**Ruling 321**

Chapter 321

Arianne gave up on struggling. No matter how much she struggled, Mark would still insist on having his way…

Mark's movements were as terrifying as the deafening thunder, finally ending amidst her sobs.

The rain stopped at some point through the night, the sun that rose with the lingering rain droplets the next day feeling very warm. Arianne was scared for the whole night, barely catching any sleep. She made certain that her baby was fine, but she still held a grudge against him.

She did not keep quiet while she washed up. The fatigue and morning sickness sapped all of her remaining energy, so much so that she did not have it in her to bend down and pick up a fallen cup from the floor. She had not been showing any signs of morning sickness before but look at her now, after Mark came. She thought that he must have affected her…

Finally, Mark woke up due to Arianne's clamoring. Looking at the foreign environment, he lapsed into a momentary daze. Snippets of last night replayed in his mind but no matter how much he attempted to recall what happened, his memory refused to return in its entirety. Of course, he could not remember what he had said. In his hungover state, headache raging, he got up to go to the bathroom with a frown. When he saw Arianne, he recalled the previous night… He only remembered fragments of it but his body had still reacted…

Not in the habit of wearing the same set of garments for two days, the towel around Mark's waist became his only clothing. He turned around and told her, "I want to use the toilet."

Arianne left without a sound while Mark closed the bathroom door in a pique. With one hand against the wall to support himself, he took off the towel, unable to help cursing in a low tone, “Damn it…” Why had he failed to hold himself together and came to her? Brian didn’t even stop him, just leaving him here!

Exiting the bathroom, he called Brian. “Send me clothes. Fast.”

Arianne was already dressed and prepared to head out. She had not wanted to talk to him, but she felt that it was necessary. “I’m off to work. Lock the door when you leave.”

Mark rubbed his throbbing temples. “You didn’t sleep well last night, did you?” After the question, he felt like he was taking the initiative to give in and could not help but harden his tone. “I drank too much last night. I don’t remember what happened. If you didn’t sleep well, don’t go out today. I’ll inform Eric.”

Arianne puffed up her cheeks, enraged. “Since you don’t remember anything, just assume that nothing happened. I can space out my time for a break in the office, no need to worry about me.” She walked out after that, and as expected, there was breakfast at the door. Not having any appetite, Arianne put it in the hallway’s closet and entered the elevator.

When she came downstairs, Tiffany didn’t see her with breakfast and asked, “Your mom didn’t send you any breakfast today?”

Arianne answered glumly, “She did. Mark’s at my place. I have no appetite, so I left it for you.”

It was as if Tiffany had heard earth-shattering news. “What? Mark’s at your place? What’s the situation? Have you guys reconciled? He’s in such a great mood this early in the morning? Or did he come last night?”

Arianne did not feel like answering, furious whenever she thought about last night. Furthermore, Mark had told her that he did not remember anything first thing in the morning! Anyone would have been infuriated!

Taking in the ominous look, Tiffany did not press further and returned to driving.

Just as they left, Brian arrived. Once he saw Mark, he was reprimanded directly. “Have you gone crazy or was it me? Who asked you to send me here!?”

Brian looked wronged. “Sir… You were the one who made such a big fuss about coming…”

Would Mark admit to the dumb things he did? He would only be obstinate. “Couldn’t you see that I’d drank too much? How could you do what I said when I was drunk? If I’d asked you to kill someone and burn down a house, would you have done it? You’ve worked for me for years and you still don’t know how to act!”

Brian braced himself and said, “People say that what you say when you’re drunk are your thoughts are their most truthful. You must have missed Madam to be fussing about coming here. You don’t know your temper when you’re drunk. If I didn’t do what you said, you would go at it for the whole night.”

Mark honestly had no idea what he was like when he was inebriated. It wasn’t like he didn’t feel guilty. He gave up arguing with Brian and took the clean change of clothing into the bedroom. Suddenly, he

caught a glimpse of white lace on the edge of the bed. The fabric was obviously wretched apart and torn. Connecting it to his foolish act last night, he changed and left with a long face. Mark felt even more ruffled when he saw the breakfast in the hallway's closet.

"Send that woman something to eat, but don't say that it's from me."

Brian hummed his acknowledgement and dropped Mark off at the company before he went to send food to Arianne. Breakfast, pastries, cakes, he bought everything that he could.

When he placed the items on the front desk of Eric's company, the girl stationed there was baffled. "Mister… who's these for?"

Brian panted from the work. "For Arianne. I'm leaving, have her collect them after I'm gone. Say that… Brian sent them." Mark had told him not to mention it was him, he did not say that Brian could not mention his own name.

After Brian left, the girl swallowed her saliva looking at all the delicacies. Intending to take a little something for herself, she took the initiative to send the food directly to Arianne's desk. "Arianne, someone sent you food again. There's so much, are you sure you can finish it alone?"

Chapter 322

Arianne asked casually, "Who sent them?"

The girl answered whatever she was asked, "He said he's Brian."

Brian? Arianne felt a tiny headache. Mark's attitude when he spoke to her was not the nicest. She did not expect him to ask Brian to send her breakfast. If he had not asked for it, Brian would not dare to have done it. She really did not know what he was thinking.

The weather was hot nowadays and the food items could only last the day. She would not be able to finish it. Considering for a moment, she said, "I'll take some. Distribute the rest among yourselves. I won't be able to finish them."

The front desk girl did as she was told happily and saved the best for Eric specifically. When Eric saw the label on the box, he clicked his tongue. "Looks like they're making up. Look at this, sending food to the office…"

"Mr. Nathaniel, what are you saying?" The front desk girl was puzzled.

Eric shook his head. "Nothing, move along now."

When she finished work that day, Arianne did not have Tiffany pick her up. She was off from work earlier and the time did not match Tiffany's, so she could save her the hassle.

Once Arianne entered the door, she felt that something was off. Rice Ball would have sprung over to snuggle against her usually, but there was no sight of it today. She recalled the last time she saw Rice Ball. It was when she changed its water and kibbles before she headed out this morning. Rice Ball was curled up in its nest without actually bothering her then, and she did not mind it, thinking that it had not slept well due to the downpour last night. Now, Arianne felt that something was amiss.

