Ruling 411

Chapter 411

“Don’t… Stop it…”

Her rejection was soft, unaggressive, causing Mark to disregard it. With a simple flip of their bodies, he caged her under him and pinned her struggling arms. Her wrists were thin, both of them fitting in only one of his hands.

Realizing what was about to happen, Arianne panicked. “Mark! Please don’t!” She was subconsciously repelling the act, an indescribable feeling coming over her.

Losing himself in the heat of the moment, Mark littered kisses around her lips and asked, “Why?”

Why? Arianne didn’t know why either. How was she supposed to answer him? They were lawfully married, husband and wife. Something like this was normal, expected even, but she was subconsciously resisting. So why?

She thought about his past with Aery and her three babies, none of them able to greet this world. The torment that she had gone through in the hospital was a neverending nightmare.

There was also her past, which she had sealed away, regarding Will and regarding the absent Sivans. All these had things to do with her, all of it a heavy burden to bear. If she were to enjoy peace in this moment, that weight would suffocate her.

Not receiving a reply, Mark thought that Arianne was only being shy and decided to take it a step further.

Arianne shut her eyes nervously, her body trembling. How much hardship did she endure before she had achieved the peaceful life she had right now? She did not want to break the peace. She could only accept what was given.

At the last moment, she suddenly opened her eyes.

“No! That…”

Mark was slightly stunned, as if reminded of something else. “I forgot to prepare…”

She bit her lips. “Then forget it. I’m scared…”

Silent for a few seconds, Mark got up to light a cigarette in front of the window, taking his phone out to send a text.

Arianne put her pajamas back on hastily and sat on the bed, wrapped up in a blanket. Mark only smoked when he was exceptionally frustrated, making the entire situation awkward. She knew that she had been a wet blanket but she refused to accept any blame. The doctor said that she could not get pregnant again, and even if she did get pregnant, abortion was the only option she had. It was basically self-torture.

Twenty minutes later, there was a knock on the bedroom door. It was soft but echoed throughout the room during the quiet night.

Mark walked over briskly and opened it partially. It seemed to be Brian outside but Arianne couldn't be sure.

When Mark closed the door and came back to the bed, she heard the rustling of a wrapper being opened. Mark had asked Brian to buy him condoms!

When she thought about Brian knowing what she and Mark were about to do, she felt like crawling into a hole and hiding there forever. "How could you… let someone else buy them for you? How am I supposed to look at him now?"

Mark was too focused on the task at hand to pay her words too much attention, propping Arianne's legs up against his well muscled arms. "We're all adults here. Besides, it's not like he hasn't seen or used them before."

It was rare for Arianne to see Mark's shameless side. She was both speechless and exasperated, the nerves that had finally calmed down before high strung once again. She had thought that she would be able to escape tonight but…

Arianne didn't dare to look at Mark's face. She turned away and closed her eyes, allowing him to do whatever he wanted to her. For a moment, she was consumed with an endless wave of thoughts…

When she woke up the next day, her voice was hoarse.

Compared to her own fatigued state, Mark was in a good mood. He was glowing, his steps light and bouncy now. Every once in a blue moon, he was all smiles to everyone at the start of the day. Even Henry said that he had not seen his master so happy in a long time. Arianne was the only one thinking about stopping this from happening once again, or decreasing the frequency of it at least…

During breakfast, Mark pushed his glass of milk towards her. “Eat more, you’re too thin.”

You’re too thin… His words made Arianne recall Tiffany’s joke, asking her to have more dessert and grow fatter, lest Mark find her too bony to touch…

It occurred to her that she felt like punching Tiffany. She couldn’t even look at the two glasses of milk in front of her, somehow relating them to something else.

Around eight in the morning, Tiffany called her. “Ari, did you see the news?”

Mark had already left and Arianne was now more at ease at home, free to talk about whatever she wanted. “Yeah, Jackson’s news, right? It’s not odd. Mark went to those places with him in the past too. Why’d you ask?”

Tiffany was silent for a few seconds. “Are all men like this? One man and a whole group of girls. I never saw Jackson as someone wild. I can’t help but wonder how many women he ended up bringing to the hotel.”

Arianne could decipher a strange meaning behind Tiffany's tone. "Tiffie, why do you care?"

Chapter 412

Tiffany flatly denied, "I'm not worried. It's a roast, get it? A roast! Speaking of, what happened to that desert you made? I've heard that Mark nearly lost his life after consuming it. And that he's even had to go to the hospital for an IV?"

Arianne felt depressed at the very mention of this matter, "No improvements. If I could make the exterior of the desert look good, that would already be an achievement, but it just won't taste good. Not even Rice Ball wants to eat it. Now, every time anyone at home sees me in the kitchen, they tremble with fear. I'm so worried."

Tiffany burst into laughter but did not go overboard with teasing her. She stopped at just the right time, "Ari, would you like to come look at houses with me? My mother wants to move, and I'm afraid that she might nitpick. Come and help me convince her so that once it's nearly done, we can just decide. At least, I won't have to deal with her walking around the entire day and still feeling unsatisfied."

Arianne agreed. She didn't have anything else to do anyway.

Once they met up again, Tiffany pulled Arianne aside and softly told her, "My mom is definitely going to look at villas. You've been living in the Tremont Estate for many years, so you must have an eye. Let's just persuade her and get this over with. As long as the house is bearable and the price isn't more than a million dollars, we can take it. I don't have enough patience to spend an entire day with my mom, looking for houses. It's too torturous. Let's just agree on that."

Arianne nodded, "Are you and Ethan going to get married? Is he buying this house?"

Tiffany furrowed her brow and shook her head, “Ethan and I aren’t getting married this soon. My mom is eager to move into a new place and is itching for me to get married so that Ethan can give us a house and she can move out as soon as possible. However, I’ve already told her that I’m not getting married this soon, and if she wants to move, I can only pay for it with my own money. I don’t know if my mother actually listened to all of that.”

She didn’t even know if Lillian listened to her? That was a problem.

They had seen villas from three different locations in the morning. Lillian refused to settle for anything less than seven to eight rooms. She would either complain that the rooms had bad configuration, that they were too small, or that the location was too secluded.

