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Chapter 421

Arianne felt slightly helpless, “That’s not what I mean. I’m just making casual conversation. Has your office desk always been here?”

Ellie smiled and nodded. “This floor is pretty quiet. It doesn’t really matter where my desk is. Mr. Tremont is really nice. He doesn’t like having people around him when he’s working, but I have to be ready to assist him at any time. So it’s best that I work here.”

Arianne could not understand what Ellie meant when she called Mark ‘nice’. She thought Mark had been harsh with Ellie. “How much is your monthly salary? Working as his secretary must be a tiring job.”

A question about salary was a highly personal subject, no matter the occasion. However, since it was Arianne who had asked the question, Ellie did not avoid the subject. “My basic salary is 3500. It’s not so bad, and there’s a year-end bonus too. It’s pretty good, and it’s not a tiring job.”

Upon hearing the numbers, Arianne no longer felt that Ellie had been treated harshly. A secretary’s salary was higher than hers, a fashion designer. Every profession had its own master. She did not even dare to think about receiving the salaries of the world’s best fashion designers.

Back in the office, Jackson hesitated momentarily before finally speaking up, “Mark, Ethan has turned his attention on me.”

Mark was not particularly surprised by this. “Did he cause you trouble?"

Jackson nodded, “But nothing came out of it. This can’t go on. Tiffany will be undoubtedly pushed into hell if this continues. We need to come up with a way to solve this. It wouldn’t be too bad if we’re completely unaware of this, but we all do. All of us except for Tiffany. Isn’t that crossing a line? Your truce with Ethan is only temporary and will tip over sooner or later. When that time comes, he’ll tell Arianne the truth without any hesitation. At that time, the result will be the same.”

Mark tugged at his tie irritably. “I’m aware of everything you mentioned, but if I’m forced to choose, I’ll only save Arianne. There’s no other way. I’ve never been a kind man, you know me. I won’t ever feel any guilt toward Tiffany. At the end of the day, we’re the insiders. Revealing the matter is really our decision to make. Arianne is the only one connected to Tiffany here, not us. Do you feel like you’re being cruel? Stop hiding things from me, Jackson.”

Jackson was taken aback. Suddenly, he laughed. “What kind of a joke is that? Stop being weird. I just think… that Tiffany’s a pretty amazing girl and that it’s a little unfair to her. Don’t overthink it. Besides, I don’t think she’s ready to marry Ethan so soon. The best outcome for you is for her to marry him. That way, your truce with Ethan will last longer. However, we can’t eliminate the possibility of her actually leaving him. Neither you nor I can control that. You’d better come up with a good plan. I get that it’s a difficult problem.”

Mark paused thoughtfully, a cold glint flashed in his eyes. “I’ve been trying to come up with something. I haven’t given up. It’s a little troublesome. Just give me some time.”

…

At a sunny beach by the bay. The summer sun was scorching hot, and many people had come here to have fun. Women dressed in bikinis and men wearing swimming trunks were everywhere.

Tiffany lay on a deck chair beneath a sunshade, dressed in her swimsuit and sipping on iced fruit juice. Thanks to her sunglasses, everything seemed less glaring.

Next to her, Ethan relaxed as he watched the people around them going about their own activities. He said tentatively, “Tiffie, please reconsider.”

Tiffany immediately felt nervous when he brought up the subject. “I know that you’re Mark’s younger brother. Me and Ari are very close. We were together for three years so getting married would be the best choice. It’s the logical choice. However, did you consider we’re both completely different people now? My feelings toward you have changed. Likewise, yours are different too.”

A hint of impatience flashed across Ethan’s eyes, concealed by his sunglasses. He suppressed his impatience and said, “How is it any different? You women are always overcomplicating things.”

She sighed. “I once loved you with all of my heart and sacrificed everything. However, the outcome was terrible. You made me give up on you. Regardless of your reason for doing things, the breakup was real. You never asked for my opinion when you left me. You’ve never treated me with any care. You were cold and distant the entire time. Honestly, I’m still in shock that you turned around and asked me to come back. This isn’t like you at all. I’ve carefully thought back on every detail of our breakup, there was no bitterness or helplessness in your eyes. You didn’t even look sad. I don’t know if I should trust you. I agreed to get back together simply because the tenderness that you’re showing me was exactly what I had hoped for in the past. I felt that I still had feelings for you so I decided to give it a try. But you’ve been suffocating me. I’m really not ready for marriage. I feel as if I don’t know you at all. I need time.”

