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Arianne let out an awkward laugh as she read the message on the screen from Jackson, “I don’t know… I was under the impression that he wouldn’t usually be here. What do we do?”

Tiffany’s fingers speedily tapped against the phone screen, the anxiety on her face gradually increasing. “Oh no, we’re done for. He says that there’s no other seats in this place, so he has no choice but to share a table with us. His mother agreed and said that it’s a great opportunity for us to have a meal together. What do we do? Is this considered a meeting with the parents? I’ve already told him that we’re ending it, but I still have to act it out for him? They’ll be here too. What should I do? Should I run?”

Arianned called on a staff member to clear up the rubbish on the table, “Don’t freak out, I’m here. There’s no other way now. You’ll just have to keep the charade. It’s just that… Ethan is here too. Would that be alright?”

Tiffany was taken aback, “It should be… alright?” She wasn’t sure either since Ethan had told those people that she was his girlfriend. It’d be awkward if they ran into each other again and spoke.

Arianne wasn’t feeling too anxious. After all, it was Tiffany’s business. She couldn’t do much about it. When she saw Mark and Jackson escorting Lillian and Summer, two very charming ladies, like bodyguards, she realized that she had nowhere else to run either. She and Mark had been in the middle of a cold war for days. What nonsensical situation was this? Why was he butting into someone else’s parents’ introduction?

“Tiffie… Mommy’s here!” Lillian carried her long-lost confidence and complacency that belonged to a rich man’s wife. She was even treating Tiffany with an added gentleness.

Tiffany dearly wished to find a crack in the ground and bury herself into it. If she explained the situation now, Lillian would certainly admonish her for having a big mouth in front of everyone!

Mark placed one hand into the pocket of his suit. His cold aura drew attention from everyone around him. His gaze landed on Arianne. He furrowed his handsome brow, clearly upset that she had disobediently gone out of the house. The weather was hot, and it hadn't even been a month since she had her miscarriage.

Jackson concealed his usual frivolous outlook and acted like an honest man in front of Lillian. Even the smile on his face seemed to portray a rule-abiding boy next door. No, he seemed more like a man. He had the words "kind", "pure" and "amiable" written all over his face.

Tiffany made one final struggle, just as they arrived in front of her. She put on a fake smile and said, "How about… we go somewhere else to eat? Or we can sit in separate tables. See, Ari and I are sitting at a table for four. There isn't enough for six. It'd be better to tell us in advance next time, so that Jackson can set up a private room for us."

Arianne hung her head, refusing to look at Mark. She didn't need to look at him to figure out what expression he had on his face.

Summer was unperturbed, "It's fine. We'll just add two more chairs. Jackson, tell someone to bring us some chairs." Jackson was quite obedient; he went off to personally bring two soft and cushiony chair covers and placed them near the corridor. Luckily, the corridor was wide enough, so the chairs were no interference.

Summer was a stickler for etiquette, so she pulled Jackson into sitting down with her on the chairs that he had brought, leaving the good seats for their guests. Lillian happily sat next to Tiffany, and Mark was

left with no choice but to sit next to Arianne. Furthermore, Summer had generously ordered the most expensive dishes in the restaurant. She would have ordered even more if Jackson hadn't reminded her that they wouldn't fit the table.

Lillian's cheeks glowed as she stared at Jackson brazenly, eyes filled with satisfaction. Tiffany was secretly nervous and would glance at Ethan's private room from time to time.

"Mrs. West, allow me to sit next to Jackson. You should sit next to Ari," Mark suddenly spoke up, suggesting a seating change.

Summer did not refuse him. After all, Jackson and Mark were the only men. This was a gentlemanly approach.

"Mrs. West, what kind of skincare products do you use? It's really done wonders for you; you don't seem to have aged at all. In fact, you and Jackson look more like siblings, rather than mother and son."

These were the topics that women usually talked about whenever they were together. Lillian has always been more outgoing, so she spoke to Summer as if they had known each other for years.

Summer revealed her brand of skincare, and Lillian purposefully acted surprised with a hint of regret, "That's a very expensive brand, but it works really well. I used to use that brand of skincare myself. Now… I haven't bought it in a while. I have to think of Tiffie. It's a struggle for her to earn money."

Tiffany felt as if her scalp had turned numb. She hated these kinds of hypocritical acts. If only Lillian really cared about her struggles in earning money.

“It’s fine, leave your skincare product bill to me,” Summer heroically declared, “We’re family, after all. Don’t talk as if we’re separate entities. I’ll take you shopping after this meal. We’ll buy whatever you’re lacking.”

Tiffany hung her head, her face drained of color. She loathed these kinds of manipulative, hypocritical, and theatrical acts. Lillian saw nothing wrong with it, but she was embarrassed…

Jackson glanced at Tiffany and cut off the conversation between both mothers, “Mom, can we talk about something else? Mark and I are both men. We can’t get a word in. Give us more generic topics, will you?”

Summer giggled, covering her mouth, “Alright, alright. I understand. Mark, you and Ari have been married for quite a while, haven’t you? Don’t you plan on having kids?”

The entire atmosphere became deathly still as she said this. Jackson’s expression tensed, “Mom, I’d rather talk about skincare. I enjoy listening to that!”

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Arianne forced a smile, “It’s fine, Mrs. West wasn’t aware. It’s alright. I can't have children. I’ve miscarried twice, and now I can’t get pregnant.”

Summer shot Jackson a glare, “Why didn’t you say so? I’ve brought up a taboo because of you. I’m sorry, Mark. I’m sorry, Ari. It’s alright, you’re still young. Just take good care of your health and you’ll be fine. Keep your spirits up.”

The atmosphere finally grew warmer when the dishes were served. Tiffany and Arianne had eaten a good portion prior to this so they weren't that hungry. The pair disliked these kinds of social events. They shared a look and silently made a pact to go to the washroom together.

At the washroom, Tiffany let out a long sigh, "I'm going nuts. My mom is a really good actress. She's clearly been driving me insane, yet she's claiming in front of other people that her heart aches for me when I've been working so hard. What a joke."

"It's fine," Arianne soothed, "It's important to keep up appearances in front of others. Don't be mad. Let's just have a good meal while we're here. Just eat your food and ignore them."