As she called for Rice Ball, she searched for the cat, realizing with a start that it was still lazing in its nest like this morning, barely moving. It did not even touch its water and kibbles. Its usually lively eyes were drowsy as well. Its torpid state made it look like it was dying!

Not knowing what was wrong, Arianne hurriedly put it into the pet carrier and sent it to the vet. After the initial diagnosis, the vet concluded, “Feline distemper. Treatment has a forty percent survival rate and sixty percent death rate. The fee is not cheap. Consider it quick. I’ll say this now, the death rate of feline distemper is quite high, it won’t necessarily be saved after treatment.”

Arianne’s eyes rimmed red at once. “Save it! We’ll do it, definitely!”

Rice Ball was not only a pet to her. It was a ray of hope that ran into her life during her darkest moment. It was a tiny creature as pitiful as she was. It could only depend on her. If Arianne did not save it, who would?

After a drip and medication at the vet, it was already past ten at night. The vet could see that Arianne was pregnant and reminded her, “It has to be sent here daily for drips and will take around half a day. It’s best that you feed it medicine at home. It’s a challenge to feed cats medication. Do you have someone else at home?”

To the average people, pregnant ladies were the last people they would expect to see sending a pet to the vet. Vets and pets were a taboo. Even if the pregnant lady loved pets, her family would have stopped any direct contact.

Arianne was exhausted to the brim. She shook her head hopelessly. “I’m staying with my cat alone… I can feed the medicine.”

The vet shook his head and picked up his gloves, which Rice Ball had ruined from its scratches, to wag them in front of Arianne. “No matter how close the cat is to its owner, it’ll still overreact from being fed the medication. It’s instinct. It’ll hurt you from the scratches and it’s harmful to a pregnant lady. The doctor can only help you with the medicine once during the drip each day. You’ll have to feed it when you get home. This is a long-term battle, you won’t be able to handle it alone. You can let it stay at the vet long-term too, keep it with me, but… the presence of its owner is crucial to creatures like cats. It’s mollified when it sees you, which is beneficial to its ill state. I don’t recommend boarding.”

Arianne was quiet, feeling extremely helpless. Looking at the limp Rice Ball in her arms, she was at a loss for what to do.

Suddenly, her phone rang. She answered it without looking at the screen. It was usually Tiffany who would call her at this hour. Once the call was connected, she spoke with a sob, “Rice Ball is sick with feline distemper, it’s rather serious. I’m at the vet now, I can’t do it alone… Tiffie… can you help me? I really can’t… I can’t take care of it by myself…”

There was no reply from the other end of the line for a while. Thinking that the call got cut by accident, Arianne checked her screen in doubt, only to see that it was not Tiffany who had called her. It was Mark!

She was chagrined once she recalled that she had wailed to him just now. “Sorry… I thought that it was Tiffie…”

“Which vet? Send me the address, I’ll be right there,” Mark said promptly without ridiculing her despair over a cat. Even though his tone was indifferent, Arianne could not help the pinch on her nose. “You actually don’t have to mind me…”

There was a two-second pause from Mark before he answered, “Tell me this when you’re no longer Mrs. Tremont. Now send me the address.”

As the call was hung up, Arianne was stunned for a beat before she hesitantly sent him the address. Rice Ball was significant to her, but to Mark, it was just a stray cat she picked up. He could help for now but that did not mean that he would keep helping her.

By the time Mark got there, the vet clinic was already closed. Arianne’s frail form stood quietly outside the clinic, easily unnoticed.

Chapter 323

Looking at her determined front while carrying Rice Ball, Mark felt a mix of emotions. It seemed that he was the only one she was heartless to. She could even treasure a cat so much…

Arianne dared not get into his car, knowing that he was a germaphobe and worrying that Rice Ball’s fur would shed in the car. “You didn’t actually have to rush here… Today’s drip is done, it’s just that I can’t feed it the medication alone at home… It has to come back tomorrow for drip still.”

Mark hopped out of the car and grabbed the pet carrier that housed Rice Ball before tossing it into the vehicle. “I don’t have time for your nonsense. Get in.”

Arianne was surprised, worried that something would happen to Rice Ball from the rough handling but dared not argue with him. The weather was hot and dry, inevitably making one lose its cool quickly. A person like him would be riled up easily.

Back to the apartment, Mark took off his suit jacket and tossed it on the couch right as he stepped inside before he rolled up his sleeves. “Come on.”

Not daring to be slow, Arianne took Rice Ball’s medication out. “Uh… Either I grab Rice Ball’s legs and you feed it the medicine, or we swap…”

Mark glanced at the lifeless cat and chose to swap. When he came into contact with the cat, it was as if Rice Ball realized what was about to happen, for it sprang up and scurried under the couch.

Arianne placated it patiently, but Rice Ball was not having it. Since she was pregnant, she dared not squat down for too long and could only assuage the cat as she bent down, holding onto the couch. Mark was standing diagonally to her and could see her gaping neckline when Arianne bent low. A thought flashed across his mind—they seemed to have grown some more…

Once Mark thought about others seeing what he did as she bent down, he was vexed. “Can you take note of what you’re wearing?”

Confused about what he was referring to, Arianne turned back to look at him. “What?”

Mark wordlessly gestured for her to step away and moved the coach. When Rice Ball was exposed, he swiftly carried it up.

Arianne was still mulling over his words just now and subconsciously looked at her collar, blushing at once…

The process of feeding a cat its medication was torturing. Rice Ball cried and shrieked ceaselessly like they were feeding it poison. Both Arianne and Mark were covered in sweat from the labor. Knowing how particular Mark was with his environment, Arianne felt bad. “Uh… I don’t usually stay in the living room, so it’s unnecessary to spend for an AC. If you’re warm, you can go to the bedroom for the air conditioning.”

Mark put Rice Ball down and went to the bedroom without a word. The moment the cool breeze was released, he exhaled a long sigh as well. The hot weather was murderous.

After settling Rice Ball’s needs, Arianne made him a cup of black tea. “It’s not hot anymore.”

