Ruling 401

Chapter 401

After dinner, Mark and Arianne went directly back to the Tremont Estate.

When Ethan sent Tiffany home, he took out the ring once again. “Tiffie, can you give me an answer now?”

Tiffany felt rather suffocated. “Ethan… I’m sorry, I haven’t made up my mind yet.”

Ethan frowned and set the ring aside. “You told me that you would give me an answer by the time I’m discharged from the hospital. There’s either love between us or there isn’t. Is it such a difficult decision to make? Did you fall in love with someone else already during the time we were apart?”

Tiffany rolled down the car window and took deep breaths to make herself feel better. “No… I… I’m just worried that my mom would be upset. You know how she is. She’s unstoppable once she starts a tantrum…” At a time like this, she could only use her mother as an excuse. Although she couldn’t resist Ethan’s sweet talks, simply accepting his proposal didn’t seem to sit well with her either…”

Ethan gritted his teeth then took a deep breath. “If your mom is really the only problem that you’re worried about, then leave her to me. I won’t ask you for an answer until it’s solved. For a moment there, I just thought that you had fallen for someone else and the thought of that scared me.”

Fallen for someone else? Jackson’s face popped into Tiffany’s mind. Feeling flustered deep down in her heart, she hung her head low and didn’t say another word.

After a brief silence, Ethan made a suggestion. “Why don’t you quit your current job and work at my company? I’ll arrange a high-paying, easy job for you. You can stop working after we get married in the future; I’ll take care of you financially. I am now capable of giving you a good life. I managed to obtain the land under that unfinished building. Do you know who the original owner of that piece of land was? Your family. Mark bought it off and gave it to me as a gift. We’ll work hard together from now on. Life will definitely get better.”

Tiffany was quite surprised to hear that Mark had bought the land for Ethan. Furthermore, she hadn’t thought about resigning from her job either. “I’m only good at designing. Joining your company is like getting paid for nothing and that’d make me feel bad. I’m doing pretty good at Bright Incorporated.”

Ethan slammed on the brakes abruptly, causing the tires to screech against the road loudly. The expression on his face turned frosty. “Are you refusing to resign from your job because you’re reluctant to part with that job or is it because you’re reluctant to part with a certain someone? You only need a job. I can offer you a higher pay and easier job. There’s no reason for you to not accept it. From what I know, your career isn’t developing very well at Jackson West’s company. You were always just winging it back in the university, how good could you possibly be at your job?”

Ethan wasn’t wrong and his words choked Tiffany into silence. It was true that she wasn’t doing very well at Jackson’s company, and she even felt guilty when receiving her salary. But why did she subconsciously reject Ethan’s request of having her resign from the job?

“It’s not that I’m reluctant to part with someone or the job… I’ll consider it. I’m so exhausted from cleaning the whole day. Just send me home now.” Tiffany had lost her desire to continue the conversation. She wasn’t even sure when she started feeling suffocated around Ethan.

Early next morning, Ethan went to Tiffany’s house bearing gifts. This was his first official visit after the Lane family went bankrupt, so he was mentally prepared for what was going to hit him.

Lillian was the one who answered the door. It was rare for her to skip mahjong night, like yesterday, and she was still at home today. At the sight of Ethan's face, her face immediately fell. "Oh, the sun had risen from the west today. What are you doing here, child? Begging for a good beating?"

Ethan curled his lips into a confident smile, completely ignoring Lillian's hostility toward him. "Mrs. Lane, I'm here to pay you a visit. You can decide whether I need a good beating or not after we've talked inside. I'm here to discuss with you about Tiffie."

Lillian had always looked down on Ethan in the past for his poor background. Despite knowing that he was doing a bit better now, Lillian still gave him the attitude because she hadn't forgotten how he had dumped her daughter when the Lane family went bankrupt. "If you have something to say, then do it here. What other matter can you possibly have with Tiffie? Both of you broke up a long time ago. Now, stop pestering her!"

Ethan didn't seem to mind her attitude and just set the heavy gifts he was holding on the ground. "I've cleared up the misunderstanding between the both of us. You can ask her about it yourself. I know you still resent me, but I wonder if my elder brother told you that the land he bought from you is actually a gift for me?"

Lillian was stunned. "What did you say? Wasn't Mark Tremont the one who bought the land from me? How did he become your elder brother?"

"He's my half-brother who I didn't grow up with. We share the same father. Just yesterday, I took Tiffie out to have dinner with my brother and sister-in-law. And today, I'm officially paying a visit to you. If you still have an issue with me, then I'll leave the gifts here and take my leave." After saying all that, Ethan turned around to leave but slowed down his pace on purpose, knowing that Lillian would definitely stop him.

As expected, Lillian stopped him a few seconds later. “Wait! Come in, we’ll chat.”

Ethan turned around and followed her into the house. The gifts easily took up half of the space on the coffee table. Every single one of them was equally expensive.

Lillian was still skeptical of his words. “You’re really Mark Tremont’s younger brother? Why have I never heard of this before?”

Chapter 402

Naturally, Ethan wouldn’t admit that he was the illegitimate child of the Tremont family. He concealed the coldness in his eyes and gave her the most perfect smile he could manage. “Not many know about it. If you don’t believe me, you can ask Tiffie or call my brother yourself. By the way, I brought the transfer agreement for that piece of land. You may verify its authenticity.” Ethan took out the agreement.

Lillian examined it and only believed him after she had verified that it was indeed an authentic document. “You mentioned… something about Tiffie just now? Are you two getting back together again?"

Ethan nodded. “Yes, I got into a car accident a few days ago and Tiffie had been taking care of me. I had my own reasons for breaking up with her back then. Now that everything has settled down, I wish to marry Tiffie. However, she hasn’t been able to give me an answer because she’s worried that you wouldn’t agree. This is why I came to visit today without informing her. I seem to have arrived too early though. Is she still in bed?”

Lillian finally showed a smile on her face. “Yeah, she’s sleeping in. She should be up in a bit, but let’s chat first. It’s not like I’m totally against the idea of both of you getting back together since you are no longer the poor boy you used to be. At least, you will be capable of giving her a good life. The main concern now is your character. You wouldn’t dump my daughter again, would you? Marriage isn’t child’s play, so you better get that straight.”