Tiffany suddenly changed the topic, "Ari, Jackson's mother is a really nice lady. She didn't do it on purpose. The ignorant shouldn't be blamed. Don't be angry with her."

Arianne shook her head, "It's fine, I understand. It's alright, really. I'm not that weak. No wind or wave has been able to knock me down. Should I be upset about this? Alright, compose yourself and continue your meal. I know your appetite. You're definitely not full yet. Let's go."

Tiffany slapped her own cheeks, "Alright, get a grip. You can do this, Tiffany!"

The pair had just walked out of the washroom, arm in arm, when Tiffany's spirits immediately sunk. Ethan had emerged from the private room, along with the rest of his dinner party!

Someone spotted her before she could react and reminded Ethan, “Your girlfriend is here! We won’t disturb you now. Excuse us.”

Ethan smiled at Tiffany and waved the group away. Tiffany was rooted to the spot, too afraid to move, and even more afraid of looking in Jackson’s direction. At this very moment, she felt strangely guilty.

Just as Ethan made his way towards her, Arianne stepped in front of her, “Your friends have left, Ethan. Why aren’t you leaving? Tiffie and I haven’t finished our dinner yet.”

Ethan shot a look towards Jackson’s table and caught Mark’s icy glare. He smirked, “Then I’ll be going now. I’ll talk to you later, Tiffie.”

Tiffany let out a long sigh as she watched Ethan leave. She had been shivering from nervousness. Furthermore, Ethan had used her nickname. There was no one around anymore, why was he using such an intimate name? Was he really trying to provoke her?

Lillian secretly pinched her when they returned to the table, warning her not to have any further contact with Ethan. It was clear that Jackson was a more worthwhile investment.

Tiffany bit back the pain and stopped herself from squealing. She had suffered more fear and apprehension today than ever before.

“Tiffie, was that fellow a friend of yours?” Summer asked.

“No… I…” In her nervousness, Tiffany became tongue-tied.

“He’s an old classmate from university. Now that I think about it, Mark was our senior too, being a Southline graduate. He happened to be having a meal here, so we ran into each other and had a small chat. Jackson’s restaurant is pretty awesome. I have to make reservations before coming here to have a meal,” Arianne calmly gave a perfect explanation, dragging Mark along with her, which made it seem all the more natural.

Mark pursed his lips and stayed silent. Jackson did not expose them either.

The brief interlude ended very quickly. The next half of the meal seemed pretty peaceful. Lillian knew when to stop herself too and did not make Tiffany any more nervous.

After dinner, when they all walked out of the restaurant, Mark spoke up first, “Ari and I will be heading home now.”

Arianne frowned. She had just had her dinner and wanted to shop around. Going home meant boredom. Why was he bossing her around?

Lillian was eager to go shopping, “Sure, go on ahead. We’ll talk another day.”

Jackson smiled at Mark helplessly. He was destined to go on a shopping trip with two mothers tonight. This was his least favorite activity, but he could not escape. Of course, Tiffany was not exempted either.

Arianne sat in the back seat on their way home, with Mark driving. In the past, she would have never had the guts to treat him like a chauffeur. Now, as long as she could avoid getting too close to him, she couldn't care less. As they say, she was "pissing into the wind".

"How much longer do you plan on treating me like this?" Mark suddenly asked.

Arianne stared at the view outside the window and replied indifferently, "What do you mean? Isn't this better? You don't want a divorce, and I'm helpless against you. So, I'll just do whatever makes me comfortable."

He paused for two seconds then suddenly changed the topic, "Stay away from Ethan in the future. Do not contact him at all."

She disagreed, "You've already chased Will away, but what's wrong with Ethan? He's Tiffie's ex-boyfriend; I have absolutely nothing to do with him. You can relax."

He did not want to impose these filthy matters on her but was afraid that she would rebel against him on purpose. Considering that Ethan was capable of doing anything, he couldn't risk it, "It's not what you think. He's a Tremont family b*stard."

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Arianne was shocked, "What did you say?"

He fell momentarily silent before calmly explaining, "Remember that thing that Charles Moran mentioned? You overheard my conversation with Jude in the study too. That ba*tard is Ethan. He's very

dangerous, so you and Tiffany should stay away from him. Remember that incident back when you were still in university? That knife you took for me when that cafeteria lady's crazy son suddenly attacked me? Ethan instigated him. Most importantly, he was the master manipulator behind the Lane family's missing goods. That man who died in the fire was only a sacrificial lamb. Ethan suddenly started a company after leaving Tiffany and bought that unfinished building too. Where do you think that money came from? That's all you need to know. I can't tell you anything more. He's done all of that to get me, but you have to know that he has an agenda behind everything he does. He's not a normal person."

Arianne was having difficulties with digesting this revelation, "You mean… Ethan's always had an ulterior motive, back when he started getting close to Tiffie? He's not only treated her as a stepping stone for three years, and he even personally caused the Lane family's… How could this be… This is too much. Tiffie was very much in love with him; she was so good to him. How could he do this? He did all of that to push you down? Even if he wanted his share of the family fortune as a Tremont b*stard, there are many other ways to do it. Even announcing his true identity to the public would have been better than all those horrible things he's done! Also… that reunion three years ago, my picture with Will. Was he behind that too? That incident with Will and I in the hotel, was he involved in that too? I can't think of anyone else who'd do it. I suspected Aery at one point, but it didn't really seem to add up."

She connected the dots to these incidents because they would have a definite effect on Mark once word of them got out. Tiffany was not Ethan's only pawn in his game against Mark, for he'd manipulated her too. She never expected this, but recalling these memories filled her with fear.

Mark did not want to drag the topic any deeper, "So you're not that stupid after all. He doesn't want money or the Tremont family fortune. He just wants justice for his mother and himself. A mistress and a secret ba*tard, what kind of justice could he possibly have? What a joke. I will fix this. You don't have to worry about it. Just remember what I've said, stay away from him."

Arianne simply couldn't calm down after discovering all of this. She had considered the possibility of Mark making a mistake, because this was simply too unfair to Tiffany. However, Ethan had managed to fork out hundreds of thousands of dollars to repay Tiffany after their breakup, and had suddenly become obscenely rich. How could that be explained?