Mark glimpsed at her. “You’re pregnant, you can’t have black tea.”

Subconsciously, she answered, “I didn’t.”

“Then why do you have it here?” he asked.

Arianne clamped her mouth shut. She had just bought the tea because she saw it when she was shopping. She did not have the time to drink it and it had been kept there since. She had only opened it after he came. Mark’s sudden question made Arianne question herself as well. If she was not drinking it, why did she keep it?

The topic came to an end at their silence. Arianne realized that Mark was still here after her shower. It was late and he had driven to pick her up from the vet clinic. If he had to drive home again in the middle

of the night, it would not seem right. He was sober right now without a drop of alcohol; what happened last night should not be repeated. Arianne braved herself and said, “Uh… go shower. You can stay for the night. It’s so late and pretty hot too.”

Mark looked at her and narrowed his eyes. “Do you know what it means for a woman to tell a man this?”

Arianne’s heart rate picked up as she went to the water dispenser and downed a glass of cold water in panic. “You’ve stayed so late to help me. It’s inappropriate to chase you out. I don’t mean anything else.”

Not replying to her, Mark went to the bathroom for his shower.

Listening to the flowing water, Arianne could not find her peace. She had retained him for the night, as she felt bad, but because of what he said, she could not help her thoughts from going rampant…

When he was done showering, Arianne pretended to be asleep, but she perked up her ears to pay attention to Mark’s movements. He had moved around the bedroom and headed out. Curious, Arianne got up to check. It came as a surprise when she saw that Mark had volunteered to sleep on the couch. What astonished her even more was that Rice Ball and its bed were moved to the side of the couch as well. He was going to sleep with an eye kept on Rice Ball…

“The purpose of me sleeping on the couch is for you to have a good rest, not for you to worry about nothing. It’s just a cat, I can handle it.” Mark stayed still on the couch after speaking and adjusting himself on the couch.

Arianne felt a flurry of emotions. If he had not helped to check on Rice Ball, she would have to wake up several times through the night to see how the cat was doing. This was what the vet had told her to do anyway. He despised furry animals so much, how could he know about it?

Out of the blue, she was reminded of what he had said the other day.

“I loved you, but that’s in the past now.”

Until now, Arianne still could not bring herself to believe what he had said. She had always thought that he was disdainful about the word ‘love’. Indeed, she did not know him well enough. Despite spending so many years together, she did not know him in the slightest. What she had thought she knew about him was only her one-sided confidence. Just like she thought that he must not know how to take care of small animals when he hated them and was extremely intolerant of them; it was the complete opposite.

It seemed that she had unknowingly let down the man who all the women could not bear to see this way. She had been disappointing him all along…

Chapter 324

Arianne did not close the bedroom door when she slept. This way, the air conditioning in the bedroom could more or less lower the temperature in the living room. Otherwise, Mark would not be able to sleep.

The fatigue these two days caused Arianne to sleep soundly until the next morning. If she weren’t woken up from nature’s call, she wouldn’t have even bothered to leave her bed. Walking to the bathroom drowsily, she was stunned when she entered. Mark was using the toilet! And he did not even close the door! Although he stood with his back facing her, Arianne could hear him clearly.

She closed her eyes instinctively and turned around. “Can you close the door when you use the toilet?”

“Can’t, it’s too hot.” Mark was nonchalant, having a temper from his lack of sleep.

Would the heat in the bathroom kill him in the time taken to pee? Arianne was speechless. At the same time, she prayed for him to be faster. With the baby in her womb, she could not hold it in for too long… Before she was pregnant, she had never felt this extent of urgency.

When Mark was finally done, she pushed him out impatiently, not expecting him to push the door open and ask, “What’s for breakfast?” just as she sat on the toilet.

Arianne looked at him in shock, unable to release herself no matter how urgent it felt. Was it really appropriate to discuss breakfast in this setting? Was he still Mark Tremont, who had always been particular?

As if realizing something, Mark closed the door again.

Breathing in relief, Arianne got up to lock the bathroom door before she continued to soothe herself of life’s most urgent call. She had still been sleepy before, but now she was wide awake.

Coming out of the bathroom, she asked as if nothing happened, “Did Rice Ball eat anything? Did it drink?”

“It drank, but nothing to eat yet,” Mark answered casually.

Not knowing what to reply, Arianne checked the time. Helen had probably asked someone to send the breakfast by now. She opened the door, and as expected, there was also fresh produce. Breakfast was sent every day while fresh produce was sent every other day.

She took the breakfast to Mark. “There you go. Didn’t you ask what’s for breakfast? This.”

Mark made no comment about the shop where the breakfast was from and opened it at once. “I thought that you didn’t want anything from Helen.”

Arianne smiled. “I don’t. I rejected her money and property too, but she pushed them to me anyway. I can only find a chance and return them to her. But the fresh produce and breakfast that she sends? I don’t like wasting food. What can I do with them if I don’t consume them?”

There was no reply from Mark as he ate quietly, not forgetting to share half of it with Arianne.

Before Arianne’s smile could fade, Mark suddenly spoiled the mood. “I’m doing all this not because I’ve forgiven you, but out of responsibility. Don’t think that everything’s fine now. If the baby’s not mine, you’re doomed.”

Arianne froze slightly, already having gotten used to his erratic changes, so she was not exactly upset. After breakfast, she went to work with Tiffany while Mark sent Rice Ball to the vet for its drip on his way. He had volunteered to do it and not because Arianne suggested it.

When it was near noon and estimating that Rice Ball was about done with the drip, Arianne was going to pick it up and sneak it to the office so she could take care of it when Mark sent her a five-minute clip. Rice Ball was in his office!

She had thought that Mark's limit was helping her send Rice Ball to the clinic, but never in her wildest dream would she expect Mark to pick it up on time or… Had he waited until Rice Ball was done with the drip?

Arianne's hand flew to her chest subconsciously, her heart having a mind of its own. It felt as if her palpitating heart was going to leap out of her chest. It was like she was getting to know a different Mark Tremont, one who gave her a different feeling from the past…

She calmed herself down after some time and texted back, "Thank you, thank you for everything that you've done for Rice Ball."