During lunch in a restaurant at noon, Tiffany pulled out the floor plans of each house that they had seen and showed them to her, “Choose. Choose one. I am not running around with you. The villas in these areas are already pretty good. Stop wasting time.”

Lillian did not bother looking at the floor plans. She rolled her eyes at Tiffany and said, “I don’t like these villas. They’re too small. These only cost a few hundred thousand bucks. How could these be any good? Let’s look at something better in the afternoon.”

Tiffany’s temper rose, “Mom, I’ve told you. We have to buy this house on our own. Ethan and I won’t be getting married this soon. We’re just getting to know each other again. Don’t be a foolish wastrel. Why don’t you buy a mansion worth ten million instead? But do you think you can afford that?”

Lillian widened her eyes in anger, “I’m supposed to pay? You’re asking me to use the money I’ve earned from selling that land to buy a house? If someone is already giving me a house, why wouldn’t I want it? Tiffany, you’ve been with Ethan for more than three years. He used to be poor and now he’s rich. If

you're not getting married, what are you waiting for? For him to change his mind again and to kick you aside? I don't care. He's already said it. As long as you agree to marrying him, I can have any house in the capital that I want."

Tiffany threw the villa floor plans into the trash can, "How long has Ethan's company been around? Do you plan on emptying his bank account, just to buy you a house? We need to know when to toe the line. I'll say it one more time, he and I will not be getting married any time soon. Either you put off buying a house, or you pay for it yourself."

Arianne had expected for the mother and daughter to end up in a fight. She felt a headache, "Mrs. Lane, those houses that we've seen aren't too bad. If you're eager to move, just choose one. That $900,000 villa isn't too bad. You should consider it."

Lillian's entire face filled with scorn, "A villa in the capital, worth around $900,000? The location is too secluded. I might as well buy a condominium in a better location."

Arianne was upset, $900,000 was considered a sky high price to her. Unfortunately, it was nothing to Lillian. Tiffany took a deep breath and said, "Alright, go ahead then. Let's split up after lunch; you can go wherever you want. I'll tell Ethan that we'll get a house when I decide to get married. If you want to move out right now, buy a house with your own money. End of discussion."

It was as if their lunch was laced with gunpowder. Lillian pulled a long face. Then, she suddenly looked up and said to Arianne, "Ari, Ethan is, after all, Mark's brother. You're his sister-in-law; why aren't you concerned about your younger brother's wedding? Tiffie is your friend too. You can't be unfair to her."

Arianne was stuck for an answer when Tiffany threw down her knife and fork, then left, "God, I'm so pissed!"

Arianne wasn't sure if she should laugh or cry, "It's fine, Tiffie. The weather's already hot enough, don't get all heated up. What your mother said does make sense. If you and Ethan are to get married, Mark and I… shouldn't be so nonchalant. However, I don't have a say in the Tremont family's matters, so there's no use in your mother asking me."

Tiffany massaged her forehead, "Ethan said it himself, he'd do it on his own. So you and Mark don't need to concern yourselves over this matter or worry about it. I shouldn't have invited you today. I only ended up dragging you along with me into her bullying. This is so embarrassing. Come on, I'll buy you a cup of milk tea."

Chapter 413

They arrived at a tea shop near the shopping mall. Arianne was melting from the heat and had just managed to cool down after having a seat, when Tiffany's phone rang.

They initially thought that it was a call from Lillian. Tiffany did not plan on answering it at first. However, she glanced at the call notification screen on the phone and found that it was Ethan.

Ethan would usually be at the office at this time and wouldn't contact her. She pressed the call answering button, "Hello? What's up?"

"Come into the shopping mall. I've got a surprise for you," Ethan sounded mysterious on the other end.

The shopping mall was right next door. The pair waited for their milk tea before slowly walking over. A sea of pink balloons came into view from the moment they entered the shopping mall. Arianne let out a girlish giggle, "What's going on in the mall today? Look at all of these balloons; they're so pretty!"

Tiffany's brain circuitry had always been different from the average person's, "Pretty? They would have exploded if it weren't for the air conditioning in the mall. They'll be reduced to thunderous explosions by then. Let's see if you'll still think they look pretty."

She had just finished speaking when the duo suddenly saw themselves broadcasted live on the mall's large television screen. Before the pair could react and figure out what was going on, Ethan's voice echoed from a broadcast, "Tiffie, we've known each other for three years and nine months. Throughout our entire journey, you've always been the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, only you. I know that I've never been perfect, but I will do my best for you in our journey ahead. The wedding that I've owed you is finally ready, are you?"

Just as Ethan had spoken, a group of young men dressed in suits emerged from amidst the crowd, holding flowers as they walked towards Tiffany. Aside from the pink balloons before them, there was a sea of red flowers. Everyone paused in shock, not a single one of them not envying her.

Even Arianne felt moved, let alone Tiffany. What woman wouldn't feel moved by such a grand proposal?

Tiffany blushed furiously as she searched for Ethan everywhere. Finally, he cut through the crowd and arrived in front of her. Going down on one knee and pulling out a ring, he gazed at her with sincerity, "Tiffie, will you marry me?"

Arianne tactfully stepped aside, doing her best to ensure that Ethan and Tiffany were the only ones on the big screen. She certainly wasn't going to be the third wheel.

Ethan and Tiffany instantly became the focal point. Many pulled out their phones to record this moment. Tiffany was dressed in a long white dress today, with her hair hanging down loosely, like the perfect depiction of one's first love. Ethan, on the other hand, was dressed in his best suit — an

expensive, custom-made suit that was cut perfectly to his figure, highlighting the best outlines of his figure. Now on one knee, there was no doubt in everyone's eyes that this was a perfect proposal. But Tiffany hesitated.

A short bout of hesitation could be explained as shock and being overcome by emotion, but a long, drawn out hesitation had undoubtedly drawn some blind heckling, "What are you waiting for? Say yes, marry him!"