She couldn't help wanting to seed in more doubts, "I… I don't mean anything else, I just want to know, but what on earth happened with Ethan and his mother? Since he's racked his brains so much, he certainly won't let the matter go. Of course, it'd be best to solve the matter because no one's going to benefit from this if it keeps dragging on. Your international branch closures must have had something to do with him too, right?"

Mark fell silent. He remembered his father's honesty on the night before that flight and the pale, hopeless look on his mother's face. That woman, who had given everything to the Tremont family… finally followed that ungrateful man onto the plane and never came down again…

Ethan and his mother were two lines that he had refused to touch. They were the Tremont family's deepest and darkest secrets. He gradually tightened his grip around the steering wheel, losing control over his emotion. Left with no choice, he swerved the car onto the side of the road. "The Tremont family affairs have nothing to do with you. I've said enough. Don't ask anymore!"

Arianne was frightened by his sudden change in attitude and didn't dare say another word. She suddenly realized that he may have seemed calm when he mentioned the b*stard, but in reality, he couldn't bear facing the Tremont family's past. He had already gathered a lot of courage in order to tell her these things. She shouldn't have probed him.

"So-Sorry, I shouldn't have asked. Thank you for telling me. I'll tell Tiffie to cease all forms of contact with him. Let's go home, okay?" She had suddenly realized that he had a vulnerable side too, so she didn't blame him for his outburst.

The car continued on its journey back to the Tremont Estate. The pair did not say another word.

As they walked through the doors upon their return to the Tremont Estate, he coldly reminded her, “Don’t go out for the time being. It’s too hot and bad for your health. Wait for a month, then you can go wherever you want.”

These words of concern were spoken in the most cold and distant tone. No one else in this world could convey these words so naturally, except him.

She did not quibble with him over his tone. After all, she had upset him by asking questions that she shouldn’t have.

Just as she was getting ready to go back to the guest room, she found that Mary had put everything on the guestroom bed away. She found Mary and asked, “Why did you put everything in the guestroom away?”

Mary seemed puzzled, “Previously, you slept in the guestroom due to inconvenience. Everything is fine now, so why would you continue sleeping in separate rooms? You’re still young. Feelings require close proximity in order to last. Which young couple would sleep apart? Be good, go back to Mr. Tremont’s room.”

She felt helpless, “Mary! I was doing fine in the guestroom. Set it up for me.”

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Mary promptly shook her head, “This is an order from Mr. Tremont as well. Why don’t you talk to him yourself? I certainly wouldn’t dare make the decision on my own.”

She wanted to talk to Mark but was terrified when she remembered that he was in a bad mood.

In the shopping mall.

Jackson and Tiffany felt a little empty and soulless. They had walked through the entire mall, but Lillian and Summer showed no signs of stopping. Jackson suffered most of all; as the only man among the four, his arms were going to give out soon.

Just as Lillian was about to head into another branded clothing store, Tiffany couldn't help reminding her, "That's enough, Mom. Jackson and I are exhausted from working all day."

She knew that as long as she used Jackson's name, Lillian would not go too far.

As expected, Lillian reluctantly stopped, "You're right. Let's stop here then."

Summer smiled, "Then let's meet up again some other time, Mrs. Lane. Jackson's usually the one managing the company and I have nothing better to do. We should meet up more often."

Lillian nodded in agreement. She couldn't ask for more.

Jackson dropped Tiffany and Lillian off at their home downstairs. Tiffany turned serious when they entered the elevator, "Mom, my relationship with Jackson is fake. He's been paying me to play a part

and lie to his mother. Don't take it so seriously and please don't ask her for anything. He's already paid me."

The smile on Lillian's face stiffened, "What did you say? I really thought that you'd found a rich husband, but you're telling me that it was all a lie? Tiffany Lane, you really have grown up. If you're so great, get Jackson to fall in love with you. What's the point in lying about all of this? Are you trying to kill me?"

Tiffany had known that she was going to react this way, "I didn't have the time to tell you that it was my fault. It's not like Jackson hasn't been paying me for my services. At least, now you'll have a bigger allowance. Next time, when his mother asks to see you, just make up an excuse and turn her down."

Lillian restrained her anger and did not reply.

Tiffany was afraid that she would mess things up for her, so she reminded her, "You'd better not get involved. Just act as if you don't know a thing. Jackson and I will end things when the time is right."

Lillian still remained silent. She darted out of the elevator once it opened its doors.

After taking a shower, Tiffany lay on her bed and took out her phone. There were no other messages for her, aside from the message notification on Ethan's bank transfer. She couldn't help admitting that Ethan's small gestures confused her. She wanted to know his intentions. How was this any different from teasing her? She wasn't going to go back to him, but she couldn't bear her past feelings for him. It was true that she was moved.

She sent a message to Jackson: You'd better hurry up and tell your mother that we've broken up. This can't go on.

His reply arrived very quickly: Why? Rushing to get back together with Ethan? I've told you, it's fine. You don't have to be so anxious. But if you're really that anxious to get back with your ex, I'll think about it.

She thought it over, then replied: Yes, I'm anxious to get back with my ex. Will that do?

In truth, she was so anxious to conclude this messy affair, any excuse would do at this point.

At White Water Bay Villa, Jackson stared at the contents of her message. His expression was indistinct under the dusky light, seemingly shrouded in gloom.

After a while, he finally replied: Okay.

It was a simple one-liner. After all, she was in a rush to pursue love. He couldn't stand in her way, despite knowing everything Ethan had done. It wasn't any of his business. He was merely a spectator.

The sweltering night felt strangely irritating. The large villa was so quiet that he couldn't sleep. A bone-chilling loneliness led him to find pleasure from a nightclub. Surely, a place like that was most suitable for someone who hated loneliness as much as he did.

The Tremont Estate.

It was a rare chance for Mark to get an early night's rest, but he was forced to change his plans thanks to a sudden call from Jackson. It seemed that it had been a while since they'd actually hung out.