Mark did not reply, as expected. She thought about it and texted him again, "Will Rice Ball be a nuisance when you work? It has to go for drips for days at least; it won't be convenient to you this way."

Mark did not reply still. Arianne thought that he was busy and gave up interrupting him.

In the CEO office of the Tremont Tower, Mark looked at Arianne's texts without replying, but he did not turn his screen off either. He had just discovered that it was actually so simple to have her become 'chatty' with him.

For the entire afternoon, Arianne sent him ten text messages telling him how to take care of Rice Ball, afraid that he did not know how. Mark had only replied a “Mm” without regarding her reminders. She was not even born yet when he had a cat.

Once work ended in the evening, Arianne went to Mark’s office with Tiffany. Certainly, it was for Rice Ball.

Arianne had been worried about Rice Ball having a hard life for the whole afternoon, only to find out how comfortable it was when she reached Mark’s office. Its bowls and bed were new purchases, its kibbles were imported, and it had a brand new luxurious cat climbing tower. It was like it had a new home here!

Although Rice Ball still looked lifeless without an appetite, it was doing much better than it used to.

Tiffany joked, “Mark, why don’t I return the car to you? Now that Rice Ball is sick, you have to take care of it with Ari. Just stay together. You can drop her off and pick her up from work every day, along with the cat. Isn’t that easier? Why did you still give me a car for nothing? When Ari’s tummy gets bigger in another month or two and she goes on maternity leave, both of you will still have to stay together. You won’t actually leave her alone, right? What do you say?”

Chapter 325

Arianne gave Tiffany a pinch to signal her to stop blabbering. The latter shut her mouth reluctantly but observed Mark’s expression.

Mark’s gaze remained on the monitor all this while even when he said, “Sure. The car is yours then, I’m not used to that model.”

Tiffany did not expect to pick up a bonanza. “For real? But I don’t really need a car. It’s so new, and I’ve only driven it for a few days. If you’re really giving it to me, can I sell it? I’m super poor, poor people aren’t worthy to have a car…”

Since Mark had said that he was giving away the car, he did not mind what would happen to it. “It’s up to you.”

Tiffany replied in understanding, “Then I’ll make a move first. My mom’s still waiting for me to serve her. Leave together, you two. Ari still has a little one inside her. Make sure she eats on time; that’s two being hungry if she starves! Oh yeah, her checkup is coming up, go with her too!”

Arianne did not expect Tiffany to ‘sell’ her off like that. Mark was still working and she had nothing to do, so she stayed in his office. It was awkward. She could only go to Rice Ball. Before her hand reached the cat, however, as if Mark had eyes behind his head, he said, “Don’t want your baby anymore? Don’t touch the cat.”

Retracting her hand obediently, Arianne could not help arguing, “But I wash my hands when I eat… As long as I watch my hygiene, it’s not like I can’t touch it. Can you be more scientific?”

Although refusing to entertain her, Mark still kept his gaze on her occasionally. Whenever Arianne looked like she was going to pet Rice Ball, he would stop her.

…

Happily holding onto the car key, Tiffany ran into Aery once she got to the ground floor of the tower. She did not think that Arianne would be happy with Mark, but Arianne could not divorce him when she was pregnant now. Under such circumstances, Tiffany strictly prohibited the appearance of someone as dangerous as Aery, especially when she saw the latter clad in a miniskirt and a cropped camisole. She could not hold herself back. “Hey, what are you doing here?”

Aery loathed Arianne, so she of course had a deep impression of Tiffany. “Do I have to report what I’m doing here to you? This isn’t the Lane’s. This is the Tremont’s. Besides… it’s game over for your family, what are you being so arrogant about?”

Tiffany was never afraid of being poked fun at. “Haha, I’m just giving you a gentle reminder. Don’t go upsetting yourself. The legal spouse is up there; an ex-mistress like you shouldn’t be poking your nose there, lest you embarrass yourself, end up crying, and make a fool of yourself. Laying your claws on your sister’s man, you’re really the epitome of shamelessness, Aery.”

Aery looked aghast. She had done so much these days to go back to Mark. According to the progress, it was impossible for Mark to reconcile with Arianne so fast. It was not even possible for them to get back together. She had come to Mark in full-fledged confidence, only for Arianne to get a head start?

“What’s Arianne doing here? Mark dear has personally seen her with Will, how dare she come here? She’s the one who shouldn’t be here. And you, Tiffany, the Tremont Tower isn’t somewhere a peasant like you can come. Stop bringing your bad luck here. I’m here because Mark allows me to, no one can stop me. So, who are you to?” Aery marched to the elevator after that.

Tiffany grabbed her instantly. “I won’t be courteous if you dare take another step forward. A peasant like me is so poor that I have only my life left. You’re different. You have a brilliant future and a great life ahead. I don’t mind losing this life of mine, but can you give up everything you have? Don’t think that I don’t know that you hired some goons to prey around for me previously. Too bad, Lady Luck is with me, you didn’t get your way. Should we settle this once and for all?”

Not wanting to stay any longer with her, Aery called out to the security at the entrance, “Are you all dead? Chase this crazy woman out right now!”

The security exchanged looks and decided to turn a blind eye in the end. They were no fools. Tiffany had come with Arianne, and Arianne was the wife of their boss. They could not afford to offend the friend of their boss’ wife.

Aery was infuriated, cussing and dragging Tiffany outside. While she did so, her scanty clothing could barely cover her fair skin, putting on a show for the passersby. Embarrassed, she could not push her way in and could only hide in her car and fume.

Seeing that Aery did not plan to leave, Tiffany was in no hurry to leave either. As long as Arianne did not come out, Aery could not enter.

Around seven, Mark and Arianne finally came out together. Aery bolted out of her car with teary eyes. “Mark darling! That woman, Tiffany, harassed me! She pulled at my clothes in public… She’s awful. How am I supposed to face the others now…”

As she spoke, she saw the pet carrier in Mark’s hand. When she saw Rice Ball inside, she took two steps back in reflex and showed disgust in the bottom of her eyes.

“Who asked you to come?” Mark said expressionlessly.

Aery suspected her ears. “What…? Mark, dear… are you talking to me like this because Arianne is here? Weren’t we fine previously?”