To show his determination, Ethan spoke frankly and directly. “I know, just tell me what gifts you would like. I have a house and a car without any loans. By the time that unfinished building is done, it’s going to be made into an office building that will bring me a decent amount of passive income through rent collection. Besides, I still have my own company to run.”

Lillian’s eyes immediately lit up. “Are you really planning on relying on yourself? Since you are from the Tremont family, shouldn’t you be inheriting half of the family properties? You won’t necessarily be able to earn half of that wealth through your own abilities. But of course, that’s just a casual question from me. As for the gifts… Hmm, the Lane family used to be an influential family too. If it wasn’t for the unforeseen incident, we wouldn’t have ended up in this state. I’m still expecting an amount that is befitting of our former glory. How much can you offer?”

She was shrewd enough to ask Ethan to give a figure first. If it was higher than what she had in mind, then she could raise it a little more. If it was lower, then she could still try to raise it. In any case, there was nothing for her to lose.

However, Ethan knew Lillian well enough to avoid the trap she had set for him. “Well Mrs. Lane, it’s too tacky to talk about money. Since the house that you’re currently living in isn’t that good, I’ll give you a better one as a gift for starters. After Tiffie and I get married, whatever is mine is going to be hers too.”

A house in the capital city came with a considerable price tag. Not only that, its value would always be on the rise. Lillian had long gotten sick of this rental house. Even so, she still felt that a house was too stingy for someone like Ethan who was part of the Tremont family. “The Tremont family isn’t that stingy, right? Your elder brother probably won’t just watch you getting married without doing anything, right?”

Ethan frowned slightly. “To be honest, I don’t plan to rely on the Tremont family or my elder brother. Although I’m nowhere near as wealthy as him, I can still afford a decently luxurious lifestyle. The land that he gave me is already a gift in advance. I’m sure that you of all people would know very well how much it cost him.”

By now, Lillian had a hunch that Ethan was most likely an illegitimate child of the Tremont family since, after all these years, no one had known that the Tremont family had another child other than Mark. Hence, it was unlikely for him to get half of the family properties from Mark. It was good enough that Mark had so generously bought a piece of land and gave it away to him. Lillian was already very satisfied that the land could fetch her enough money to turn her back into a wealthy lady. Just when she was planning to exchange it for a house, someone unexpectedly came offering one to her. Not only that, it was a young and capable man with a good family background like Ethan. She could probably still squeeze a lot out of him in the future. After thinking for a moment, she nodded. “I have no further objection. You can talk to Tiffie about it. That child is still in bed at this hour. I’ll go wake her up. Meanwhile, please entertain yourself.”

After Lillian got up and made her way to Tiffany’s room, Ethan heaved a sigh of relief. Although he was a little disgusted with Lillian, he had to bear with her since she was his potential mother-in-law. If that weren’t the case, he would have shown her hostility.

“What! Ethan is here?” Tiffany’s shocked voice rang out from the bedroom.

Lillian smacked her ass hard. “Shut up and get up quickly!”

Tiffany sat up with her messy hair. It took her awhile to finally figure out the situation before her. Ethan was visiting her mother to ask for her hand in marriage! How could she go out and meet him like this? She had to go through the living room to wash up in the bathroom, but she didn’t want Ethan to see her walking around in her pajamas!

Despite the fact that they had seen each other in every way during their three years relationship in the past, the cycle had reset itself since they'd broken up for so long.

When Lillian urged her for the second time, Tiffany sprinted into the bathroom to wash up like a gust of wind. By the time she was done, it was almost an half an hour later. Ethan didn't lose his patience and still wore a smile on his face. "Tiffie, I've already seen all of you. There's nothing to be shy about."

Tiffany smiled awkwardly. "Hehe… erm… Shall we have lunch together? I'll choose the place. What do you guys want to eat?"

Ethan looked at her as an imperceptible calculative look flashed across his eyes. "I've already made a reservation at the White Water Bay Café. I believe Mrs. Lane will definitely love it there. Jackson sure runs a great restaurant."

Chapter 403

The smile on Tiffany's face faded. Why did Ethan have to choose White Water Bay Café of all places? Or did he choose it because of Jackson? She really wanted to explain to him that there was nothing between Jackson and her, yet she just couldn't bring herself to say it every time the words reached her lips.

Aside from spending money frivolously, Lillian also knew how to read a situation. She knew that there was more reason for Ethan to choose White Water Bay Café than it seemed on the surface. "Fine with me, it sounds like a decent place."

When she left the two of them to change her clothes, Tiffany finally couldn't hold herself back anymore. "Ethan, there's no need for that. There's really nothing between me and Jackson."

Ethan's gaze turned hard. "If that's the case, then dining there isn't an issue, right? You should be comfortable and prove to me that there's really nothing between you two. My patience has a limit. Since I've already taken things to this extent, you should consider giving me a reply as soon as you can. I sincerely want to marry you."

Tiffany bit her lip silently. Why was she never this uncomfortable with Ethan in the past? Now that she thought about it, Ethan would never care if she liked someone else in the past, or if she was grabbing a meal or a drink with another guy. Did he change because he started to care about her?

The atmosphere was getting a little tense, so she chose to escape to her mother's room. "I'll go see if mom is ready."

Closing the door behind her, Tiffany let out a long sigh of relief before hissing softly, "Mom, why did you agree to go to the White Water Bay Café? Won't you feel awkward if we run into Jackson there?"

Lillian wasn't really bothered. "You were only putting up an act with Jackson anyway. What's there to be awkward about if it's a fake relationship? Or is there really something between you and him? Since you were always so picky about the blind dates I set up for you, you better appreciate it now that a good man like Ethan is taking the initiative to reconcile with you. I used to look down on him because he was poor, but he's actually turned out to be Mark Tremont's younger brother now. If you marry into the Tremont family, we'll never have to worry about money again in our entire lives. You better not screw it up. You said you didn't like those other men, but Ethan is your first love of three years. I'm sure you have nothing else to say about him, right?"