Just as he changed his clothes and was about to walk out the door, he found Arianne in the living room, playing with the cat. Knowing that she was dragging out her bedtime out of reluctance to share a bed with him, he purposefully mentioned, "I'm going out for a while with Jackson and Eric. I might be back very late. Get an early night yourself."

Arianne secretly heaved a sigh of relief. She nodded, seemingly calm on the surface. She headed straight into the bedroom once he left.

She did not expect Mark to stay out the entire night and not come home. She was dead to the world and only realized this the next day when there was no sign of his return at home. This was rare, and hadn't he mentioned that he would be back very late last night, just before he left the house? He did not say that he wouldn't be back.

Despite her curiosity, she didn't look into it. He had legs of his own. He could go wherever he wished. She couldn't control him.

Mary was more anxious that she was, "Ari, Mr. Tremont has been out the whole night and hasn't come home. Why are you always so nonchalant? Aery may be gone, but you don't want some Avery or Emily to come walking in too!"

Arianne did not respond and focused on her breakfast instead. Eating, sleeping, and drinking were the only things that she was allowed to do at home these days. She'd play with her phone or the cat if she felt bored. She was going to turn into mold very soon. He, on the other hand, certainly had a great life — going out, making merry, and having fun. She felt scornful at most, and nothing else.

Mary snatched her bowl away, “Call Mr. Tremont, or you’ll get no breakfast.”

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Arianne had no choice. She took her phone out and called Mark in resignation. No one picked up the phone for a long time. Just as she was about to hang up, Mark suddenly answered the call. She heard his hoarse and faint voice. “Hello?”

She spoke perfunctorily, “Why didn’t you return home yesterday? Where are you now?”

Mark was silent for a moment before he answered, “I spent the night at Jackson’s villa. I’ll be going to work from here.”

She had nothing more to say. She threw a glance at Mary, silently asking with her eyes if she could end the call now.

Mary mimed to her, asking her to confirm if Mark was really with Jackson instead of fooling around with other women. Arianne felt it was a bother to do so, but she wanted to quickly get this over with so she could enjoy her meal. She listened to Mary and said, “Send me a video.”

Mark hung up immediately, but he sent her a short video that lasted around ten seconds. The video showed the interior of White Water Bay Villa that belonged to Jackson. It seemed like he truly did spend the night in Jackson’s villa.

Mary gave Arianne a thumbs-up. “That’s right. You should be strict with men.”

Arianne felt that it was strange that she had to constantly know about his whereabouts. What was even more strange was Mark’s compliance with her wish. He made it seem so real.

Something even stranger happened later. Mark sent her another video when he arrived at his company. It seemed like he was reporting his whereabouts to her. He thought this was how she wanted it to be. He did not show his face in the video, but she could see his shoes.

Arianne did not know why but a mischievous thought appeared in her mind at this moment. She suddenly said in a demanding tone, “I can only see parts of your shoes. How do I know if someone else is taking the video for you?” She was genuinely curious as to what extent he would go to, to comply with her wishes.

To her surprise, she received a video call from Mark soon after.

She became nervous seeing this. Her hand trembled, and she dropped her phone on the floor. She calmed herself down before finally answering the video call. She averted the camera to Rice Ball that was sleeping on the sofa so he could not see her.

On the other hand, Mark was rather direct. The camera was pointed directly at him. Not only was he handsome in person, but he looked just attractive on video. Although the phone was placed at a rather awkward angle, it still did not detract from his looks. There was no denying that he was truly handsome. His good looks were not affected at all even if the camera was placed in the worst angle.

“Are you checking up on me?” He asked mockingly as he looked through the documents on his desk.

“It’s… Mary made me do it.” She shifted the blame to Mary.

This was their first video call so it was quite awkward. There was nothing for them to talk about. She racked her brains, thinking of a topic, before she finally said, “What do you plan to do… with Ethan?”

A frown appeared on his face. “I’ll do whatever I need to do. I’ll let him know that everything that’s illicit should stay hidden. He’s just an illegitimate son who has a vain mother. He doesn’t have the right to fight with me.”

She was afraid of infuriating him again so she said, “That’s good. You can take care of it yourself. I won’t bother you anymore. Bye.”

She heaved a long sigh after she ended the video call. She was in a slight dilemma. She wondered if she should tell Tiffany about the kind of things that Ethan had done. She had long let go of the pain that Ethan inflicted upon her before. He was nothing to her now. There was also no misunderstanding between her and Mark. However, it was different for Tiffany. Tiffany still bore the emotional wound from what Ethan had done to her.

Arianne hesitated for a moment before she finally texted Tiffany. “Tiffie, are you free? Can you meet me at noon? There’s something I need to tell you.”

Tiffany replied that she would come over as soon as she got off work.

Arianne was relieved. Since she had made up her mind to tell Tiffany the truth, she would no longer hesitate. It was better for Tiffany to see Ethan for who he really was. It was also truly surprising that Ethan was Mark's younger half brother. It seemed like the heavens were playing a joke on them.

After Tiffany replied to Arianne's message, she put the phone back into her bag. A car stopped beside her all of a sudden. The window rolled down, revealing Ethan's face. "Let me give you a ride."

She said irritably, "Are we friends? Mr. Connor, we should keep a polite distance from each other since we've broken up. Don't do anything strange. Don't tell me that you came all the way here in the morning just to give me a ride."

Ethan did not lie to her. "It's true. I came here just to send you to work. From now on, I'll pick you up whenever you clock in and out of work. I know you're still unwilling to forgive me. I won't ask you to be my girlfriend again, but that's my goal. I want to do it, and I'm definitely able to do it."

He was still as confident as ever. She was slightly shocked. Even in the past, he had never said such things to her. Was he chasing her on his own initiative? In the past, she was the one who did the chasing and gave him her all. Who knew she would see the day where he would take the initiative to chase after her? She did not expect it would only happen after they had broken up.

However, he was manipulated by him and used as a pawn. Naturally, she would never easily forgive him. "You won't succeed. There's nothing you can do to make it up to me. Moreover, I no longer have any use to you. You can have whatever you want now. What do you need with a pawn like me?"

Ethan's bright eyes were filled with a tinge of sadness. "I've never treated you like a pawn. Can't you forget about the nasty things I said before? Give me five minutes to explain myself."