The sight of the anticipation on Ethan's face put Tiffany at a loss. That's right, she was no longer moved by his actions. In fact, she felt like running away. She had been telling him, over and over again, that she did not want to get married too early. Ethan, however, had planned out such a grand proposal behind her back. If she were to reject him in front of so many people, he'd be humiliated. On the other hand, it wouldn't feel right to her if she agreed. This stifling feeling gradually turned into a crushing weight.

She felt someone's gaze upon her that was different from the rest. She lifted her eyes to find Jackson and Summer standing at the top of an escalator in an angle that happened to be directly facing towards her and Ethan. Jackson's gaze was full of silence and his emotions were unreadable, yet it became the straw that broke the camel's back.

She did not have the courage to look into Summer's eyes. Summer must be extremely disappointed in her, right? After all, her son had just broken up, and his ex-girlfriend was being proposed to. Summer probably couldn't stand the sight of her right now…

"Tiffie?" Ethan frowned, eager to hear her answer.

She stiffened her hand and forced it towards him, "Ye-yes…"

Kindness was an asset and also a liability. She surrendered in the end, unwilling to humiliate Ethan in front of all of these people. This was the only choice she had right now.

Ethan smiled as he slipped the sparkling diamond ring on her finger, then pulled her into his arms and kissed her on the lips.

She saw Jackson and Summer turn and walk away. At that moment, she felt something deep in her heart collapse.

The roaring claps and cheers from all around made her very irritated. She couldn't bring herself to smile at all. She couldn't even force a smile.

When they walked out from the shopping mall, Arianne believed that it was time for her to leave, "So, what's next for you two? Are you going somewhere else? I'll get out of your face. See you!"

Ethan was about to speak up when Tiffany said, "I'm having a bit of heatstroke, not feeling well. I had an icy drink under the hot sun too, so I'm feeling a little faint. I don't think I can hang out with you today, Ethan. I'd like to go home and get some rest. Will you drive me? We can drop Ari off along the way too."

Ethan paused for two seconds then cheerfully agreed, "Sure, get in the car. I'll get you some medicine for your heatstroke later. You should always have some at home, especially when you're going out. I'm worried that something might happen to you when I'm not around."

Chapter 414

After dropping Arianne off at the Tremont Estate, Tiffany finally spoke her mind, “Ethan, you should know that I only agreed to your proposal to spare you from being publicly humiliated. I don’t want to get married this quickly. I mentioned this long ago.”

Ethan didn’t seem too surprised by her revelation, but he hadn’t expected her to speak up so soon, “So?”

She took the ring off her finger, “Could we talk about this after I’ve decided to get married? It’s really not what I want right now.”

He curled his lips into a smirk, as if in self-mockery, “You used to push me into getting married, and now it’s the opposite? What changed? I love you more than ever, yet you’ve gradually lost your feelings for me. I admit that it’s all because of me, and I’m trying my best to fix it. But I’m afraid that there might be some unforeseen events, so I’d rather get married first. If you have any doubts or anything you don’t like about me, we can always work on it in the future. All I want is for you to marry me now.”

She lowered her head and bit her lips, “I’m sorry.”

He slammed his foot against the accelerator, growing slightly hysterical, “‘Sorry? Don’t give me that bullsh*t. I don’t want to hear it! Either we get married in a month, or we break it off. That’s more thorough. You’re not unwell, are you? I’ll drop you off at home. You have ten more minutes; think of your answer, very carefully.”

Ten minutes wasn’t a very long time. Ethan turned towards her when he parked the car at her home, downstairs, “Well?”

Her answer remained the same, “I’m not ready to get married right now.”

He smiled and nodded, “Okay, I respect your decision. Consider it as payback for what I’ve owed you. You’ve made me pay the full price now. I was a dick in the past, and you’ve had your revenge in full. We’re even. You should go.” Then he opened a window and lit a cigarette, refusing to look at her any longer.

Tiffany let out a heavy sigh and did not give too much of an explanation. She pushed the door open and got down from the car.

Ethan still refused to look at her. His fingers around the cigarette trembled. At that moment, he suddenly regretted allowing her to make such an extreme decision, but he did not turn back. He knew that he had fallen entirely in her hands from the moment he decided to pursue her again. In the past, he had been consumed with thoughts of his revenge on Mark and had thrown everything that she had given to him out the window. Regardless of whether it was guilt or true love, he had long prepared himself to accept any possible outcome when he threw his dignity on the ground to bring her back to him. Now, he finally had a taste of the heartbreak she had felt when they broke up the first time. He had brought all of this onto himself.

He threw the ring that she had given back to him out the window before he left. He had chosen that ring with careful meticulousness. It had cost him $10,000. He was filled with such joy during the selection process. Now, it only brought him humiliation.

Tiffany dashed into the bathroom and took a shower when she arrived home, completely calming down.

She felt a twinge of regret for hurting Ethan’s feelings, but she didn’t have any way of ensuring that both sides were at ease. Both sides were still emotional, so she did not contact him and sent a message to Arianne instead: Ari, I only agreed to marry Ethan to save his dignity. I’m not ready to get married yet.

He got angry and forced me to make a decision—either we get married in a month, or have a clean break up. I was a mess.

Arianne called her immediately, “So, what did you choose?”

Tiffany scowled miserably, “I didn’t choose. I stood firm in my belief. I wasn’t ready to get married so early and I apologized. He thought that my apology meant that I chose to break it off, so he got very angry. We’re both cooling off. I just wanted more time to search for the feelings I used to have. He’s suffocating me. If he had only just given me some time…”

Arianne had no idea how to console her, “I don’t know what to say. You did the right thing back there, and you did the right thing when you explained things very clearly to him too. He was a little extreme. I think that you need to have a proper discussion with each other so that you can better understand each other. If he could take a step back and give you some time, it would be better for both of you. After all, marriage isn’t a game. You have three years’ feelings as your foundation. He shouldn’t have suffocated you like that. You should ask him why he’s so eager to get married.”