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Ethan gave Tiffany a half-smile and asked her coldly, “Are you sure you’re not just trying to get me to grovel until you’re satisfied to get back at me? I’ve made it very clear that I admit that I have mistreated you in the past. I’m wearing my heart on my sleeves now when I’m around you. What else do you want me to do? You can torture me or do whatever you want. I wish to have a home. A home that belongs to us. My only condition is to get married. I can’t wait that long. You can do whatever you want, I can agree

to anything you want. All I want is for us to get married. I don't want to fight with you today. I just want to have a good chat with you about this. Think clearly before answering me. I'm afraid I won't be able to control myself."

Although Ethan had softened his attitude slightly, Tiffany could still feel how forceful he was behind his compromise. Her only condition was to not get married too early which clashed with his only condition of getting married. She mulled over it for a moment before she spoke, "My only condition is to not get married too early, which happens to be completely opposite of yours. This is where the problem lies. You can either work out a solution or we can continue fighting about it. I'll leave it up to you."

Ethan did not get angry as she had expected. "Of course we'll have to work out a solution. Now that you mentioned it, I thought of something else. You only refuse to get married now, right? I'm fine with that if you move in with me. That should be fine with you, right?"

Tiffany was taken aback. Living together? Although they had spent a lot of time under the same roof when they were dating for three years, they had never consummated their relationship. It was at this moment that she hesitated. Logically speaking, his request was reasonable. Since she only wanted to delay the wedding, this request was worth considering.

"Why don't you let me think about it first." Tiffany did not instantly give him an answer. After all, she was still rather uncomfortable at the thought of living together with Ethan.

"I don't want to hear that kind of answer anymore. I've been considerate of your feelings to leave aside my plans of getting married. Can't we just live together? We'd dated for so long. If I was only after your body, we would have done that a long time ago. I need an answer now. You'll either move in with me or we'll get married in a month. The choice is yours," he issued an ultimatum.

Tiffany knew there was no more room for negotiation. Now that she thought about it, if Ethan had wanted to consummate their relationship during those three years, she would have agreed without any hesitation. He was actually the one who wanted to wait until they were married so he never touched her. So… it would seem like there was nothing for her to hesitate about. “Alright, I’ll move in after two days. I have to make some arrangements with my mom first. She can’t even take care of herself.”

In order to prevent future troubles, Ethan had already come up with a solution. “I’m not used to living with elders. I’m sure your mom probably doesn’t want you to look over her shoulders all day long either so I’m planning to have her move into a house near mine and hire a housekeeper to take care of her needs. I’ll pay for all the expenses. Go back and discuss this with your mom. I’ll come and get you in two days.”

He spoke so naturally that everything seemed like it was well within his plans.

Tiffany could not help but feel she had been forced or manipulated into this.

Ethan might seem like he was pressuring her into getting married on the surface, but it felt like he was actually waiting for her to agree to move in with him instead…

That night at the Tremont Estate…

Arianne received a call from Tiffany during dinner and learned that her best friend was about to move in with Ethan.

When she finally hung up, Mark unexpectedly spoke up. “Was it Tiffany? What did she tell you?”

Arianne was a little surprised that Mark suddenly took interest in this kind of thing. “She… She said that she’ll be moving in with Ethan and might even marry him one day. I don’t see anything wrong with that. If a couple realizes that they can’t get along under the same roof, then, there’s still room to change their mind. If they only realize that after getting married, then, it’d be more troublesome.”

Mark could not help but raise his eyebrow when he heard the underlying meaning in Arianne’s words. “Are you saying that we don’t can’t get along with each other?”

She quickly denied it. “No! We’re talking about Tiffie here, don’t go twisting my words… Even if we don’t get along with each other, we still managed to live together for more than a decade under the same roof.”