Chapter 326

Fine? Arianne was disturbed. Although she knew that Mark had gone back on his word after promising her that he would not contact Aery, it was better not to think about some things. She was not in the place to say anything. Even if it was not her intention, she had still lain on the same bed with Will and was caught in that spot by Mark. There was nothing she could do.

Mark was irritated by the heatwave going on outside. “You didn’t hear it wrong. I’m not saying it because of anyone. Don’t look for me in the company. I’ve told you that we’re not contacting each other anymore. Did you think that I was just joking?”

Aery had thought that she had won. He did say not to contact him anymore, but he obviously did not hate her presence after what happened with Arianne and Will. They had been fine. Shouldn’t what he’d said previously be ignored? She was unwilling to face this reality. “Mark, dear… don’t be like this! I’ll be good. I won’t pester you when you aren’t looking for me…”

Mark said nothing, making his way to the car, which wasn’t parked too far away. Brian came down to open the door for him while Arianne followed at a normal pace.

Aery’s gaze fell on Arianne’s slightly bulging tummy and understood the situation at once. Seeing that Mark had already gotten into the car, she grabbed Arianne’s hand and lowered her voice, saying, “Ah, it’s because you’re pregnant, huh? Doesn’t matter. I can kill your first child; the same thing goes for the second one. A filthy woman like you doesn’t deserve to stay by Mark’s side. It’s not even definite that this child belongs to Mark…”

The accident that caused her first miscarriage flashed across Arianne's mind. Despite her wrath, fear took up a large portion of her feelings. If she were alone, Aery's threat would be nothing to her. She had a baby now, however. She could not risk it, nor would she.

"Aery, what do you want?" she asked coldly.

"Heh… Aren't you well aware about what I want? I want Mark, only him," Aery gritted her teeth.

Only Mark, huh? Arianne was quiet for a few seconds before flinging away Aery's grasp and entering the car. She was not stupid. Without Mark, she would only face harsher abuse. Even if she gave Mark away in a silver platter, Aery might not let her go just yet.

Not understanding what she meant, Aery could only stomp her feet in anger when she saw the car leave.

Seeing that Mark and Arianne had left, Tiffany drove her car and brushed past Aery, causing the latter to stumble and almost fall. "Are you blind?!"

Tiffany wound down the car window to give her the middle finger, feeling incredibly gratified. This was how a b*tch should be taken care of!

In the car, Arianne spoke up, "Aren't you curious about what Aery told me just now, when she held me back?"

“What’s there to wonder? Only so much can happen between two women,” Mark replied, uninterested.

Arianne paused for a few seconds and said, “She threatened me, said that she could kill my second child after she’s killed my first one. She thinks that you’re with me because of my baby. It cost her the chance to be with you. She wants me to give you away.”

Was she complaining? Mark turned to look at her with a hint of consideration. Pondering, he then answered, “And? Are you giving me away?”

Arianne looked outside through the car window. “I’m not dumb. But it’s not like you’re mine either.”

…

Returning to the apartment, Mark easily held Rice Ball captive while Arianne quickly took the medication and fed it. After the struggle, Rice Ball hid itself, not wanting to see either of them. Every time this happened, Arianne felt a pang to her heart, but she was powerless in this situation.

Mark entered the bathroom with a frown, repelled by the medicine and cat fur on his clothes.

After a few minutes, his phone rang on the coffee table. Picking it up, Arianne went to the bathroom. “It’s yours.”

The door slid open to a crack and Mark's hand extended to accept his phone before closing it. She wanted to say that she was hungry and ask him what he wanted to have, since she could cook and feed them both with all the ingredients at home. It was a pity that Mark did not give her the chance to speak.

Arianne went and took out some vegetables and meat from the fridge. When she was treating the meat, she could not help the nausea that rose from seeing the bloody red mush and threw up. Mark was greeted with the sight of her bending and dry heaving into the trashcan when he came out of the bathroom. Furrowing his brows, he asked, "What are you doing?"

Pointing at the meat in the sink, Arianne replied, "Cooking. We have the ingredients, no need to eat out."

Mark took her away, "Save yourself the hassle, someone will send us dinner."

Arianne thought about the fresh produce that would go to waste instead, insisting, "They'll be spoiled if we don't eat them. I'll cook for myself; you can order takeout if you're not used to it."

Without saying a word, Mark swept all the fresh produce in the fridge into the trash can. "Can you stop now? The kitchen is so warm. You'll be fully cooked before your meal is even done."

Upset by his action, she continued to argue, "It's so wasteful to throw everything away! Why are you like this!"

Mark was adamant. "Are you saying that throwing what Helen bought you is wasteful? Didn't you not want what she gave?"

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Speechless, Arianne turned to go to the bedroom in a fit of anger. She wanted to close the door but she was worried about him not getting any air conditioning.

Soon enough, Brian sent them their dinner. A quick look at the packaging told them their dinner was from White Waters Bay Restaurant. After Brian left, Mark called out toward the bedroom, “Dinner’s here.”

Arianne did not reply, pretending that she did not hear him.

Although he only had a towel on, Mark felt hot. The frustration was grating on his nerves. “Are you eating or not? I’ll throw it if you aren’t!”

Arianne remained silent. She couldn’t help but feel that he was here just to make her mad. They were just not meant to get along!

Mark got up to go to the bedroom and carried her to the couch in the living room in a swift move. “I don’t have a good temper. Have your dinner!”

Arianne opened the takeout silently and ate it. The bedroom’s air conditioning could not cover the entire living room, so she soon felt hot. She did not really have an appetite either and was unable to finish her dinner, even though it was only a small plate.

Mark had it worse than her. “How long are you planning to stay in this horrible place?”

Arianne replied faintly, “I don’t plan to move. It’s a decent place to live in.”

Mark breathed in deeply, his tone turning distant. “Will isn’t coming back, so stay here for the rest of your life if you can!”

Looking at him, Arianne bit her lips before speaking coldly after a while, “Can you not drag Will into everything? It’s because…” She did not finish her sentence, nor did she want to. He had his assumptions, but she did not have it in her to explain.