Tiffany stared up at the white ceiling, feeling dispirited, “He was afraid of unforeseen events. What could that possibly be? There are only two possibilities — either we get married, or we break up. The ‘unforeseen event’ that he’s so afraid of was brought forward because of how he’s dealt with it. He probably lost control in a fit of rage. I’ll talk to him later. Ari… Do you know? I saw Jackson and his mother at the mall. I never thought that they’d be there too. Jackson’s mother was really nice to me when I went to his house, pretending to be his girlfriend. She must be very disappointed now… I know that it was all fake, but I didn’t want her to see all of that.”

Arianne hadn’t noticed Jackson and Summer at the mall, “They were there too? That must have been awkward… But you don’t have to worry too much about that. It was all an act anyways. Alright, alright. Cheer up. How about I take you to dinner tonight, my treat?”

A bright notion flashed across Tiffany's mind, "No, my treat. I'll take you out and we'll get high. I used to be poor, but now my family's suddenly come into a plot of land that can be sold off. Life is truly filled with ups and downs. Let me pay for you, just this once. I'll see you there tonight and we're not going home until we're good and drunk!"

Chapter 415

Arianne didn't really like places with blaring music, but she agreed, just to pander to Tiffany's mood. However, she was too afraid to tell Mark about it. She didn't even have to think about it to know that he would never let her go.

She got ready to go out before Mark returned from work and sent him a message: I'm going out for dinner with Tiffie and then we're shopping afterward. I might be home very late.

Mark was under the impression that she had gone stir-crazy from boredom during her confinement period, so she was more inclined to going out and having fun now. Therefore, he did not think too much of it: Mm.

She heaved a sigh of relief when she received his message. She asked Henry to drop her off at a restaurant next to Zero Degrees Bar and waited for him to leave before meeting Tiffany at the bar. The thick smell of cigarettes assailed her senses from the moment she walked in. A myriad of personalities adorned the dazzling hall. One could tell that it was a posh place at first glance.

She walked past the hall, past the dimly-lit corridors, and opened the door to a whole new world. It was still pretty early, so there weren't very many customers. The DJ hadn't even started playing yet, so it was pretty quiet.

Tiffany pulled her to a seating booth and sat down, "Bring on the booze!"

A waiter hurriedly stepped forward to take their order. Seeing how generous Tiffany was with her money, the waiter took the advantage and recommended a few types of imported liquor. Of course, they were also the most expensive ones.

Tiffany was in a bad mood, so she ordered all of the waiter's recommendations. Their table was soon filled with complimentary fruit platters and snacks, so one could imagine how expensive the liquors were.

"Tiffie, don't drink too much. We're two women, all on our own. It doesn't feel safe to get drunk in a place like this," Arianne was worried that Tiffany wouldn't know when to stop once she started.

"What are you so afraid of? I'll make sure to send you home safely, no matter how drunk I am. Don't you worry," Tiffany guaranteed, patting herself on the chest. Then, she unbottled every single bottle of alcohol.

When Tiffany patted her chest, Arianne noticed that her boobs were close to popping out from her low cut spaghetti strap top. She quickly pulled them up for her, "You should have worn more layers! It's a little cold here and not too hot. You're going to have a wardrobe malfunction…"

Tiffany finally noticed that Arianne was dressed more conservatively. Most women who came here to have fun would be dressed in hot pants or a mini skirt with maybe a spaghetti strap tube top. Arianne, on the other hand, wore a cream-colored calf-length skirt. She looked like a housewife!

"Ari, you do know that your dress is more risky than mine, right? These men are used to seeing exposed thighs, and they will be intrigued by your naivety. You should be more concerned about yourself."

Arianne blushed. She picked up a cup of liquor and took a sip, then looked around, feigning nonchalance. She felt like a fish out of water here.

The number of people in the bar gradually increased over time. The lights flashed euphorically as people hit the dance floor. The fashionable DJ was energetically bringing hype onto the atmosphere from the stage. The music was deafening.

At first, Arianne wasn't used to this. However, after Tiffany had forced a few glasses of alcohol down her throat and dragged her to the dance floor, she began to let loose. The pair had quite a lot to drink, so they became more chatty than usual. Their conversation style became a lot bolder too.

"I think your man is pretty exciting now!" Tiffany yelled hysterically into Arianne's ear, "And his best friends too. Jackson and Eric aren't too bad!"

Despite the blaring music, it didn't completely manage to cover up whatever she had said. Ariane smiled shyly after hearing it, "Ethan's not bad too! He looks a lot like Mark! I never noticed it before, but you can really tell once they stand next to each other!"

Tiffany let out a long sigh at the very mention of Ethan. She slumped on the sofa and sipped on a glass of liquor melancholically, "I don't know how many more times I'll end up falling for Ethan. I think he's just my first love, and I can't f*cking get over. He's the first guy I ever loved, after all, so I can't just cut him off!"

Tiffany's sudden plunge in emotions reminded Arianne of her own unhappiness as well, "You're much better off than I am. At least, you have a choice. I don't."

“Do you love him?” Tiffany downed her glass.

“Don’t know,” Arianne honestly replied.

“‘Don’t know’ means that you don’t love him enough, but you like him a lot,” Tiffany said, smiling at her dubiously.

“Probably,” Arianne didn’t want to deny it. Every time she thought of Mark, she’d be filled with bitterness and sweetness. The bitter parts were unbearable, whereas the sweeter parts filled her with joy.

“I’m going to the toilet. You coming?” Tiffany wobbled as she got up to her feet, with one hand over her stomach.

Arianne shook her head, “No. You better be careful. Hurry back once you’re done.” The toilet wasn’t too far away, so she had nothing to worry about.

Tiffany stumbled on her way to the toilet, humming along to the music too. The loud music and blinding lights were catalysts for emotions. Patrons here were divided into two categories: to release their frustrations or to find extreme excitement. She belonged to the former.

Once she emerged from the toilet, she raised her hands, still damp from having washed them, and waved them in the air as she walked. Then, she accidentally bumped into someone and wiped her hands

on the latter's chest. She looked like she was caressing it instead. She used to frequent these sorts of places, and no matter how drunk she was, she could still differentiate if she had bumped into a man or a woman. If it was a man, she would "tease" him a little to avoid conflict.