Mark pressed his lip together, his emotions unreadable. “You think so? I beg to differ. Back then, you were only a child who regarded me as your elder brother. Speaking of that, I’m really curious about your experience now that we’re married.”

Experience? How dare he bring that up? Arianne did not dare to speak her mind so she just lied with a flat smile on her face, “It’s been pretty good.”

He obviously did not buy her words. “Then, why are you always talking about getting a divorce? You should know that many women yearn to be Mrs. Tremont, a position that you seem to hate very much.”

The corners of her mouth twitched. “No… I don’t hate it… I’m not going to mention getting a divorce again.”

It was only then his lips curled into a smile. “You said it yourself. If you bring it up again, I’ll throw your cat out.”

In the living room, Rice Ball suddenly shivered in his sleep on the sofa.

Arianne silently said a prayer for the cat. What did the cat have to do with this?

However, she was still slightly worried about Tiffany and Ethan. “Umm… you only mentioned that the incident that befell the Lanes had nothing to do with Ethan. What about the rest?”

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Mark’s expression grew unnatural. “As for the rest… Well, he was more or less involved. If I were him, I might have done even more horrible things. What are you trying to say?”

Arianne thought Mark sounded as though he was like he was defending Ethan, which again, made her feel that he was not being his usual self. Even so, she did not voice her suspicion. “I’m just thinking that… if you can forgive his actions, then, I can as well. It’ll be fine as long as he truly repents and turns over a new leave after he gets back with Tiffie, lives his life well, and treats you like his elder brother.”

Mark did not say anything else and returned to his study after dinner. The expression on his face turned grim. After thinking for a moment, he sent a message to Jackson. “Tiffany Lane will be moving in with Ethan Connor.”

When Jackson received the message, he was dining at the West family residence with his mother. After reading the message, he set his phone aside quietly. He must not reply! Replying would be akin to admitting to Mark that he liked Tiffany. 'Like' was a ridiculous word in his dictionary. How dare Mark think that he liked Tiffany when he was not even sure of his own feelings?

When Summer noticed his little actions, and her mood turned sour. "Who sent that text, and why aren't you replying to it? Worthless son! You finally brought back a daughter-in-law for me but someone ended up snatching her away and even proposed to her. Can you just pull yourself together?"

Jackson suddenly had a bad headache. "Mom, can we just forget about it? Why are you scolding me instead of worrying about your son's broken heart? Aren't you worried that I might get depressed?"

Summer rolled her eyes at him. "I'd be happy to see you depressed. I don't think there's even the tiniest bit of sadness in you after your breakup. You don't even drown your sorrows by drinking like normal people, and it doesn't even seem like you're brokenhearted! If you like Tiffany enough, she wouldn't have broken up with you. You only have yourself to blame for this."

Jackson did not refute her words. "Alright, it's my fault… Enjoy your meal. I'm done. I'll get going now."

"Go away. Don't come here for a free meal again, you're just too vexing to look at!" Summer said dully.

After leaving the West family residence, Jackson sighed in relief. He had a fleeting thought to reveal everything to Tiffany. Naturally, he would not and could not do it. His every action would determine Mark and Arianne's future. He knew that Mark would not be able to live without Ariane...

Instead of driving back to the White Water Bay Villa immediately, he sat on the edge of the flower bed by the door and sent a message to Tiffany. “Are you free to come out now?”

He was not even sure what his intention was for sending that message. Perhaps, he was trying to stall for time?

She replied to his message quickly. “Do you need anything?”

The four words stunned him. There were usually some intentions when a man invited a woman out at night. He thought for a moment before responding to her question. “Do I need a reason to find you? Come out for a drink.”

After he sent the message, there was no reply for a long time. Jackson guessed that she must be chatting with Ethan on the phone and being all lovey-dovey. Who was he to her anyway? He smiled in resignation and drove away from the West family residence.

Twenty minutes later, Tiffany returned his message. “I was helping my mom with the laundry. Where are you now? My mom took the car out. I’ll call a cab. Let me tell you first, I can’t drink too much.’

Upon reading the text, Jackson immediately replied with three words. “Wait for me.”