Tiffany knew that her mother was an easily influenced person, so she no longer bothered to argue with her.

They seated themselves at the main dining hall at White Water Bay Café. Lillian unceremoniously ordered the most expensive dishes. Just when the bill was reaching a four-digit figure, Tiffany gave her a reminder. “Mom, there’s only the three of us here. We won’t be able to finish the food.”

Lillian threw a glance at Ethan then ended her order with a bottle of red wine that cost nearly a thousand dollars. “This is the first time my soon-to-be son-in-law is treating me to a meal; you don’t have to be that stingy. Why are you taking his side before you’re even married to him?”

Maybe because he was in a good mood, Ethan didn’t seem to care. “Don’t worry about it, Tiffie. Just order what you ladies want to eat. It’s my turn to repay all the kindness that I’ve received from the Lane family in the past.”

One was happily spending money while the other was happily footing the bill. Tiffany felt like she shouldn’t even be here at all.

Tiffany was relieved that they didn’t run into Jackson here this time. Maybe he wasn’t here today. After their meal, Lillian suggested going shopping when they came out of the café. Ethan continued to ‘spoil’ Lillian unconditionally. The entire situation made Tiffany feel a sense of powerlessness. She remained passive the entire time, going along with the plans that were arranged by someone else. She wasn’t even given a chance to make any decision. This was awakening her rebellious side because she wasn’t willing to have someone else decide her life for her.

She questioned herself whether she still loved Ethan.

Her answer was ‘not sure’. Yes, she had no idea if she still did. Their intimate moments would still make her blush and his gentleness would still make her heart skip a beat. Yet, something was still missing compared to when they were dating back then. She just couldn’t figure out what was missing.

When Tiffany returned to her workplace on Monday, she made the decision to resign.

She knew Ethan’s personality well enough to know that he would feel uneasy as long as she didn’t resign. Her resignation was the only way to reduce the fights between them. Since she didn’t reject him, then she might as well just try to make the relationship work again. If she could find back the same feelings she had for him back then, that would mean she still loved him, right?

She knocked on Jackson’s office, holding her resignation letter in hand with a heavy heart.

Soon enough, his husky voice rang out from inside. “Come in.”

She took a deep breath and pushed the door open, then entered his office and placed the resignation letter on his desk. “Thank you for everything you have done for me, Mr. West.”

Jackson swept his gaze over the resignation letter emotionlessly then hit her with a casual question. “What’s wrong? Going home to be a full-time wife?”

She forced a smile. “No, only to assure Ethan. Men can be very scary when they are jealous. Since I’ve decided to restart our relationship, we’ll have to give each other a sense of security. I’ve really enjoyed working here, and I’m even a bit reluctant to leave.”

He picked up her resignation letter and read every word. “Don’t leave if you’re reluctant to…”

Tiffany thought that her ears were playing tricks on her because Jackson didn’t look like he was cracking a joke. “Pardon?”

When Jackson lifted his gaze again to look at her, a frivolous smile bloomed across his face. “Never mind. I’ll sign it later. Just do the paperwork before you leave today and handover your work. You may pick up your pay from the finance department.”

She nodded then turned to leave. The moment she was about to step out of his office, Jackson called out to her. “Hey…”

Chapter 404

She stopped in her tracks and turned to look at him. “Hm?”

“Are you sure? Is it really possible to rekindle old flames? Can you really like someone as much as you did after breaking up?”

Jackson had avoided private chats with Tiffany for quite a while now so she was a little surprised by the questions. She pondered over his question, but she only came up with an answer that was not really an answer. “Well, we were in a relationship for three years, and I’d poured my heart and soul into it. If we still like each other, then, it’s natural for us to be together. Since I decided to get back together, I’ll have to take it seriously.”

He finally smiled in relief. “You’re not exactly a star performer in the office so you resigning isn’t a loss to me. Don’t worry, I’ll happily sign your letter.”

She glared at him. “Should I be happy for you since you’ve finally gotten rid of a freeloader in your company? Alright, just keep your happiness to yourself, I’m… leaving now…”

As soon as the door was closed, Jackson tossed her resignation letter into the trash bin. He opened a webpage on the computer that exposed all of Ethan Connor’s crimes. Feeling conflicted, Jackson wondered if he should let her jump into the fire pit. However, he could not tell her anything. His hands were tied. On one hand, he had Mark. On the other, there was Tiffany.

In the end, he picked up the resignation letter from the trash bin. He took a pen and signed his name with a heavy heart. The two words that he had written countless times before took him more time than ever now.

When it was about time to get off work, Tiffany came to his office again. “I’m done with the handover procedure. Have you signed my resignation letter? I need it to get my salary from the finance department.”

Jackson passed the signed resignation letter to her. Just when Tiffany turned around and was about to leave, a thought flashed through his mind. “Let’s have dinner together?”

She was a little surprised. “Why? Is it supposed to be my farewell dinner?”

He laughed. “Something like that. Let me tell you now, I’m giving you preferential treatment. You can decide if you want to accept it.”

“You make it sound like… I wouldn’t dare to go. Well then, in that case, I’m going!” She nodded hesitantly.

Tiffany went to the finance department half an hour earlier to collect her final salary.

Jackson got off work early as well and brought her to White Water Bay Café. Despite being the owner, he dined in with Tiffany as a customer. The good thing was that their table was guaranteed no matter how crowded the restaurant was.

Jackson generously opened a bottle of expensive red wine. The two clinked their glasses together and emptied them in one go. “All the best in your future endeavors after your departure from Bright Incorporated.”

Tiffany laughed at him. “Stop being so fake. Are you being sarcastic? You make it sound like I got poached. No one would poach someone like me away.”

Her eyes lit up as the dishes were served in succession. “Wow, all my favorites! I’m digging in!”

He sneered and mocked her mercilessly, “Is there any food you even dislike? You’ll eat anything like a pig.”

The mention of pig suddenly reminded Tiffany of the time they had to share the same room when she was putting on a show with him. She accidentally stepped on him and he told his mother that his hand got crushed by a pig's foot...