Just as she was about to turn away and leave, the man grabbed her wrist. She smiled amorously and infatuatedly, "Why? Want me to apologize, handsome?"

Chapter 416

The man looked sullen. "How much did you have to drink?"

His voice sounded familiar. When she looked up, she was dumbfounded. It was Jackson.

The exposé of his activities in nightclubs flashed in her mind. She forced herself to reply cheekily, "Why? Is Mr. West looking for some fun again? I haven't had too much to drink. Ari is waiting for me at our seat. I'm going back. You have fun."

Jackson did not release her. Instead, he dragged her to a secluded staircase, "It's bad enough that you came here, but you even brought Ari along? What do you think is going to happen if Mark finds out? Is it just the both of you?"

Tiffany pushed him away, "That's right, it's just both of us. I'm pretty sure Ari has never been to a place like this since she has always been with Mark. She hasn't even experienced one of life's greatest entertainment. Isn't that a waste? Anyway, are you here to lecture me? I'm not going to listen to it. Let me go!"

Jackson realized she really had too much to drink so he did not bicker with her. “Stop drinking, I’m taking both of you home.”

She narrowed her eyes at him. “Are you bossing me around? Who do you think you are? I’m not going!”

He frowned. The darkness dimmed the bright light above them, but it did not hide his handsome and elegant features. “Didn’t you just get proposed to during the day? Why are you coming to a place like this at night? Are you planning to have some fun before settling down? Or are you celebrating? Doesn’t Ethan care that you’re here doing all of this?”

She grabbed his lapels at the very mention of Ethan’s name. “Are you trying to be a wet blanket? I asked for a breakup! He insists that we should get married in a month, and I’m not ready to get married just yet. I haven’t even rekindled the feelings I used to have for him...”

His body stiffened. No matter how much she tugged at him, he did not move at all. When he heard her say she was not ready for marriage and did not feel the same way she did before, he said, “Your hesitation proves that you no longer want to be with him. Just break it off.”

She released his lapels and leaned against the wall. “Why are you so worried about whether I break up or not?” She asked snarkily, “Are you going to be with me if I break up with him?”

An obscure glint flashed across his eyes so swiftly that Tiffany did not notice it. “If you break it off, I’ll be with you.”

She was not exactly drunk to the point where she had lost all of her senses. She clearly heard Jackson's words. Suddenly, she found that she could not meet his gaze. Her smile disappeared from her face as well. "You said you're going to stay single and never get married."

He pushed her forcefully up against the wall and kissed her plump and tender red lips. He had been hanging out in this bar for quite a while and had quite a bit to drink. Whether it was the alcohol or a long-restrained urge, he really wanted to do this.

This kiss was not as superficial as the last one. His excellent kissing skills submitted her. She knew this was not right so she tried to push him away. However, she gradually lost her strength. She stopped struggling and placed her hands on his chest.

Someone would pass by from time to time and see them making out. However, no one was surprised. After all, things like these were the norm at a place like this. There was even a possibility of hearing lewd noises from the toilet stalls sometimes.

After an immeasurable amount of time, Jackson finally released Tiffany.

She gasped breathlessly as she pulled the hemline of her miniskirt down nervously. "You… Have you gone mad? Do you have any idea what you just did?"

He placed his hand on the wall, caging her between his body and the wall. He tilted her head up and forced her to meet his gaze. Then, he pressed his body firmly against her, pushing her against the wall. "Of course I do. I've always wanted to do it. And… It doesn't just stop there."

She was no match for him. She was usually only filled with false bravado. She was not like him who had experienced all sorts of excitement. Embarrassed, she struggled to leave him. “You assh*le! Let go of me! Ari is waiting for me!”

He curled the corners of his lips into a wicked smirk, “I’m well aware that she’s waiting for you. If it weren’t for her, we wouldn’t stop here. Go on ahead. I’ll watch your back. Call me when you want to go home. I’ll be at the seating booth on the second floor.” Then, he released her and stepped aside.

Tiffany bolted back to her seat, her heart pounding wildly against her chest.

Arianne noticed the distracted expression on Tiffany’s face and grew worried. “What’s wrong, Tiffie?”

Tiffany’s hand was still shaking. She tried to pour some liquor and ended up spilling most of it on the table. “No-nothing… I just need a drink. Drink with me.”

Two hours later, Arianne surrendered. “I can’t do it anymore. I’m going to puke if I drink any more… Tiffie, let’s go home, okay?”

Tiffany still did not have enough. Ever since Jackson had provoked her, she had sobered up. She needed to get drunk. It would be best if she could get so drunk that she would forget everything when she woke up the next morning. “I don’t want to go home yet. Wait for me? Or I’ll send you home first and come back again?”

Arianne was too worried to leave her alone. “Forget it. I’ll wait for you.” As soon as she had spoken, the music stopped abruptly and a group of bodyguards in black suits charged in and checked every booth as though they were looking for someone.

Tiffany was the first to notice Mark who had walked in. “Ari, your man is here.”

Arianne shivered in fright. “Don’t joke with me! He doesn’t know that I’m here. I only told him I’ll be back late!”

Tiffany pointed at Mark who was not too far away. “I’m not joking. He’s coming over.”

Chapter 417

Arianne followed her line of sight, and her heart skipped a beat. Mark was as eye-catching as ever even when he’s surrounded by a crowd. She could not miss him even if she tried. She was not sure if it was due to the alcohol, but she was not as afraid as she usually would be. For an extra dose of courage, she poured herself another glass and downed it. “Tiffie, I’ve got to go. Call me if you need anything…”

Mark and his group of bodyguards arrived at their booth soon after. Arianne bravely threw herself into his embrace before he lost his temper. “I was out having dinner with Tiffie, and it was still early so we came here. What are you doing here?”

Mark’s face looked grim. The inebriated expression on her face made him boil over with rage. He forced himself to restrain his temper. “I came for you. Let’s go home.”

Arianne secretly waved goodbye to Tiffany and left the bar with Mark. She discovered Jackson was also in the bar, and he had been the one who disclosed her location to Mark!

