, I was always just the friend of someone you like. But… I’ve liked you for a long time now. I love you. I never got to say it before, but after you broke up with Tiffany, I—”

Jackson’s eyebrows furrowed slightly before he snapped, “Can you please skip all these unnecessary sh*ts? I’m really not in the mood to hear any of it. I’ll tell you right here, right now: the baby is in your body, so if you insist on keeping it, then I have no right to force you to take it out. On the flip side, you have no right to make me accept it as mine either, do you understand me? So here’s the rundown: bringing that child to this world would damage your future and life in ways that cannot be undone. There’s not a sliver of benefits for you. But if you abort it, though, mark my words—I’ll compensate you for it. So, use your head and think. I’m giving you five minutes.”

Tanya raised her eyes and examined Jackson’s hardened face in disbelief. “You hate me so much that you would rather abandon your own flesh and blood than accept me? Don’t you understand? I want the baby to live no matter what because it’s yours, Jackson! Yet, you want me to abort it, don’t you? You think it’s all about money, is that it? Well, no! No, I don’t want money, and I won’t abandon this baby! Even if… even if you don’t want us, I won’t discard the baby!”

“Suit yourself. This is the end of our discussion. Leave now,” Jackson replied, his voice devoid of any warmth. “And yes, I’ll be sending you an agreement very soon. Sign it before returning it to me. It’s about the child's custody. You see, I won’t force you to abort it, but the baby is not legally related to me in any way. I don’t care if I am the father; you cannot force me to fork up alimony. I won’t give so much as a dime. So, think carefully.”

Tanya did not consider his words carefully before disembarking. It was only after Jackson’s car vanished at the end of the road that she finally understood his implication.

He had thought of a way out for himself if she refused to comply. Everything he did was to sever his ties with her without leaving any leeway at all!

No, Tanya would not sign whatever agreement he cooked up. She wouldn't!

Night fell. Tiffany returned home after splitting away from Arianne. Upon reaching home, however, she was shocked to find a very demoralized Tanya flitting nearby.

Wary, she asked, "Why the hell are you here at my place?"

Tanya looked up to her with tears overflowing in her eyes and fell onto her knees. "Tiffany, it's all my fault. I love Jackson so much, and now I'm pregnant. It's his… It's his child, but he won't… Won't let me bear the baby to terms. I don't want to do an abortion. I don't wanna—the doctor said my body's too fragile. If I abort this child, I'm never going to be able to become pregnant again. You wouldn't want me to lose my right as a mother, would you? Please, for the sake of whatever is left of our past relationship, help me. I'm begging you…"

Tiffany felt as though a hammer pounded her head. Tanya…pregnant? With Jackson's progeny…?