Tiffany hesitated for a short while before she got into the car. “Just five minutes.”

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Ethan started the engine of the car without asking for Tiffany’s workplace address. It was obvious he knew everything about her. “I was forced to break up with you at that time. I know it sounds rather ridiculous but it’s true. I was worried as well when I saw your family in trouble because I couldn’t provide you with the kind of life you’re used to. I decided to use all my money to invest in a project with my friends. You were unaware of it, but I even mortgaged the car you gave me for a bank loan.” He continued to say, “I didn’t want to burden you in case my investment fails. That’s why I broke up with you. There was no other woman. Who knew I’d succeed? I intend to expand my business after this. We can go back to living the life we had before. Tiffie, you were good to me in the past. It’s my turn to treat you well. It wasn’t my intention to hurt you. Can we start all over again?”

During their time together, Ethan had never been a passionate man who would say such words. For him to speak these words to her now, she would be lying if she said she was not moved. She could clearly see the deep love he had for her in his eyes. There was no doubt about it. They had dated for three years. Even during those years, she had never experienced these feelings before. She felt adrenaline surging in her body, and her heart was thumping wildly. A blush could be clearly seen on her face.

Tiffany was so nervous that she stammered when she spoke, “I...How do I know if you’re telling the truth? You truly looked down on me, I’m not such a vain or materialistic person. When we were together, you didn’t have much money, but it didn’t matter to me. I have never cared about money so how can you use that as an excuse to break up with me? Although you think you were doing it for my sake, I’ve never wanted that. Now that you’re saying these things to me, I’m honestly confused.”

Ethan did not press on. “It’s fine. I’m willing to wait until you forgive me. Let me take care of you from now on, okay? I’ll compensate you and give you a grand wedding whenever you’re ready.”

Tiffany nodded slightly. “I’ll think about it.”

Although Tiffany did not agree nor disagree, Ethan acted as though she had agreed to be his girlfriend. He rubbed her head affectionately and asked, “Have you had breakfast? Take a look at the back seat. See what’s there.”

Tiffany instinctively turned to the back to have a look. There was a plastic bag in the back seat. She saw a part of the Chinese-style omelet wraps. It was from the shop she liked the most. Surprisingly, he went and lined up for her breakfast early in the morning. She would be lying to herself if she said she was not moved. In the past, she had treated him like her everything, but he had never cared about her. He had always been aloof to her. However, it seemed like he had changed and was working hard to treat her well. Indeed. This was the feeling when one was deeply loved. Previously, when they were still dating, it felt like a one-sided relationship. She was the only one who sacrificed everything for their relationship. Although she was moved, she felt slightly sad as well. After all, she felt so inferior during their relationship in the past. She was truly pitiful.

She did not take the Chinese-style omelet wraps. She tilted her head to look at him and asked, “Ethan, I want to know whether you’re telling the truth. I always thought that you never loved me. You’ve always been aloof with me. Previously, I thought that’s how you are and maybe you just didn’t know how to show affection. That’s why I took the initiative and gave all my affection to you. It did not matter even if others thought I was pitiful. However, based on what I can see now, it seems like you know how to love. Since you say you love me, why didn’t you treat me like this in the past?”

Ethan fell silent for a moment before he said, “I finally realized how to love someone after I broke up with you. You were so good to me in the past. I only knew how to enjoy your love and care but didn’t think to reciprocate it. I was wrong. I’m sorry.”

At this moment, Tiffany grabbed the Chinese-style omelet wraps and ate it. However, she could not properly savor it. She could only taste the bitterness of the past three years.

When they finally reached her company, Ethan got out of the car first and opened the door for her. He even thoughtfully put his hand above her head to protect her head from hitting the roof of the car. “I’ll come over to pick you up for lunch at noon.”

Tiffany remembered that she had agreed to meet with Arianne so she said, “I’m busy at noon. I’ll be meeting Ari. She’s staying at home for postpartum confinement so she’s been feeling bored. I’ll be going over to accompany her.”

Disappointment was written all over Ethan’s face. “Then… It’s fine. How about tonight?”

When she saw how disappointed he was, her heart softened and she relented. She said in resignation, “Forget it. I’ll have lunch with you. I’ll meet Ari at night. This way I can spend a longer time with her.”

Upon hearing her words, a smile bloomed on his face immediately. “Okay.”

This was the feeling one had when one was in love. Just one smile would have such a strong effect on them.

When Tiffany returned to her seat in the office, she was still smiling happily. She told Arianne that she was unable to meet her at noon and would meet her at night instead. Suddenly, she remembered Jackson might be bringing her lunch today. She rose to her feet and made her way to Jackson’s office. She opened the door directly. “Did you bring me lunch today?”

Jackson waved his hands dismissively. “I woke up late today so I didn’t bring you lunch. I’ll just treat you to lunch later.”

She sighed in relief. “No, no, it’s good that you didn’t bring me lunch today. I’m having lunch with someone today. It’s just as well. Oh, you don’t have to bring me lunch anymore from this day onward.”

Jackson narrowed his eyes immediately. As a playboy with much experience in love affairs, he could tell something was amiss. He could practically smell the love in the air. “What do you mean? Did you make up with Ethan?”

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She pondered over Jackson’s question for a moment before she said, “Not yet, but soon. By the way, have you told your mom that we’ve broken up? I won’t be able to act with you anymore.”

Jackson seemed to have lost his voice at this moment. He did not speak for a long time.

Tiffany was slightly taken aback. “What’s wrong with you? You can’t stand seeing someone getting into a relationship? Just because you’re against marriage, it doesn’t mean that I am. Moreover, I’ve known Ethan for three years, we’re quite compatible.”

He pursed his lips, “Close the door and come here.”

Tiffany closed the door as instructed and went up to him. “What?”

Jackson suddenly leaned over his desk and grabbed Tiffany's shoulders. Their eyes met, and she could feel his firm hold on her shoulders. He said seriously, "You can't return to him."

"What's your problem?" Tiffany was truly confused. His expression alarmed her. After all, it was pretty scary to see a usually frivolous man becoming serious.

"Yes, you've been together for three years. I don't know if he understands you, but I have no doubt that you don't understand him. I mean it when I say you can't make up with him. Stay away from him!"