“How much longer did you plan on sticking around if Jackson didn’t tell me about this? Who told you to come here? Do you have any idea how dangerous it is for girls to get drunk in a place like this? Have you been listening to me at all? Do you want to meet your maker?”

Arianne acted meek and obedient when faced with Mark’s wrath. “I understand… I won’t set foot into these kinds of places again. If I ever do, I’ll ask you to come along. Will that be okay?”

He took a deep breath and massaged his temples, alleviating his headache. “There won’t be a next time! Moreover, I won’t be coming to these places again.”

She was too afraid to answer. Suddenly, she felt her stomach churn. She tried to hold it in for a while but found herself unable to do so. She quickly told Brian to stop the car, “I need to puke. Stop the car!”

Brian quickly pulled the car to the side of the road. After a particularly hair-raising bout of vomiting, Mark got down from the car and handed her some tissue and a bottle of mineral water in disgust. “I really want to leave you on the side of the road!”

She curled her lips, cleaned herself up before getting into the car again. She had clearly puked it all out, but the alcohol had numbed all of her senses, taking away the very last vestiges of her awareness.

When they arrived at the Tremont Estate, Mark carried her into the bedroom, looking thoroughly disgusted. He threw her into the bathtub before filling it with water. Before he could help clean her up, she flailed her hands, thoroughly soaking his clothes. He gritted his teeth and pulled off her clothes before taking his own clothes off. He really did not have the strength to clean up after taking care of her and cleaning her.

“Mark Tremont, you’re terribly exciting!” Arianne boldly declared, cupping his face with her hands, blissfully unaware of how terrifyingly black his face was at the moment.

“Who taught you that?”

She giggled giddily, “Tiffie said it, and I kind of agree.”

He smacked her thigh twice. “Don’t ever say these things to anyone else, you’re only allowed to say it to me. Got it?”

She responded in a similar manner and slapped him on the face twice. “Got it! Your face is so red. It’s like you’re burning up.”

He stayed silent. It was much more than that. The rage he felt was burning. If she did not hug him earlier in the bar, he would not have let the matter go so easily. He was too afraid to think of the consequences of her being in a place like that in a drunken state.

His gaze darkened. He lowered his head and silenced her chatty little mouth. Soon, he realized the inconvenience of the position so he picked her up and placed her on his lap.

At this moment, she was straddling him. She instinctively tried to get up, but he tightened his grip on her hips. “You asked for this, and now, you’re running away”

Before she could respond, he silenced her again. She made too much noise in her drunken state. He wanted absolute silence from her…

…

Zero Degrees Bar.

Tiffany drank on her own until midnight before she finally picked up her bag and staggered out of the door.

The amount of liquor she drank was definitely not enough for her to forget her troubles. If it were possible, she really wanted to drink herself into a stupor. However, reality did not permit it. She was alone so she had to retain some sobriety to take care of herself.

She leaned against a tree, waiting for a cab. Out of boredom, she pulled out her phone and saw messages from Ethan and Jackson.

Ethan: I'm sorry. I was too rash, and I overreacted yesterday. I'm sorry. I'll see you tomorrow, and we'll have a good talk.

Jackson: Have you finished drinking?

Jackson: Looks like it's not enough. Don't be a showoff. Call me later, and I'll send you home.

Tiffany did not reply to any of them. The only thing she wanted to do now was to go home and get some sleep.

Suddenly, a grey car that had been waiting at the side of the road nearby drove toward her. The window rolled down. “Hey, pretty girl. Want a ride? I can take you home.”

She glanced at the driver whose head was poking out from the car window, suppressing the urge to puke, and waved her hand dismissively. “You can’t afford me. Find someone else to plug your hole.”

The driver cursed and swore as he rolled up the window.

She had seen many people like him, hanging around outside bars, waiting for a drunk girl to stumble out. Their intentions were obvious.

Chapter 418

Her phone rang. It was a call from Jackson. She rejected the call, having no intention of answering the call. Her mind was in a mess. She did not want to bring any further trouble on herself.

Two minutes later, she heard footsteps drawing near to her. She instinctively turned around vigilantly and met Jackson’s intense gaze. She felt slightly guilty at this moment and slipped her phone into her bag with a straight face as she said, “My… My phone ran out of battery…”

He raised his brow. “If you ran out of battery, my call shouldn’t have connected. How could it have disconnected in the middle of the call? What am I, a three-year-old?”

Tiffany did not reply. She lowered her head and stared at her feet. If she could only find a hole in the ground, she would gladly bury herself!

Jackson did not bicker with her over rejecting his call. Instead, he chuckled. “Forget it, I’ll take you home.”

When she saw him pulling out his car keys, Tiffany immediately reminded him, “You’ve had a few drinks. You shouldn’t be driving.”

He stared at her, unperturbed. “Are you that certain that I’ve had a few drinks?”

Her eyes darted all around, vehemently refusing to look at him. How could she have possibly known that he had had a few glasses of alcohol if he did not kiss her? After all, she had personally tasted the alcohol in his mouth. Besides, it was impossible for anyone to come to a place like this and not drink alcohol. “Are you telling me that you came all the way here to drink plain water?”

Finally, he relented and hired a designated driver, probably because he saw the embarrassment on her face. She would feel much more comfortable with an outsider around.

Both parties had their eyes closed, resting the entire way. They did not interact with each other too much, feeling uncomfortable from having too much to drink.

When the car arrived at the ground floor of Tiffany's building, he pushed her when he realized she showed no signs of moving. "We're here."

She drowsily opened her eyes and looked outside to confirm that she was in a familiar place. Then, she thanked the driver and got down from the car. She was too afraid to turn around knowing Jackson was still there. She suspected the liquor she had was diluted with water. Otherwise, how could she possibly be so conscious?

Shortly after, the designated driver drove ahead. Jackson had long sobered up. His eyes were bright and alert. "Ethan sent you here, didn't he? The designated driver that I called still hasn't arrived. I should be more cautious next time."

"He wants to see you." The designated driver glanced at him through the rearview mirror.

He smirked. "But I don't want to see him. What do you think I should do?"