The memory was still so vivid in her mind. Jackson climbed into the bed after midnight and insisted on sleeping next to her. She had one leg on top of his body, but he did not push it off and just allowed her to keep it there...

"You really don't plan on getting married?" She changed the subject.

"What's so good about getting married? You can't even do anything because someone is controlling you twenty-four seven. Not only that, but you have to be readily available on the phone and take care of them all the time. What's fun about that? I can't bring myself to do something like that, and I'm not willing to be subjected to such torture either. I'm happy to be single." Jackson spoke bluntly, remaining faithful to his plan of staying unmarried.

"A person like you deserves to be forever alone! It's not as bad as you think it is. Not all girls are like that nowadays. When I dated Ethan back then, I was the one taking care of him while he remained indifferent to me. At that time, I just don't know why I was still so motivated to treat him that well despite his attitude toward me. I've already lost all that energy now. On the contrary, he started becoming more like me in the past. Is this what they call a role reversal?" Tiffany did not approve of his opinion and used herself as an example.

He paused for a moment before speaking. "You've lost all that energy that you had before? That just means you don't love him anymore. You only agreed to get back with him for the sake of regaining the sense of balance you had back then. You really need to get it straight, kid."

She rolled her eyes at him. "You're the kid! No, you're an old man!"

Jackson frowned. “Who are you calling an old man? I’m several years older than you so it’s only natural for me to treat you like a kid. Besides, I haven’t reached the age where you can call me an old man! Do not call me that!”

Since the atmosphere finally became less tense between them, Tiffany suddenly had the urge to bicker with him. “You can’t stop me from calling you what I want! Try to seal my lips if you can! I have every right to call you an old man as long as you’re a day older than me! What are you gonna do about that?”

Jackson narrowed his eyes at her. He lowered his voice and asked her in a coquettish tone, “Do you want to find out for yourself if I’m really an old man?”

Chapter 405

Tiffany instantly blushed. Instead of scolding him, she downed a glass of wine nervously. “You’re really nasty…”

Her reaction stunned him for two seconds. Whenever they joked like this in the past, she would retaliate instead of blushing...

All of a sudden, her phone rang in her bag. Tiffany answered the call in front of him without any hesitation. “Ethan? I’m eating outside. Why? No one in particular, I’m with a friend. What? Meet? It’s gonna be late by the time I’m done, can we leave it until tomorrow? By the way, I’ve resigned. I’ll have plenty of time tomorrow. Alright, I’m hanging up now.”

After Tiffany hung up, she continued eating and did not notice the cold expression on Jackson’s face. After a few more glasses of red wine, the blush on her face showed no signs of fading away. She used to

be able to hold her liquor well but not anymore since it had been quite a long time since she last drank heavily. Since she was drinking too fast earlier, the alcohol had gotten to her head.

By the time they were done eating, the bottle of red wine was nearly empty as well.

Jackson only drank a little so she was the one who drank most of the wine. Since she was feeling very depressed lately, she was using the wine to drown her sorrows.

When they exited the café, Jackson noticed that her face was as red as a tomato. “Do you need a ride?” He offered.

The alcohol left her feeling bold, and she began to run her mouth, “Of course! Are you expecting me to go back by myself? My home is like a million miles away from here! Hurry up and drive your lady back!”

Jackson was amused to see her acting this way and decided to play along with her. He opened the door on the passenger side for her. “Please get in.”

After Tiffany got into the car, he reminded her, “Put on the seatbelt.”

She shook her head. “I don’t want to. I’m too full from dinner. It’s going to make me feel uncomfortable.”

Jackson leaned over and fastened her seatbelt for her. They were suddenly so physically close that Tiffany could smell the fragrance of his body. It smelled exactly like the pillow in his room. She recalled she had slept soundly that night...

She involuntarily gulped when she looked at his face from such close proximity. The shadows of the tree branches under the streetlight swayed like ghostly figures outside the window, and yet, his face was as beautiful as an angel. Back then, she also stared at Ethan's face and gulped. Tiffany cursed at herself inwardly for being this shallow.

"I heard you gulping, are you thinking of devouring me?" Jackson turned to look at her after he fastened her seatbelt for her.

Their faces were so dangerously close that the tips of their nose were almost touching.

Tiffany was so shy that her eyes were darting everywhere except for his face. "Not at all! You're imagining it. Back off now!"

That piqued his desire to tease her, and he refused to move his body. "What if I don't want to?"

She pushed against him and could feel the heat from his sturdy chest spreading to her palms through his thin shirt. "Then, I'm going to take advantage of you!"

The expression on Jackson's face suddenly became serious. Looking at her flushed cheeks and moist lips filled him with the urge to kiss her. His body moved instinctively as soon as that thought popped up in his mind. The moment he pressed against her soft lips, he closed his eyes and told himself that it was

merely something he was doing under the influence of alcohol. However, he was very aware that the little amount of wine he had imbibed earlier would not be able to cloud his mind...

Tiffany's body froze instantly. She closed her eyes as well, unable to believe what was happening. Was he kissing her? Jackson was kissing her! Was she dreaming? At this very moment, the scenes of them bickering, fighting and joking with each other replayed in her mind. Tiffany could clearly feel her heart racing so fast as though it was going to burst out of her chest. She had even forgotten to breathe.

Jackson did not deepen the kiss, and it lasted only a few seconds before he straightened his body. "Well, you've already taken advantage of me. It's time to go."

Her chest heaved as she turned to face the window, not daring to look at him again. She pretended as though nothing had happened between them.

As soon as Jackson's car stopped at her house, Tiffany got out of the car at lightning speed. She stopped after taking two steps forward, but she did not look back. She said softly, "I don't know when we'll see each other again, but it'll be… my treat next time."

A trace of bitterness could be seen in Jackson's eyes at this moment. "If it's going to be with Ethan, then forget about it. If it's you alone, then I'll consider it." After saying that, he drove away.

Instead of going home, he went out, looking for some fun. His nightlife had just begun. For a man like him, Tiffany was not the only one who fascinated him. Every woman fascinated him. Besides, he was not the type to steal someone else's woman.