Tiffany moved his hands away. "Are you crazy! You may be my boss, but you can't be this controlling! Give me a reason at least."

Upon realizing that he had lost his self-control, Jackson recomposed himself before he replied, "Speak to Arianne. She might be able to provide you with some information. You're right, I'm just your boss. Our relationship is that of an employer and an employee. I don't want to overstep my boundary."

Tiffany turned and left in anger, slamming the door.

The staff in the office were shocked by her courage. How dare she throw a tantrum at the boss?

…

Jackson rose to his feet, irritated, as he removed his suit jacket and threw them on the sofa. He picked up his phone and sent a text message to Arianne. ‘Tiffany is showing signs of getting back together with Ethan. If Mark has told you anything about Ethan, please make sure you relay it to Tiffany too. Shame on him for exploiting her once, but shame on her for being a fool for the second time!’

…

Arianne became anxious when she received Jackson’s message. She did not expect things would escalate so quickly between Tiffany and Ethan. Moreover, Tiffany had never been able to hide anything from her, she did not expect to be blindsided by this. She was convinced Ethan harbored ulterior motives. It could not possibly be love. It was absolutely impossible!

Tiffany had suffered enough, Arianne could not stand watching her being used by Ethan all over again. After giving it some thought, she could only go to Mark. He was the only one who could stop this and find out Ethan’s motives in approaching Tiffany again.

Arianne was sweating bullets by the time she arrived at Tremont Tower, only to be told by Ellie that Mark was not in his office but in the conference room. Before Ellie could even finish speaking, Arianne had run off in the direction of the conference room. Since she had been to the conference room, she knew where it was.

The moment she barged into the conference room, the voices inside immediately ceased, and everyone shifted their attention to her.

Mark was leaning back against his chair at the head of the table, listening to a presentation. The commotion made him sit up straight. “What’s going on?”

All the executives in the meeting were holding their breaths. Mark would definitely lose his temper if anyone dared to interrupt a meeting. Just because he was nice to everyone in the company, it did not mean he did not have a temper.

“I… It’s an emergency… Can I have a moment of your time?” Arianne was panting slightly, not realizing what she had done.

Mark rose to his feet and made his way to her as he casually adjusted his tie with his slender fingers.

The executives were flabbergasted when they saw this.

Arianne remained silent until they were in the office. “Ethan is deliberately approaching TIffie again. He must have some ulterior motives. Jackson told me that she’s about to get back with him. I can’t allow this to happen. I was going to tell her everything about Ethan in the afternoon, but she postponed it to tonight instead. I’m guessing she has a lunch date with him!”

Mark looked at her indifferently, “This is why you came looking for me?”

She was slightly taken aback. “I…. Y-yes...”

He went to his desk and made a call with the landline phone. “Send me the information regarding the unfinished building right away.”

Two minutes after making the call, Mark took out his phone and checked his mailbox before handing it to Arianne. “Do you understand now? The land that the unfinished building was built on belongs to the Lane family. Tiffany is probably unaware of this. When Ethan bought the unfinished building, a land title conflict occurred. However, the truth is the lease is expiring soon, and he couldn’t find the owner to renew it. I already found someone to expose this. There’s no way I’ll let him invest in it. I just didn’t expect he would be able to track down the landowner so soon.”

“According to my investigation, lands are generally leased for seventy years. And yet, the lease contract for this land is only forty years. It’ll expire in five years. This means that it was leased out thirty-five years ago, probably for some other purposes before the construction of the building. Since the area wasn’t developed back then, the land hardly had any value. The Lane family might have even forgotten about it since the lease contract wasn’t under John’s name but Tiffany’s grandfather who was still alive back then. Strictly speaking, the landowner should be Tiffany’s grandfather. It’s evident that Ethan only approached Tiffany for the sake of the unfinished building on the land that’s rising in value. He’s hoping to get the land without spending a dime and maybe even earn himself a girl.”

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Arianne was at a loss. “What should I do? Should I call Tiffie over and tell her the truth now? Would it be too cruel to do that?”

Mark was rendered speechless by Arianne and laughed out of anger. “You’re right, it’s indeed very cruel. Why don’t you just let her fall hopelessly in love with Ethan and pretend you know nothing until Ethan dumps her after getting the land? Or maybe wait until she discovers the truth about Ethan after they’re married? Don’t you think that’d be even crueler? If that incident didn’t happen, the Lane family would still be very well off today, and John Lane wouldn’t have died so early.”

Arianne understood that Mark was telling her that this was the best time to tell Tiffany, but she just could not bring herself to do it. She could not bear to see the disappointment and despair on Tiffany’s face when she discovered the truth. “I… I don’t dare to tell her… Tiffie will definitely lose her mind.”

Mark pressed his lips and nodded. “Yes, she’ll definitely lose her mind. However, it’ll be even worse if you let things progress like this. There are people waiting for me in the conference room, I have to leave now. You can stay here for the time being.”

It was only at this moment that Arianne realized she had called him out in the middle of a meeting. She was panicking that she completely forgot that Mark was in the midst of work. She was wrong in this regard. “Go ahead then, I’m sorry for causing you trouble.”

He quickly left the office without saying anything.

The meeting ended after more than an hour. By the time Mark returned to the office, Arianne was still there, still hesitating with her phone in hand.

Upon seeing this, Mark felt an impending headache. “You have no problem being ruthless to me. Why don’t you put it to good use now?”

She looked at him blankly. “When was I ever… ruthless to you?”

He said nothing but just took out a cigarette. Instead of lighting it, he just brought it to the tip of his nose and sniffed it before playing with it between his fingers. That was right, Arianne was always so indecisive when it comes to everyone except him. He had experienced her ruthlessness, and yet, she did not seem to be aware of it.

After pondering for a while, Arianne said tentatively, “Can…. you… I mean, since you’ve helped me… Can’t you just help me all the way? Since you’ve already uncovered the truth, is there a way you can prevent Ethan from getting back together with Tiffie without her knowing the truth?”

Mark looked slightly even more manly with an unlit cigarette in his mouth. “Yes, I can kill Ethan Connor.”