The driver hit the accelerator, which could be considered as his answer. Jackson methodically pulled out a handgun from a small compartment in the back and pointed it boldly at the back of the driver's neck. "Stop the car. You have ten seconds to preserve your insignificant life."

The driver was only in it for the money, he did not expect to go head to head with a formidable adversary. His entire body stiffened as he slowly stopped the car on the side of the road and raised his hands before he carefully got down from the car.

Jackson calmly slid into the driver's seat, then, spun the gun in his hand around. "It's a toy."

The driver grew enraged, but Jackson drove away after leaving him with a message. "Tell him that if he wants to see me, do it personally!"

…

Early in the morning, the very next day, Arianne was awoken by the sun shining brightly on her. She had had too much to drink last night. As a result, her head was pounding. She shifted a little and remained horizontal on the bed. She had absolutely no intention of getting out of bed. Strangely, her entire body felt sore when she moved.

Then, her memories slowly flooded her mind. Her eyes flew open. Mark personally dragged her home from the bar last night, did he not? What happened after they arrived home? She could not remember a thing! She did not think Mark would let her off so easily, and her heart began to race as she thought about this.

She was the only one in bed now, which meant that Mark had gone out. At least she could have some peace for now. However, when he came home…

Uncertainty prevented her from lying down any longer. She crawled out of bed, ignoring her body's complaints. Just as her feet touched the ground, her knees nearly gave way. It felt as though the ground was made of cotton. The strangest thing of all was that she discovered she was naked. She forced herself to remain calm and went to the bathroom to take a shower. She faced the mirror and found obvious signs of hickeys all over her body, like flags planted over every part of her body. She no longer had to guess what happened last night. This explained why she felt so sore as well. Unfortunately, she could not remember a thing,

At this moment, Mary's voice rang from outside the bedroom. "Ari, are you up? Mr. Tremont asked me to clean up the room once you're up."

Arianne calmed herself and feigned nonchalance as she opened the door.

Mary smiled ambiguously as soon as she saw her. "Mr. Tremont was so concerned about you, asking me to wait for you to wake up before cleaning the room. He was afraid that I'd disturb your sleep. You had a lot to drink when you got home last night. Mr. Tremont was the one who carried you up to your room and showered you. He's actually quite considerate."

Arianne could not bring herself to smile. Her entire body was feeling extremely uncomfortable. She finally understood why everyone said that too much alcohol would lead to serious trouble. "Then… You can go ahead and clean up. I'm going down to eat."

Mary grunted in reply and walked to the trash can in the corner of the room. Aside from a pile of tissue, there was nothing else in the trash can. Arianne had managed to catch a glimpse of it. Her heart suddenly raced. Seeing as Mark had asked Mary to clean the room, that meant the room had not been cleaned prior to this moment. Why were there no condoms in the trash can? Did they not use any contraceptive last night?

Chapter 419

She sat down at the dining table, her mind was filled with doubts. She called Tiffany. Tiffany stayed back at the bar when she left yesterday. Although Jackson was there, she was still worried.

The phone rang for a long time before Tiffany finally answered in a muffled voice, "What is it, Ari? Why are you up so early?"

Arianne lowered her voice, “Early? It’s past ten in the morning. I just got up. Did Jackson take you home after I left? How much did you drink?”

Tiffany was taken aback and remained silent for a very long time. Suddenly, everything that had happened in the bar came flooding back to her. She… made out with Jackson! She knew it, she did not have enough to drink! She remembered everything!

Arianne grew worried listening to Tiffany’s prolonged silence. “What is it, Tiffie? Did something happen?”

Tiffany sighed. “Nothing, we’ll talk when we meet up next time. I invited Ethan out for lunch today to have a good talk with him. I’ll talk to you later, I’ve got to get ready. I probably would’ve stood him up if you didn’t call.”

After the call had ended, a message appeared on Arianne’s phone screen. It was from Mark. She felt wary when she saw his name on the phone, and she nearly jumped in fright. The message was simple, he was only asking if she was awake.

Initially, she wanted to ask about last night, but she was too embarrassed. In the end, she simply replied with a yes.

She had just sent the message when he called her immediately. “Did you just wake up?”

He seemed to be in a pretty good mood, based on his tone. She heaved a sigh of relief. At least he was not mad at her for going to the bar, “Yes, I’m having breakfast now…”

He did not hang up as he usually would. This time, he continued talking, “Have a light meal. You must be feeling horrible after drinking that much. Come over to the office later if you have the time. You have nothing to do at home anyway, I’m sure you must be bored.”

She grunted in reply before she ended the call. She felt vexed, hating herself for being too cowardly to ask. It was only a simple question; did they use a condom last night? What was so difficult about that? She would continue to worry if she did not clarify things with him.

She slowly made her way to Tremont Tower at two in the afternoon, mulling over various ways to ask him about last night. She had to ask him. After all, she did not want to go through the pain of a miscarriage for the third time. The sooner she knew about it, the sooner she could take preventive steps!

Ellie opened the office door for her when she arrived on the forty-sixth floor. “Mr. Tremont is waiting for you.”

She nodded with a smile and walked in guiltily before closing the door.

Mark was sitting in front of his desk, busy with work. He lifted his gaze and looked at her when he heard her movements. A hint of gentleness appeared in the space between his brows. “Have a seat first. I’ll be right with you when I’m done.”

Her face began to burn up, and her heart began pounding in her chest with a weird rhythm. She simply refused to believe it, was she feeling… shy? Speaking of which, he was in such a good mood that it was almost scary. He was actually so friendly!

A forty-minute long internal struggle ensued within her mind.

Mark finally finished his work, got up, and walked toward her. “Would you like something to drink? I’ll get Ellie to make it for you.”

She shook her head profusely like an overcautious goose. “No need to worry about me, I’m not thirsty. You should get back to work. I can just read a book here. You focus on your work…”

He saw right through her discomfort and sat down next to her. Then, he reached out and stroked her forehead, “Are you feeling alright? Why is your face so red?”

She leaned back instinctively, trying to avoid his touch. “I’m fine! My face is red from standing under the sun.”