Tiffany stood by the street for a while before going upstairs. She was trying to figure out Jackson's words. Why would he decline the invitation if Ethan came along? What did he mean by he would consider it if it was just her alone?

At the Tremont Estate...

Arianne was currently researching how to run a business. Although she had been reading a lot of books every day, she still could not come up with any ideas. All of a sudden, the lights in the living room went out and all she could see was darkness in front of her. "Mary, why did the lights go out?"

Mary's voice was quiet in the dark. "Madam, it's time to rest. Henry said that the lamps should be removed and cleaned because they've gotten really dusty. Since the lamp in this living room is huge and hard to clean, he can only get it done while you and sir have retired for the day…"

The butler, Henry, paused in his footsteps when he was approaching the front door as his lips twitched involuntarily. Just a few days ago, he was lying about cleaning the air conditioner. The excuse for today was cleaning the lamp. Were there any more excuses he could use?

Chapter 406

Arianne had never doubted Mary's intention so she obediently carried her book upstairs. "Sure. It's dark here, be careful when you guys remove the lights."

Mary grinned in delight. Mark hardly came back early. She would not allow Arianne to waste this opportunity.

When Mark returned to the room, he sat in front of the French window, flipping through a book. The books that he read were different from Arianne's. They were all in a foreign language. Arianne was not good in foreign languages, and she would have a headache when she thought about deciphering them.

Since it was only nine pm, she lay down on the bed and continued reading. Before she even finished reading a sentence, Mark reprimanded her, "Who's taught you to read lying down? Are you planning on ruining your eyes? Sit up and read it if you want, otherwise, go to sleep."

His tone was like that of a parent educating his child. She had long gotten used to it. Putting her book aside, she listened to him and tried to sleep.

The room's light was switched off soon after. The rustling sounds of clothes being taken off rang in the air before Mark finally joined her in bed.

Arianne knew that he was not wearing anything so she shifted a little to the side. She was startled when Mark moved closer to her and wrapped an arm around her. "Do I have thorns on me?"

Arianne did not dare to simply move. "No… I'm a little warm…"

Mark took the remote and adjusted the air conditioner to the lowest temperature, sixteen degrees Celsius. "Sleep."

Arianne was speechless. She did not really feel warm. Twenty-three degrees Celsius was just perfect. There was only a thin blanket on the bed and she wrapped it around herself tightly. Even then she was still freezing. "It's a little cold…"

Mark tossed her the remote impatiently. “Adjust it on your own.”

Arianne quietly increased the temperature to twenty-three degrees Celsius. She discovered Mark was looking at her. She stuttered in panic, “I’m not trying to be difficult. It’s warm earlier and cold now…”

Mark moved his arm away from her waist and slept with his face facing the ceiling instead. The blanket had only covered his stomach. When Arianne’s eyes got used to the dark, she could see his bare upper body, and she fell into a daze. Once she thought about how he was going to sleep in this manner the entire summer, she felt as though her soul was going to leave her body. It was a torture for her not to be able to move freely when she slept!

“Let’s go for a follow-up check tomorrow in the hospital,” Mark suddenly said.

“No need. I think it’s fine. I feel pretty good now.” Arianne did not want to go to the hospital again. She would be reminded of the pain caused by her miscarriage once she was there.

“It’s necessary,” Mark insisted.

“I don’t want to.” Arianne could give in on other matters but not this. After being discharged from the hospital for the miscarriage, she vowed to take medication for minor illnesses and wait for her death if she contracted a major sickness rather than going to the hospital again. It had become a trauma to her.

Mark did not like bickering so he asked without beating around the bush, “Why not?”

Not wanting to revisit the topic, Arianne replied, “I just don’t want to. I won’t go even if you force me. Not going even if I die.”

Seeing her tantrum, Mark relented. “I’ll ask the doctor for you tomorrow. If the doctor wants you to go for a follow-up check, you’ll have to go.”

Arianne turned around with her back facing Mark and closed her eyes, remaining silent.

…

During breakfast the next morning, Mark texted the doctor before he suddenly looked at her and asked, “Have you gotten your period?”

Arianne glanced at Mary who was cleaning nearby. She blushed as she stuttered, “Wh.. Why.. Why a-are you asking about this?”

Mark showed her the chat between the doctor and him on the phone. “The doc is asking.”

When she saw his solemn expression, she nodded.

Mark continued asking, “Is it normal compared to the last time?”

She knew it was the doctor’s question as well so she answered in a small voice, “It’s normal…”

Mark speedily replied to the doctor’s text before finally putting his phone away. “That’s good. You didn’t want to go to the hospital and now, you don’t have to.”

Arianne was on pins and needles. Why was a man asking her questions like these? These were secrets that she only shared with her best friend, Tiffany…

“Right, what do you plan to do now? Go back to work at Eric’s or stay home?” Mark changed the topic abruptly.

It seemed like Arianne was the only one who felt uncomfortable.

Arianne shook her head. “I don’t plan to design anymore. I want to try something new, but I haven’t thought about what yet. You need a place no matter what you do now, but it’s expensive if I rent a shop. I’ll think more about it. However, I have no plans on staying home. It’s too boring.”

Mark was supportive of her keeping busy. “Sure. I can provide you with a place when you finally decide on what you want to do. We have empty shop lots, offices, and the likes. You’ll save on rent. Don’t worry, think about it slowly.”

“Okay!” It felt like she was fed with honey. Did Mark’s words mean that she was family? She could use the family’s shop lots.

Seeing the hint of a smile in her eyes that could not even be concealed, the corners of Mark’s lips curled up as well. The sweltering weather outside suddenly did not seem so bad now.

When Arianne contacted Tiffany at noon, she found out that the latter had resigned. “Really? I was thinking about starting a business or something. Do you want to do it with me? Let’s do it together. Mark says that I can use any shop or office in the family!”

Chapter 407

Arianne did not realize that she sounded like a child showing off, but Tiffany could clearly see it. “Oh, oh, oh, look at you! And you were just telling me that you want a divorce, how you can’t stand him anymore… You’re so lovey-dovey now, aren’t you? I think a divorce is impossible after you’ve spent so many years with him. There’s still familial love even without romantic love. I really envy you guys for stepping right into familial love, passing the romance. No matter how bad things get, you’ll reconcile in a blink of an eye. Other people break up so easily and get a divorce with just a snap of fingers.”