It was yet another unresolved argument that they had. Although Mark did not stand up to leave, they were not talking to each other either.

It was incredibly hot at night. Mark finally gave up and moved from the couch to the bed. While he was at it, he moved Rice Ball and its bed together to the door of the bedroom.

Fully aware that he had entered, Arianne did not make any response. It was not until his body got close to hers that she shifted aside.

“There must be something wrong with my brain for me to stay here and put up with you!” Mark sounded like he was grumbling with a cold tone but there was no bite in it.

“Then leave…” she retorted softly.

How could Mark put up with this? He got up immediately to call Brian so that the latter could send him a change of attire as he could not leave wrapped in a towel. Arianne knew that he was serious and snatched his phone, hiding it under her body.

“How much are you paying Brian a month to disturb him so late at night? You’re making him stay on call for twenty-four hours. If I had someone so harsh like you as my boss, I would’ve quit a long time ago!”

Mark searched for his phone under the blanket with a dark look. When he came into contact with Arianne’s supple skin, there was a subtle change in his expression before he drew back his hand at once. “What do you want?”

Arianne was stunned. It did not sound like something Mark would say. “It’s not what I want. I’m pregnant, and I need to rest. Don’t disturb me. Leave quietly in the morning if you want to…”

Pressing his lips together, Mark stared at her icily. His exasperation caused his chest to heave heavily. This was not something he could accept. Letting it get to his head, Mark bent down and stretched his hand under her body again. He had never felt so peeved all his life!

Unintentionally, the distance between them reduced to only a thin sheet separating their bodies. Arianne could smell the fresh fragrance of the body wash on Mark and automatically imagined his chiseled body. He had been walking around her, wrapped only in a towel for the past two days. It was inevitable that she saw his semi-naked body. Her cheeks flushed red and she became restless. “Get up… I’ll give it to you…”

Ignoring her, Mark scooped her up with one hand while he continued to look for his phone with another. Arianne's tiny frame felt even more fragile under him and she could only let him do what he wanted. When Mark found his phone, he did not get up instantly. The soft and smooth touch in his arms felt tangible, and he did not want to let go for her at all… The atmosphere somehow turned intimate.

The air was so quiet that they could hear each other's breathing. Each time their heart beat, they got closer to each other. Arianne dared not even exhale a little louder. She knew that she had been too 'cocky' tonight and should not have challenged him to the point of being angry.

Just as she was about to say something to soothe the atmosphere, Mark's kiss suddenly landed on the side of her face and moved to her neck. Ticklish, Arianne subconsciously ducked her head but it felt like she was snuggling up to Mark, like she had given a silent consent to his action.

Arianne felt that she should reject him but she was unable to open her mouth regardless. When Mark's kiss traveled to her lips and their faces were aligned, she actually closed her eyes! This meant that she was basically giving up her fight!

Arianne only knew that her heart was beating fast and her mind was a tangled mess. She had completely lost her ability to think. It felt bizarre!

Mark did not kiss deeply. He stopped for a few seconds on her lips and left. "Remember to resist the next time, and don't provoke me." He then laid down with his back facing her after that.

Composing herself, Arianne could still feel her heart thumping. Was this what people called having butterflies?! She felt like slapping herself. What butterflies? Could it be possible that she liked him? Yet, why did she not recognise herself anymore when she looked into his eyes? Her brain had stopped functioning too…

Chapter 328

She woke up from the heat the next morning. Mark's arm was draped across her chest, making it very difficult for her to breathe. She was so hot that her hair was sticking onto her face.

He was breathing into her neck, and he wasn't covered by the blanket at all. He slept with his entire head on top of her body and it was impossible for her not to feel hot!

She really disliked feeling sweaty. She struggled away from the confines of him and the quilt, got up and took a shower. When she emerged from the bathroom, she felt much more refreshed. She suddenly noticed that Rice Ball wasn't asleep in its nest. She called out to it, and Rice Ball jumped off the sofa and gracefully walked towards her. It had only been a few short days but the fat cat had already lost a lot of weight. However, it was still recovering from its illness. Previously, Rice Ball had lost its energy. At least it could walk now. That was a good thing.

Just as she was about to pick Rice Ball into her arms out of pity, Mark appeared at the bedroom door. "Touch it, see what happens."

Due to last night's mistake, she was too afraid to provoke him again. "It's Saturday. I don't have work, so I can take Rice Ball to the pet hospital for an intravenous infusion. You can do your own thing."

He didn't seem to be fully awake yet, and moodily walked into the toilet, ignoring her.

Once he was done with the toilet, she went in to wash up as well. She couldn't help feeling slightly nauseated as she brushed her teeth. However, it wasn't as bad as her first pregnancy, so she was quite relieved about that.

Mark heard someone approaching the door. He hesitated for two seconds, then made his way over to open the door, coming face to face with Helen's surprised face.

Helen was stunned by the fact that he was here, and that he had opened the door wearing nothing but a bath towel. Even though she was his "mother-in-law", it didn't feel appropriate…

Mark wasn't a particularly careless person either, and he wasn't exactly unembarrassed. He simply acted like he was. "You don't have to send things over next time. She won't be needing it."

Helen handed the breakfast that she had brought over to him. "Sure. I'd worry a little less with you around. I won't be coming over from now on. She doesn't want to see me anyway."

He shut the door after accepting the breakfast without beating around the bush. He never thought that Helen would personally send breakfast over every morning. He thought that she had been ordering takeout…

Arianne stepped out to find him carrying breakfast, and knew that Helen had sent someone to bring it over. "She's sent it over again? She's been sending people over to give me breakfast every day. Even if she's not irritated, I am."

He placed the breakfast onto the coffee table and replied, "She didn't ask someone to send it over. She sent it over herself."

She was taken aback, but she quickly squashed down that small amount of sympathy she felt. “So what? She never cared about me when I was little. Now, I’m independent. Why would I need her guilt and hypocrisy? You’re not that kind either. Are you telling me this so that I’d forgive her?”