Arianne knew he was joking and would not really do that. “I’m being serious here… I guess we don’t have much choice. Poor Tiffie, she has to go through so much.”

Mark fell silent for a moment. “Ask Tiffany’s mother to find the land certificate, then, buy it off her.”

Arianne’s eyes suddenly lit up, “That’s right! As long as we buy the land, Ethan won’t be able to do anything but give up on the unfinished building. There’s no way he would ask you to renew the contract. With that, Tiffie will no longer be of use to him.”

Mark pondered for a few seconds, then, shook his head. “Something’s not right. If Ethan really wants that piece of land, he’s totally capable of sending someone to find Lillian and buy the land from her. There’s no need for him to get involved with his ex-girlfriend and risk failing since he was the one who dumped her back then. Not only that, but it’s also a very time-consuming approach. The time he wastes is enough to allow me to purchase the land before him. Could it be that he’s short of money? Lillian must have known by now that the land’s value is rising so she would definitely not sell it or lease it out at a low price.”

Mark’s words made Arianne nervous again. “What do you mean?”

Mark shook his head. “I’m not sure. If Ethan is really approaching Tiffany because he has no money to buy the land, then, he should know that I’ll definitely sabotage his plans by buying the land first. If this is the case, then, why did he still choose to use such a time-consuming and stupid approach? This isn’t the Ethan I know, unless his main objective is approaching Tiffany and the land is only optional to him. There’s also another possibility that he’s taking the gamble of getting Tiffany wrapped around his finger before I make any move.”

No matter how he looked at it, the latter was the more likely scenario. After all, how could a person with such a clear objective prioritize love? If Ethan had truly liked Tiffany, he would not have ruined her family. Hence, the only possibility was that he was taking a gamble!

Arianne grew even more nervous. “Then what do we do? What’s he planning to do to Tiffie?”

Her pitiful appearance when worrying about others reminded Mark of a medical research that a pregnancy could cause a reduction in gray matter in the brain. How could she not understand such a simple thing? He glanced at the door to ensure that no one was going to come in before he said in a lowered voice, “What do you think a man would do to a woman that he intends to get?”

If Arianne still could not get it after he had made it this clear, then, she was really a fool. Thankfully, she instantly blushed and lowered her head, not daring to meet his gaze.

He was very satisfied with her reaction. “Don't be so narrow-minded in an open-minded world. Sex is not the end-all and be-all of everything. If he intends to get Tiffany pregnant, he’ll still need at least one or two months if he’s extremely lucky. Although a gunshot wedding is a rather crazy move, someone like Ethan will definitely be able to bring himself to do it. After all, the land and unfinished building would bring him endless benefits. He’s trying so hard to be a rising star just to fight with me. But he has neither the money nor the confidence. How can he possibly fight with me?”

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Arianne picked up her bag and rose from the sofa. “I… have to look for Tiffie now! What if Ethan proposes to her at noon and she just accepts it without thinking things through? That’ll be a horrible mess!”

Mark was suddenly a little jealous of Tiffany for having Arianne’s full attention. It was a pity that he had only heard about but not seen the tears Arianne had shed for him when he got into a car accident.

Naturally, Mark did not express his jealousy and dissatisfaction. It was not in his nature to do. “Why are you in such a rush? Aren’t you turning yourself in knowing Ethan is against me? Didn’t you make plans to meet her tonight? A shotgun wedding can’t happen in just half a day. Let’s go for lunch together.”

“Alright.” Strangely, Arianne no longer felt as nervous when she listened to Mark’s relaxed voice as he casually suggested they go for lunch.

People like Mark would definitely not dine at just any restaurants. The White Water Bay Café was one of the places that made him feel relaxed. Moreover, he would never tire of the food no matter how many times he had dined there.

Hence, the couple went to Mark’s favorite café during lunch break. They picked the window seat that they had reserved beforehand that allowed them to admire the amazing view outside. This restaurant was located in a relatively valuable area in the White Water Bay. Arianne could not help but feel dejected since it reminded her of the Lane family’s land. She looked at the river outside as she mumbled to herself, “I don’t think Tiffie is that stupid.”

“Hard to say. The IQ of a woman is reduced to zero when they’re in love.” Mark ruthlessly destroyed Arianne’s wishful thinking.

“That’s not necessarily true. Tiffie and Ethan had been in love. After their break up, Tiffie showed nothing but contempt toward him. She won’t fall for him unless Ethan is really a sweet talker. We still have the evidence in our hands, we won’t let him succeed,” Arianne protested. What did he mean by a woman being blindly in love would lose all IQ? As if a man could always keep their composure.

He chuckled softly but did not continue the conversation, leaving Arianne confused about the meaning behind his smile.

After the orders were placed, neither of them talked. They just enjoyed the delightful scenery outside the window together. The crowd who dined here were mostly well-mannered individuals who would keep their speaking volume in check. Hence, the cafe was a relatively quiet and good place to relax.

Soon after, the dishes were served in succession.

During the meal, Mark suddenly said, “Once things are not so busy, I’ll take you on a trip.”

Arianne looked at him but remained silent. She did not want to destroy the hard-earned peace between them nor did she want to get too close to him. After all, she just could not imagine traveling with him. How wonderful could the trip even be?

After lunch, Mark sent her back to the Tremont Estate and told her not to leave the house unless necessary. Arianne had no idea if Mark was worried about Ethan doing something to her or if he was just simply worried about her body. No matter which one it was, she did not feel comfortable.

She spent the entire afternoon waiting anxiously. Time ticked away slowly until it was finally time for Tiffany to get off work. Arianne immediately rang her, “Tiffie, are you getting off work now? I’m waiting for you at home. What time will you come over?”

Arianne could hear the noises on the other end of the line. “Sorry, Ari. I won’t be able to make it. Something urgent came up. Let’s meet another day. I’ll get in touch again when I’m free.”

Alarm began to blare in Arianne’s head. “What happened? Should I come over?”

Tiffany paused for a moment. “No need, just stay at home. Ethan just got into a minor car accident and is at the hospital. Since he doesn’t have any relatives, he called me. I can’t just leave him alone. I know… I shouldn’t get involved with him after we broke up for so long, but he suddenly came to find me this morning and even sent me to work. He explained himself to me. After giving it some thought, I feel what he did isn’t entirely unforgivable. Do you think I should get back with him, Ari?”