The hint of a smile on the corners of Arianne’s lips grew deeper. “Knock it off! You must be free in the afternoon since you’re not working anymore. Let’s go out for tea? I can finally go out freely now. I’m dying of boredom!”

Tiffany could not wait until afternoon. “Come out right now. I have something to tell you. My mind is in a mess…”

Arianne caught a whiff of gossip from her words. “Sure, I’ll swing by after I get changed. I’ll send you the address then.”

When Tiffany arrived at the café, Tiffany looked for a more secluded table and impatiently shared her little secret once she sat down. “Ari, will you believe me if I say I did something without Ethan’s knowledge?”

Arianne’s mind had yet to make the connection between Tiffany’s words and cheating. “What did you do? Had a meal with a guy behind his back?”

Tiffany looked grim as she said. “Not just any guy. It was Jackson! We didn’t only eat together, but he kissed me!”

Arianne’s eyes bulged. “Are you sure that… you’re not the one who kissed him? What’s he doing kissing you for no reason?”

Tiffany came clean, and Arianne seemed to understand the matter. “Whoops. It seems like Jackson has fallen for you before you’ve fallen for him. He knows when to draw the line with his jokes unless it’s not a joke. However, I still think that you’ve gotten drunk and kissed him but somehow got confused, thinking he kissed you!”

Tiffany stomped her foot. “Are you my best friend? How can you think that of me? I’ve teased plenty of handsome boys back in school, but I’ve never actually… kissed them. I’ve decided to get back together with Ethan, and I’m serious about it. So why do I get scared when I think about his proposal? He’s very clear about his goals. The sooner we get married, the better. He has even talked to my mom and agreed to give her a house when we get married, but I… don’t want to get married. In the past, I forced him to get engaged. However, now that he’s pushing for us to get married, I’m feeling reluctant. What’s wrong with me?”

Arianne picked up the spoon and fed herself a mouthful of cake. She chewed and spoke at the same time. “Don’t know.”

Tiffany sprawled on the table, defeated. “You’re an idiot! I shouldn’t be telling you this, not like you know anything. You’re just making it worse! Eat your cake! Make yourself fatter lest Mark feels that you’re too bony to the touch!”

Arianne nearly choked on the cake. She quickly drank the glass of juice on the water to clear her throat. “Tiffie, I just realized that your words can really choke someone.”

After sending a small piece of cake into her mouth, Tiffany felt content. “You won’t die so eat! If I really get married to Ethan, what will I be to you then? From your best friend to your sister-in-law? It’s crazy. I’m stuck with you for the rest of my life. Oh, yeah, Ethan… is truly the Tremonts’ illegitimate son, isn’t he?”

Arianne nodded. “This is between us. It’ll embarrass Ethan. Illegitimate or not, blood is thicker than water. Mark has accepted it and has even gifted Ethan a plot of land. Let’s just take the word ‘illegitimate’ out of the matter and let it rot away.”

Tiffany lowered her voice. “I just find it strange. Ethan has become Mark’s younger brother all of a sudden. If Mark acknowledged him so easily, why has Ethan been suffering outside all this time? Do you think someone like Mark will easily acknowledge his father’s illegitimate child? An illegitimate son… That’s someone who’s given birth to by some woman outside without an identity or status. It’s just odd. Forget it, never mind. Ethan will kill me if he finds out. It’s not like I feel disdain. Everyone’s a unique individual. It’s the mistake of the previous generation, while the child’s innocent. Maybe Mark figured this out and decided to acknowledge his younger brother.”

Arianne was going to speak but a familiar figure entered the café. From the corner of her eyes, she saw it was Helen.

Perhaps, Helen felt Arianne's gaze on her, she looked in Arianne's direction. Her eyes were filled with delight. It was clear she was pleasantly surprised. "Arianne, it's such a coincidence. I believe I've met your friend before."

Tiffany quickly wiped the cream off the corner of her mouth. "Nice to meet you."

Helen nodded with a smile while Arianne moved to the side to make room. "Do you want to join us?"

"Sure…" Helen was surprised.

The reason Arianne had invited Helen to join them because she felt Helen was considerate of her feelings. Helen no longer called her Ari. Whether it was for show or genuine, she called her Arianne. This, at least, was not revolting to Arianne.

Chapter 408

"Oh, yeah, the money and property that you gave me, I don't want them. I didn't bring them out today. I'll return them to you the next time," Arianne said calmly, distancing herself from Helen.

Helen's smile froze. "It's been so long. You should just accept them. To be honest, Aery is freeloading in my house now. Whatever she has and uses are all mine, she asks for allowances from me too. If you return the house and money to me, she'll take them. I've provided more than enough for her, that's why she has the habit of asking for things. I won't give her anything anymore, just keep them."

Arianne did not imagine Aery would be such a leech. She was already an adult, but she was acting like a big baby staying in her divorced mother's house. She could not help feeling Helen was biased. Now that the Kinseys had gone bankrupt, Aery could not possibly be the only one freeloading in Helen's home. Jean must be there as well.

Arianne took a sip of her juice. "I'll take care of them for you then. You can have them back when you think it's convenient. We don't lack these things in the Tremonts."

Helen was not surprised, but a pleased expression could be seen on her face. "You truly seem like Mrs. Tremont now. It would've been good if you've acted like this from the get-go. If you don't want the things I've given you, you can donate them. Mark has helped so many people, you should follow his lead as his wife. I have something else to attend to so I'll leave you girls now. Let's meet another day."

Arianne, naturally, did ask Helen to stay. She only watched as Helen left after purchasing her coffee and dessert.

Tiffany could not help teasing her, "We're not lacking these things in the Tremonts. What a declaration! If my mom gives me a house and gives me money, I'll wake up laughing even if it's just a dream."

Arianne did not reply, she only looked out the window.

Tiffany looked at the dessert in her hand and said flippantly, "If you really want to start a business, why don't you set up a dessert shop?"