He raised his brow. “It’s true that I’m not that kind. I don’t think you need to forgive her. I’ve already told her not to come anymore, so you don’t need to feel irritated. Eat. Once you’re done with breakfast, we’ll take the stupid cat for its IV. I’ve got something to attend to in the afternoon.”

She was unhappy with him for calling Rice Ball a stupid cat, but did not dare oppose him. After finishing her breakfast, she obediently followed him as they took Rice Ball to the pet hospital. He wouldn’t let her get down from the car and made her wait in the car. He went on his own into the pet hospital and waited for Rice Ball to be done with its IV. It was apparent that he was in a rush. So, as soon as Rice Ball was settled, he dropped her off at White Water Bay Café. “You can have lunch here. I’ve called Jackson. I’ll take Rice Ball with me. Once you’re done with lunch, Jackson will send you home. I’ll be back when I’m done with work.”

She knew that she had taken too much of his time, so she felt very sorry. “Won’t you eat first before you go?”

He narrowed his eyes, then spoke with an ambiguous tone, “No need to feel sorry about it. I brought it onto myself.”

She scoffed gently, then walked into White Water Bay Café with a clear conscience. If he hadn’t spoken to her with such mockery, perhaps she would still be feeling guilty.

She never expected Mark to book her a private room. Eating alone in such a big room felt wasteful. She asked to switch to a normal table, but Jackson denied her request. “It’s fine, it’s quiet here. Besides, I

can afford the loss. It's not like I'm not earning money anyway. Are you eating alone? Why not invite a friend?"

She agreed. Eating alone felt boring. So she called Tiffany and invited her to meet up. After the call, she came to a realization and asked, "Are you implying that you want to see Tiffie?"

A smile sparkled in Jackson's eyes, but he managed the expression on his face pretty well, so there was no loophole in it, "She works in my company. I can see her whenever I want. Why would I need to manipulate you? Don't be so suspicious all the time. A skeptical woman is unlikable."

"Only a man with ulterior motives would be afraid of a suspicious woman," She retaliated. "Based on your words, you sound like an old hand in the game of love."

Jackson was pretty blunt as he retorted, "Oh really? How am I, compared to your Mark?"

She closed her mouth. It was not as if she understood Mark's personal life. She didn't know very much, aside from his relationship with Aery.

Tiffany arrived soon after, carrying the scorching heat from outside along with her. Her cheeks were red from walking under the sun, "Wow. This weather sure is hot. I would never have gotten out of the house if you hadn't invited me here."

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Arianne handed her a glass of ice water. "Drink some water. It'll be more refreshing. Of course I'd invite you whenever there's something good to eat, just like how you'd think of me every time."

Tiffany chuckled, feeling embarrassed, “You make it sound so… embarrassing. Alright. How are things between you and Mark? I tried every trick I had to help you stop Aery from getting into the office the last time. I really can’t stand that woman. She’s so shameless!”

Arianne was moved. “I know… Thank you, Tiffie. However… Mark and I are just the same. He’s been staying at my place over the past few days, helping me take care of Rice Ball. Sometimes, we still bicker. I suspect that we’re born opposites. Our personalities don’t match. It’s probably because the generation gap is too wide. He is ten years older than me, after all.”

Tiffany waved her hand. “What do you mean? Generation gap, incompatible personalities? Forget about that. Aery is much younger than you are. Why is she so fixated on stealing your man? It’s your personal problem. You don’t know how to catch a man’s heart. Of course, it also depends on whether that man is worth the effort. It’s pretty good of him to willingly lower himself to helping you take care of Rice Ball. Who do you think he is? He’s Mark Tremont. He’s no ordinary man. He has squeezed himself into your tiny condominium just to help you take care of a cat. Doesn’t that mean that he’s after you? It’s not like he’s suffering from a mental illness.”

Arianne blushed at the thought of their romp in the sack just before bed last night. She lowered her voice and asked, “Tiffie, when you were with Ethan. Did you ever feel anything strange when you looked into his eyes from a very close distance?”

Tiffany paused thoughtfully and said, “You’re not referring to when you’re suddenly looking into each other’s eyes, an immediate heat, then kissing, right? That’s attraction. You’ll feel as if your heart is beating wildly against your chest, thumping madly non-stop and refusing to slow down. Your mind will go blank and you’ll lose the ability to think. No matter what the other party does to you, you won’t fight back and let him have his way. That’s mutual attraction… Forget it. I can’t even sort out my own feelings. How am I supposed to analyze anything with you. If Ethan really did love me, things wouldn’t have turned out the way they did. It was my mistake. I was the only one whose heart was racing.”

Arianne was thrown into confusion when she heard this. She was only asking a casual question and didn't think that she had really developed feelings for Mark. That, to her, was way too ridiculous.

Then, Jackson arrived to serve their food. He was dressed in an expensive suit, doing the work of a serviceman. Of course, it suited him very well. Tiffany lowered her head guiltily. She did not forget how wretched she was when he overheard her raving like a madwoman. As a result, she had been avoiding him, even at the office. She would never have come here if it wasn't for the food!

"Tiffany Lane, why won't you look at me? Are you afraid that your heart might suddenly start racing?" Jackson had overheard their conversation and couldn't help teasing her.

"Pfft… I'd be attracted to you? Forget it…" Tiffany lifted her head to look at him, thoroughly provoked. Just when their eyes met, she stopped breathing for just a short moment. There was only one thing on her mind — this man is f*cking hot! Especially when he smiled, so cheeky and mischievous. She simply couldn't turn away.

She was not that foolish. She did not want to thoroughly embarrass herself, so she forced her starry-eyed infatuation away, pretended as if nothing had happened and turned her gaze away. "Just serve the meal. Ari will be hungry very soon."

Jackson served the dishes elegantly like a professional waiter. "Yes… Right away."

After he had left, Arianne softly muttered, "Jackson is fine as a friend, but as a lover… I'm in no place to analyze it for you. It's not as if you haven't been in love, you'll have to weigh the options yourself."