Tiffany’s words struck Arianne like a bolt out of the blue. She had no idea just how good of a liar Ethan was, to be able to deceive Tiffany like this. Was his car accident merely a coincidence? Or was it to prevent Tiffany from meeting her? Arianne composed herself. “Tiffie, I know you’re very kind, but please make sure you don’t misplace your kindness. I must meet you today. You can go to the hospital first, then, come over here when you’re done. I have something important to tell you.”

Arianne knew Tiffany’s personality well. She was a kind and simple-minded girl. If Ethan had really gotten into a car accident by coincidence, there was no way Tiffany would ignore him, and Arianne had no right to stop her from going either. Hence, she could only wait until Tiffany checked up on his condition at the hospital.

Tiffany acknowledged her words and hung up.

Arianne glanced at the time before she sent a message to Mark. ‘Tiffie said that Ethan had gotten into a car accident so she won’t be able to meet me. I asked her to come over after going to the hospital, but I don't know what will happen there. I’m a little worried now. When are you coming back?’

When Mark received the text, he was already on his way home. This message had once again confirmed that Arianne would only look for him for other people’s sake. Otherwise, she would never initiate any contact with him. Feeling a little glum, Mark still replied, ‘I’ll be home shortly.”

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Arianne calmed down and heaved a sigh of relief when she received Mark’s reply. Although he always made her feel uneasy, he also gave her a sense of security.

Not long after that, Mark’s car drove into the Tremont Estate.

Arianne greeted him at the door and helped him take his slippers out of the shoe cabinet. “Do you think Ethan’s car accident is just a coincidence or is it premeditated?”

Mark pondered for a moment before throwing the question back at her, “What do you think?”

Arianne was speechless. She was asking him because she was uncertain.

Mark changed into the slippers and walked past her to the stairs. “There’s no way Ethan would put his life at risk before he brings me to my knees, let alone getting into a car accident. He probably even has his guard up all the time when he’s out. If my prediction is right, I don’t think you’ll be seeing Tiffany today.”

Arianne was taken aback by his statement. Tiffany had promised to meet her after her visit to the hospital. How was he so sure that she would not be seeing Tiffany?

Meanwhile at the hospital...

Ethan was sent to the general ward after his examination. Tiffany hurriedly helped him wipe his face and fed him. It felt nostalgic like the time when they were in love.

With gauze wrapped around his head, Ethan looked frail in the hospital gown. His eyes never once left the figure bustling around him. “Tiffie, I’m sorry. I suddenly realized how much of a bastard I was back then.”

Ethan’s touching words came out of the blue and caught Tiffany off guard. It sounded cheesy to her since she was not used to hearing such words. “Alright, stop talking. Look at the state you’re in. The doctor said that it’s not a big deal, it’s just some external wounds and a slight concussion. I still need to meet Ari later. Both of you are really a handful, I’m exhausted.”

Ethan closed his mouth and lowered his gaze silently. Tiffany saw his reaction and brought a cup of water to his lips. “What’s the matter? Can’t take a little criticism?”

Ethan turned his face slightly away. “Go find Arianne. I’ll be fine alone.”

Anyone would be able to tell that he was using reverse psychology. He was upset because he did not want Tiffany to leave.

Tiffany clicked her tongue. “What’s with the attitude? I still have to go to work tomorrow. You’re not expecting me to stay with you in the hospital, right? My mom will skin me alive if she finds out that I didn’t go home because I’m taking care of you at the hospital. Besides, the two of us haven’t made up yet…”

The lights in Ethan’s eyes dimmed a little. “I know your mom resents me… I get it. Don’t worry. I’ll still have to stay a few days in the hospital for observation so I won’t be able to bring you to and from work. Take care of yourself. Go ahead. I don’t need any help here.”

Tiffany was not sure if he was being serious or angry. Either way, she only said, “I’ll see you tomorrow, Ethan.”

He nodded in response.

She set the water on the side table with a sigh before she turned to leave. She was not that far from Ethan’s ward when she ran into the doctor who attended him. “Are you a family member of patient seven? Are you leaving now?”

Tiffany nodded. “Yes, he has eaten. I still have work tomorrow.”

“It’s best for him to have a family member accompanying him as he’s still under observation. If you’re busy, perhaps, you can ask another family member to come. The patient might experience dizziness or fainting, which can be very dangerous.”

As Tiffany watched the doctor walk away, she began to hesitate. She did promise Ethan that she would reconsider getting back with him, but she did not want things to move too fast. After all, the pain she suffered before was deeply ingrained in her bones. Why was she so eager to take care of him? However, her heart softened when she recalled he had no other family members.

After giving it some thought, she decided to stay in the end. She sent a text to Arianne. “I won’t be coming. Ethan needs someone to take care of him. I can’t leave him. If you have something important to tell me, then, do it on the phone.”

In the ward, the doctor briefly checked on Ethan’s condition. “It’s nothing serious, don’t worry. At the earliest, you’ll be discharged tomorrow.”

Ethan no longer looked as frail as he did earlier. “No need to rush. Remember what I told you. Do not mention a word to anyone about my condition,” he said emotionlessly.

The doctor smiled at him. “Understood, Mr. Connor. I’ve already talked to your girlfriend as instructed. She’s still in the corridor and hasn’t left yet. I totally understand you youngsters. This method can indeed take your relationship a step further. Don’t worry, I’ll do my best to cooperate.”

Ethan retrieved his wallet from the drawer. He took out a stack of cash and stuffed it into the doctor’s pocket. “You may leave now.”

The doctor turned around and went to another ward to carry out his duty, pretending that nothing happened.

In the Tremont Estate.

Arianne could not help but be amazed by Mark's foresight when she read Arianne's text. Why was he so smart? Tiffany really did not come tonight just as he had predicted. This pretty much proved Ethan had orchestrated the accident to prevent Tiffany from meeting her.

Arianne grew fearful. What other tricks would Ethan pull to prevent them from meeting each other after a car accident? Or had Ethan already achieved his objectives after this car accident? Was he simply just buying time for himself?