Arianne fell into a daze for a moment before her eyes lit up. “We can give it a try! I’ve researched desserts and thought it’s simple. However, it’s actually quite complicated. You have to do it with me! I’ll start today. I’ll go back and learn to make some. When I figure them out, we can consider starting a business!”

Not expecting her casual suggestion to ignite a fire, Tiffany felt like she could not quite catch up. “For real? Starting a business is hard work. And it’s only going to be the two of us in the beginning. We’ll wear ourselves out, and we might not even make a profit. Can you persevere? What if Mark worries about you working too hard and stops you from working? You can continue living your life as Mrs. Tremont, but I’m different.”

Arianne was brimming with confidence. “Stop using him as an excuse. Do you think he looks like someone who’ll worry over somebody else? I’ll persevere. Don’t you have Ethan as well? Alright, I’ll be heading back now and learn how to make basic desserts. I’ll bring you some to taste when I’m done!”

Tiffany ran off faster than Arianne could upon hearing Arianne’s words. “Forget it. Give them to Mark. I don’t want to die yet!”

…

When Mark returned from the office at night, he smelled something burning in the air as soon as he entered the Tremont Estate. He frowned immediately. “Mary, what’s burning? It smells horrible!”

Mary rushed out from the kitchen. “Sir… It’s not me, it’s madam… She’s learning how to make desserts and bake cakes. I couldn’t stop her. She’s burned many of them in the afternoon.”

Mark felt the signs of an impending headache as he made his way upstairs. It was only when he closed the bedroom door that the burning smell disappeared.

By the time he came out of the shower, Arianne was waiting for him with a strange-looking and strange-colored dessert. “Do you want to try it? I spent the whole afternoon coming up with something more presentable.”

Mark’s grip subconsciously tightened on the towel around his hips as his deep eyes shone with rejection. “This is presentable? I’m not having it. Let others try it.”

Although Arianne had expected this, she was still disappointed. “I’ve given Mary and Henry one each. I kept this for you… Never mind, if you don’t want it, I’ll have it for dinner.”

Mark closed his eyes and said through gritted teeth, “Give it to me!”

Delighted, Arianne scooped up a small piece and fed it to him.

Mark’s reluctance was painted all over his face. God knew how he managed to open his mouth. The moment he ate it, an incredibly odd taste exploded in his mouth and assaulted his taste buds. His expression grew complex as well. After he swallowed what he was fed, he was greeted with the eager expression on Arianne’s face. He remained silent for a long while before he finally asked, “You… You put chili in your dessert?”

Arianne nodded with a straight face. “Yup! Desserts don’t have to be sweet. We can think out of the box. As long as it’s delicious, it won’t matter. Tiffie and I are preparing to start a dessert shop. I have to practice more. What do you think of the taste?”

Mark shuffled to the chair in front of the French window with much difficulty and took out a cigarette with trembling hands. “I’ll hire you an exclusive patissier. You can just watch over the shop…”

To earn Mark’s full support, Arianne lit his cigarette for him. “You can smoke if you want, it’s alright! Tell me how’s the taste, is it that bad? I want to open up my own shop and bake my own desserts. There’s no need to spend money to hire another person.”

Chapter 409

Mark took a big puff of his cigarette before putting it out immediately. “It’s… it’s okay… Make me tea, make it richer…” Could someone tell him why the odd taste was still lingering in his mouth? Even the cigarettes could not get rid of the taste. Hopefully, the tea would be able to wash it away.

After Arianne skipped upstairs and handed the black tea to Mark, he blew on it carelessly before drinking a big gulp. It was not a wise move. He would never forget how the combination of the tea and the odd taste in his mouth tasted like. He did not have dinner that night since he had to go to the toilet for a total of 18 times. He could not endure it and finally went to the hospital early the next morning.

Arianne who had been busy the entire afternoon slept soundly, unaware of the torture Mark went through. She only noticed that he got out of bed frequently throughout the night. When she did not see him the next morning during breakfast, she thought he had gone to the office.

However, Mary chastised her, “Sir has been hospitalized because of you. Henry and my stomachs are made of iron so we’re fine. We’ll have to test your food for poison next time. Please don’t do such harmful things to sir again!”

A question mark popped up in Arianne's mind. "I was just wondering why he kept waking up last night… Is it that serious? Aren't you guys fine? I'll go check on him later."

Mary thrust a bun to her and pushed her out the door. "Henry's waiting for you outside. Go now! All you think about is eating, how can you still have the mood to eat?"

As Arianne walked out, munching her bun, she thought to herself it could not be that severe. After all, she had tried what she had made, and she was fine. How bad could it be for Mark?

However, as soon as she arrived at the hospital and saw Mark, she realized Mary had not been exaggerating. It had been a long time since she had seen him looking like that. It had only been a night, but he looked worse for wear. There was a drip needle inserted into the back of his hand, the bruising looked stark against his fair skin. What exactly did he go through?

"I'm sorry… I didn't do it on purpose…" Arianne gripped the hem of her clothes and stared at her feet like a child who had done something wrong.

Mark sighed. "Promise me, don't open up a dessert shop. No, don't start any business related to food. I'll support you in anything else you do, I'm fine…"

Arianne did not believe that he was fine. Even speaking looked like it exhausted him. Nevertheless, she had always been stubborn, she was not the kind to give up easily. "I've just started learning. I'll do my best. I'll master it, believe me."

Mark's heart lurched. "Leave… I'll be alright after the drip and will be heading to the office after that. Go attend to whatever you have to."

Seeing that he did not have to stay the night, Arianne did not insist to stay. She went back to the Tremont Estate and continued making desserts…

Each time she completed something and felt good about it, she would snap a photo and send it to Mark. Desserts had to look delicious in order to tempt people into eating them. The taste was, naturally, important as well. Customers would only return if the desserts tasted good.

Each time she sent a photo, she would receive Mark's loving and patient reply. "Please stop making desserts. Move on to something else!"

Arianne ignored his request. She was determined. As the day progressed, she had piled up two big plates of desserts at home. Not daring to give it to Mark, Arianne gave them to the Tremonts' helpers other than eating them herself. She was a designer so the appearance of her desserts was marvelous. It was just the taste that was a problem. From horrible to barely edible, she did not make further improvement.