His outstretched hand stiffened then wrapped itself around her waist instead. “I’ve reconsidered. I’ll allow you to go to bars in the future if you really want to. However, you’ll have to go with me. I’m really surprised by your drinking abilities.”

She lowered her head, clutched her skirt, and said, “I don’t like those kinds of places. I only went last night to keep Tiffie company. She was in a bad mood. By the way… I have a question to ask…”

He wondered what kind of question could she possibly ask in such a bashful state? He said, “Go ahead.”

“We-well… Erm… Uh… What happened… last night? I… don’t remember what happened when I got home…” In the end, she could not bring herself to directly ask if he had used a condom.

“Nothing special. I carried you back to the room, showered you, and then… you know. Then, we went to bed after that. You really know how to drive a man crazy when you’re drunk. My back is still sore right now.” He looked at her flirtatiously, and his tone was laced with ambiguity.

She took a deep breath, mustering all her courage before she asked, “Then, did you use a condom?” She spoke very quickly due to her embarrassment and nervousness.

Mark clearly heard her, but he pretended otherwise. “What?”

She did not have the guts to repeat herself. “No-nothing… Nevermind…”

He smirked and shifted toward her ear, his hot breath inches away. “I heard every word. What do you think?”

She believed that he probably did not and was worried. “You didn’t? I’ll go get a morning-after pill then…”

Chapter 420

He was feeling slightly helpless. He promptly stopped teasing her. “I did. Did you really think that I wouldn’t? I’ve ordered some desserts for you. You enjoy munching on desserts, don’t you? You can try them. They are the most interesting desserts I’ve ever had.”

Then, he walked back to his desk and made a call. “You can send them over now. Bring two cups of americanos while you’re at it.”

After the call, he noticed that Arianne’s head was still lowered, and she was blushing. He stared at her thoughtfully and asked, “You can’t possibly be feeling shy, right? We’ve known each other for more than ten years now. Isn’t it a little strange for you to feel shy around me?”

“I am not!” She denied vehemently with a red face.

Although he knew she was lying, he did not expose her. Instead, he said reassuringly, “We have many more days ahead of us. I really don’t want you to be timid around me every single day. Relax. It’s not like I’m going to do anything to you.”

Soon after, Ellie knocked on the office door. “Mark, the desserts have arrived.”

“Mm,” Mark replied. Ellie pushed the door open and walked in before placing an exquisitely wrapped box of desserts on the coffee table in front of Arianne and two steaming cups of coffee.

Arianne unwrapped the box, revealing the captivating desserts. She was very surprised. The mere presentation of the desserts was already very special. Anything that was delicious to Mark must be

extremely yummy. She tried a bite of a small cake adorned with strawberries. It melted in her mouth upon her first bite. It had just the right amount of sweetness. It was much tastier than any other dessert she had ever had!

“Try the coffee,” he suggested.

She followed his suggestion and sipped on the coffee. Its mild fragrance intermingled with the sweetness of the dessert in her mouth, creating a different flavor. “This is delicious! I don’t think that I’d be able to make anything as tasty as this.” That explained why he disliked the desserts she had made. Her desserts were horrible compared to this.

He walked toward her and poked his fork into a matcha dessert, then, placed it close to her lips. “Try this one.”

She was now entirely focused on the dessert and did not realize how overly-considerate and intimate his actions were. She opened her mouth. The matcha dessert was entirely different from the small strawberry cake. The taste was slightly more subtle, but it was still just as tasty. She ate every single dessert with single-minded devotion.

Mark simply sat next to her, sipping on his cup of americano. His eyes brimming with smiles. “I’ll have someone send a box over to you every day if you like them that much.”

She realized that he did not have a single bite of the desserts and felt embarrassed. “No need… This must be very expensive. I’ll just enjoy them once in a while. I’m sorry I was too greedy. They’re just too delicious, and I lost control so I forgot to leave some for you…”

He shifted his gaze to the corners of her lips. An ambiguous light flashed in his eyes. “You did.” Suddenly, he leaned over and kissed the corner of her lips before she could react. He placed his large hand firmly on the back of her head to stop her from moving away. Then, he mischievously slipped the tip of his tongue out and licked the butter off the corner of her lips. The mixture of the fragrant butter and her scent was more delicious than any other dessert in the world.

Arianne was stunned from his actions. She widened her eyes and stared at his handsome face that inches away from her, unable to react at all.

The world fell completely silent. She could only hear a faint drumming in her ears. Everything was a blur, and all her thoughts melted away. Only the man in front of her was left in clear view. She felt panicked, nervous, and strangely elated at the same time. There was no doubt she did not hate what he was doing. She even felt slightly happy about it. At this moment, she felt something that she had been anticipating for a very long time. Perhaps, she was no longer an ignorant little girl in his eyes, but a fully grown woman who no longer needed to fear him.

She slowly closed her eyes as he deepened their kiss.

He gently parted her lips, making her submit to his kiss. She instinctively wrapped her arms around his neck.

He paused for a moment when he felt her surrender and boldly pushed her down on the sofa. Her response pleasantly surprised him. After all, this was the first time he had ever received a reciprocation from her…

Just as their breaths had grown hot and heavy, a knock rang from the door. “Mr. Tremont, Mr. West is here.”

Mark stiffened and promptly straightened out his slightly messed-up clothes. “Let him in.”

Arianne quickly neatened her collar as well. Then, in order to conceal her embarrassment, she picked up her coffee and took a big gulp.

Jackson was able to tell what those two were trying to hide from the moment he walked in. He did not expose them or tease them. Instead, his eyes flashed profoundly. “I have something to talk to you about. I’ll leave once I’ve talked to you about it, and I won’t hold you up for too long. However, this is a discussion between men. Would you mind stepping out for a moment, sis?”

This was exactly what Arianne had hoped for. She immediately got up and walked out. She was even considerate enough to close the door for them. She then turned around and came face to face with Ellie’s sweet smile. She had a pretty good impression of Ellie. “How long have you been working as Mark’s secretary?”

Ellie paused thoughtfully and replied, “Seven years.” Then, another thought hit her. “I’m married!”