Tiffany acted as if she had seen a ghost. “What on earth are you saying? Even you believe that my heart would race whenever I look into his eyes? If there was any attraction, it would’ve been there long ago. I’ve known him before my family went bankrupt. I crashed into his car when I first met him. He did look pretty cool when he punched those gangsters that Aery sent after me, but I was still with Ethan back then. I couldn’t possibly have had feelings for him. Now… We’ve even shared a bed and my heart still hasn’t raced…”

Arianne was only joking. She did not intend on continuing the joke. As soon as Jackson finished serving the dishes, she asked, “You haven’t had a chance to eat yet, right? Why not eat with us?”

Jackson was not modest about it. He sat himself down. “I won’t refuse your kind invitation. Honestly, I’m quite tired. It’s rare for me to be able to take a break from the office on a Saturday, but Mark summoned me to cook for you, saying that he didn’t trust my chef and insisted that I do it myself. Tsk tsk… How I envy you for having someone to spoil you so much.”

Arianne’s cheeks blushed again. What did he mean by ‘spoiling’ her? She never felt like Mark had indulged her in any way, and it wasn’t her fault. She had long been numb to how Mark treated her from a young age.

Tiffany never liked feeling awkward. So she forced herself to throw that awkward incident to the back of her mind and chimed in, “That’s right, I’m certainly jealous of Ari for having someone to indulge her. It’d be great if Mark were wholly devoted to her.”

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Jackson cocked his brow and said, “He’s never had any other woman for more than ten years. Isn’t that devoted enough? I’ve never had a woman for more than half a year. The longest for me is half a year. Mark is devoted enough.”

Tiffany refused to blindly agree with his thoughts. “What do you mean ‘more than ten years’? Wasn’t Ari very young at the time? Didn’t Mark have an affair in the end? Devoted my as*. Do you men think that devotion is defined by not casting the woman aside? Devotion means giving your body and heart wholly to one person, not a single aspect should be left…” She sensed her impropriety before she finished her sentence. “I’m sorry, Ari… I misspoke…”

Arianne seemed unperturbed. “It’s fine. It’s about his relationship with Aery, right? I don’t mind you two talking about it. It’s alright, really.”

Despite her saying this, Jackson and Tiffany immediately cut the topic of conversation off. After all, no one here had a habit of using someone else’s pain as a topic for conversation.

After lunch, Jackson dutifully offered to send Arianne back to her condominium. She agreed immediately, as the weather was so hot and Arianne had no intention of walking around. Tiffany hurriedly said, “Then, let me carpool as well. I have an appointment at Marina Road. It’s on the way.”

After dropping Arianne off, Jackson and Tiffany were the only ones left in the car. Jackson kept his eyes on the road ahead. “What are you doing at Marina Road?” he asked, seemingly absent-mindedly.

Tiffany sighed, “My mom set up a blind date for me. She refused to drop the matter until I agreed to go. So, I’m going to have a look, just to keep the peace. What if he’s actually a prince and not a toad? I’m not like you. I’m so unlucky that I’ve got no choice but to try my luck.”

Jackson replied to her with merciless sarcasm, “Most guys who choose to meet up after lunch are miserly men who are too afraid of spending money. He’s already lacking in sincerity on your first meeting, and you’re still hoping to bump into some prince? A miserly prince? Forget it.”

She rolled her eyes at him. “It’s not nice to spend someone else’s money anyway. I’d choose to split the bill, even if it’s only coffee. We’re not getting married yet, why overthink it? I’ve got nothing to do anyway, what’s wrong in having a look? You shouldn’t be standing on your high horse and laughing at people in the mud for their despicable lives. These are the only options for someone like me.”

He didn’t answer. When the car arrived at Marina Road, he stopped at the side of the road. Tiffany was in a hurry to get off the car, but she remembered to thank him, “Thanks.”

Jackson winded down the car window and looked at her, “Are you really in a hurry to get married, or are you just trying to appease your mother?”

“Probably both,” Tiffany replied without thinking. “If I can marry a rich man, I wouldn’t need to struggle so much anymore. Even if the blind date ends badly, at least my eardrums will be at peace when I’m married. Why?”

His gaze sank as he closed the car window. “Just asking. Good luck.”

Tiffany was stunned as she watched the car leave. Why was this guy saying such strange things out of the blue to her, and in the middle of nowhere?

When she finally found the café for her blind date, Tiffany looked all around. She then focused her gaze on a man, not too far away. That man seemed pretty tall in his picture, so that should be him. He looked better in real life than in his picture, and she wasn’t sure if he was any better than that bald old man from last time. However, at least he looked better.

She straightened her skirt and walked towards him. “Hello, my name is Tiffany Lane.”

The man’s first reaction was to size her up, the kind that ran from head to toe. A few seconds later, the man seemed very satisfied and finally smiled. “My name is Ken Warner. Please, have a seat.”

She initially thought that they would be sitting inside the café. At least, she could cool down very quickly. Unfortunately, they sat outside. She could see the ocean at first glance. The scenery was nice, the sea breeze was refreshing, and there was a sun umbrella over them. However, it did nothing to lower the temperature. The heat had already diminished her patience for getting to know the other party, so she bluntly described her current background. “I graduated from Southline University, and studied overseas for three years. Now, I’m working as a designer in a branch under Bright Incorporated. My mom and I are on our own. We have no house and no car. There’s nothing much to describe about our lives. This is a general description of my current situation.”

Ken chuckled, “This is the first time I’ve met anyone as straightforward as you. It’s alright. I’ve already looked into your background in detail before I arrived. I wouldn’t be here if I minded it. Bright isn’t too bad. It’s the main office under the West family’s flag. Since you’re so frank, I won’t play coy. You’re exactly my type.”

Tiffany felt embarrassed by his blunt stare. The man hadn’t stopped staring at her ever since she arrived. She really was that blunt with her words, and he was too straightforward. She couldn’t seem to keep up. “Well… Regardless, it’s our first meeting. If all goes well, we can get to know each other a little better. Your situation is much better than mine. My mom and her friend did a thorough check on you, after all.

Ken was very confident in his personal qualifications. “Pretty much. I should fulfill yours and your mother’s expectations. I own a design company myself, I have a five bedroom home and eight figures in my bank account. I don’t like beating around the bush. If I’ve made a good impression on you, let’s confirm our relationship. I don’t like dragging it out or taking it slow. It’s boring.”