At night, Mark confirmed with Henry that there were no more dishes from hell at home before he returned home.

Perhaps, Arianne was exhausted, but she was no longer making desserts. Instead, she was studying diligently.

Mark did not know where she got her motivation from, but she was clearly not suited to making desserts.

During dinner, Mark received a text from Eric. He opened it and frowned as soon as he read the text. He rose to his feet and walked to the side to call the man. “What’s the situation? Why is someone making a fuss out of this?”

There was a tinge of gloating in Eric’s voice. “Jackson’s little boat finally tipped over after so many years of being a womanizer. Now the whole world knows that he’s one. I don’t see any effect on a rich heir like him other than his reputation being damaged. I really wonder if the media is too free nowadays. But he’s not a young boy in his twenties anymore. Ask him to take care lest his wood shrivels early…”

Mark was not as carefree as Eric. This matter was not a coincidence. The content of the news had photos of Jackson having fun in clubs. Jackson was the only man in the booth with a group of scantily clad women. He had seen Jackson this way many times in the past. The womanizer image would not affect him much.

Business-wise, Jackson had never offended anyone. This did not pose much harm to his businesses. It made one doubt the motive of the culprit.

When Mark returned to the table after ending the call, Arianne asked, “Did something happen?”

Chapter 410

Arianne rarely took the initiative to talk to him, but they had been interacting a lot recently, much more than the first half of their lives. Mark answered her question to the best of his ability, “It’s Jackson. His photos at the nightclub were taken and posted online. It’s nothing serious.”

Arianne's eyes widened. "Risqué photos? Weren't you together with Jackson and Eric at those places last time? Have people taken photos of you?"

Mark glared at her and said huffily, "I went there for the ambiance. They went there for the fun. It's not the same. Even if they took photos of me, it won't be interesting."

After dinner, Mark returned to the room and texted Ethan. "It was you, right?"

He got a reply swiftly. "Tell me that when you have proof."

The matter was not severe so it was unnecessary to pursue it. However, it was likely that Ethan was the culprit. After all, he considered Jackson his love rival. In the end, Mark only warned Ethan. "Stop laying your fingers on people around me."

When it was past nine, Mary discovered Arianne was still in the living room, seemingly had no intention of returning to the room.

When Arianne felt Mary's pointed gaze, she asked, "What… What is it? Are you cleaning the lights again?"

Mary did not come up with an excuse this time. She said slowly, "You should sleep now."

It suddenly dawned on Arianne that Mary had been manipulating her into spending time with Mark by giving her excuses such as cleaning the lights and the air conditioners. After all, she could no longer bear children. To secure her place with the Tremonts, she had to please Mark. Although all these did not cross Arianne's mind, it definitely crossed Mary's mind! If she did not return to the room, she knew Mary could stare at her for hours. In the end, she weakly retrieved her phone and headed upstairs.

When she entered the bedroom, she received a text from Mary that contained a link to a website. She clicked on it to see what it was. However, as soon as she saw the content of the website, she frantically closed the window. She really did not expect Mary to be so open-minded. The link was an article about sex and how frequent a pair of husband and wife should have sex to maintain the stability of the relationship.

Arianne instinctively counted the times she and Mark had done it, and she discovered it was pathetically low. She could not help but feel flustered. Why was everyone so concerned about this?

"What are you doing standing at the door?" Mark saw her as soon as he opened the door.

"Nothing… I just arrived. I'm going to sleep." Arianne walked past him with her head lowered.

Mark did not notice her nerves and went to the study before returning to the bedroom. Seeing that Arianne had already gotten into bed, he began to take off his clothes. After he had stripped, he switched off the light and slid into bed next to her. "I'll take you out in another two days. Where do you want to go?"

"It's too hot. I don't want to go out," Arianne spoke in a muffled voice.

Mark thought about it for a moment before he said, “Then let’s go somewhere with better weather. We can get away from the summer. It’s a rare chance. I hardly get any free time. Don’t regret it if you decide not to go.”

Arianne did not dare to imagine traveling alone with him. The trip would be a torture. “I won’t regret it. I don’t want to go.”

Mark seemed upset. “Then, I’ll go on my own.”

Arianne did not respond to him. She did not care if he went alone or brought other women with him.

However, the more unbothered she was, the more frustrated Mark became. “Can’t you have some sense of romance?”

Arianne remained silent. She did not have a single romantic bone in her body. It was not like Mark did not know about this. She was not in the mood to talk since her mind was occupied by the article Mary had sent her.

Her phone beside the pillow suddenly beeped and the screen lit up, illuminating her face and neck in the dark. The light also reflected the frantic expression on her face. Afraid that Mary had sent her more embarrassing things, she did not dare to check her phone in front of Mark. Instead, she closed her eyes, pretending to sleep.

The screen dimmed in seconds, but Mark suddenly moved and picked up her phone.

Arianne grabbed his hand in reflex and asked, “What are you doing!?”

At this moment, Mark’s upper body was glued to Arianne’s upper body while his arm hovered over her face. She could feel the warmth from his arm on the tip of her nose.

Mark thought that her reaction was rather ridiculous. “Don’t place your phone too close to you when you sleep.”

Arianne thought he was going to check her phone and was fearful of him seeing the link that Mary had sent. Upon hearing his words, she sighed in relief and snatched her phone from his grip. She obediently placed it on the nightstand a little farther away.

When Arianne hoisted herself up, her bare neck rubbed against the inside of Mark’s arm. The suppleness stopped him from withdrawing his arm. The fragrance of Arianne’s hair wafted into his nose. His eyes darkened immediately.

When Arianne lay back down, she discovered Mark had maintained his previous position. She moved his arm that was hovering above her and said, “Sleep.”

Mark inhaled deeply before he pulled her into his embrace and caught her earlobes between his lips.

Arianne froze. The ticklish feeling made her tilt her head to the side, subconsciously trying to get away. It caused Mark’s lips to land on her cheek. She could feel his heated breath on her skin.