He swiftly turned his car around and arrived at Tiffany’s house soon after that. Worried that it would be inconvenient for her to answer his call, he continued to communicate with her through text messages. “Come down.”

Five minutes later, Tiffany came out in a hurry. She did not even have time to wear her heels properly or put on any makeup. She only changed into an outfit that was appropriate for a nightclub; a silver crop top and a black miniskirt.

Tiffany got into the car and was panting slightly. She said teasingly, “Why did you suddenly invite me out? You have many people to drink with. Should I feel honored?”

“You should feel honored,” Jackson replied shamelessly.

She rolled her eyes at him. “I would have ignored you if you weren’t my ex-boss. But most importantly, you’re the person who provided help in my hours of need. Although my dad didn’t survive the surgery, I still feel grateful to you.”

Jackson feigned a look of disgust and clicked his tongue. “Don’t get all emotional on me! There are times I want to do good deeds too. How are things going between you and Ethan? He really made a fanciful proposal last time. When are you guys planning to get married?”

Even if he knew that Tiffany did not plan to marry Ethan anytime soon but would move in with Ethan instead, he had to feign ignorance lest he exposed Mark. Hence, he could only beat around the bush like this.

Tiffany sighed. “Not anytime soon. He promised to give me time, and I can finally relax a bit. But… I’m moving in with him in two days…” She blurted out. Since she was not a conservative girl in this modern era, moving in with someone was something really common so she had no reason to hide it. However, she subconsciously paid attention to Jackson’s expression when she said that.

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Jackson's expression remained neutral. "You're really planning on moving in with him? Living together is more troublesome than being in a relationship. You guys will face all the trivial matters that you'd face as a married couple. Not only that, but it's easy to lose the spark when a couple lives together too soon. That can lead to higher chances of breaking up. Young people nowadays are really rushing to experience married life. When the time comes, you'll all realize that it isn't as amazing as you think. Most people even regret getting married too early."

Tiffany was annoyed by his tone. "Can you not talk to me like you're much older than me? It's your business if you don't want to get married despite your age. If girls like us don't get married by your age, we'll be called an old maid. Alright, let's drop this topic. I won't be able to come out for a drink and meal with you next time."

That was right. If she moved in with Ethan, she would not be able to hang out with Jackson anymore.

Jackson felt vexed for some reason. "What if you one day realize that Ethan is someone whom you can never be with? You should always have a contingency plan before you do something. Don't just rush into things without thinking it through."

Tiffany was a little confused. "What do you mean? I don't get it."

Jackson had so many things to say, and yet, he could not tell her anything. Before he realized it, his car was speeding at 80 mph. "It's fine if you don't get it. By the time you get it, you won't be asking me what I mean so casually. Let's not talk about this anymore. The last piece of advice I can give you is to not move in with Ethan so soon."

Tiffany wanted to tell him that she was out of options. Other than getting married, she could only stabilize their relationship by moving in with him. Ethan was someone that she could not love fearlessly, but at the same time, she was also reluctant to let go of him. She was frustrated she still could not find the feelings she used to have for him. Love was indeed a strange and confusing thing. In the end, she said nothing. After all, no one liked listening to someone complaining.

Before they even reached the bar, her phone rang. Tiffany felt somewhat guilty when she saw that it was a call from Ethan. She answered the tone warily, “Hello? What is it?”

Ethan’s cold voice came from the other end of the line. “Where are you now?”

She did not dare to lie because she had always known that Ethan was not stupid. “I’m outside with a friend. I’ll be home early.”

He sneered coldly. “With Jackson West right? Isn’t it inappropriate for you to go out with him alone so late at night? Look behind you.”

Her heart instantly skipped a beat. She turned around and saw Ethan’s car behind them. He was tailgating Jackson’s car at a very high speed!

She hung up the phone nervously. “Jackson! Ethan is behind you, and he knows I’m in your car! I’m sure he’ll definitely be upset later. I’m afraid I can’t go drinking with you tonight. Do you mind pulling over?”

Jackson paused for a few seconds before slowing down his car and pulling over.

Ethan pulled over his car in front of them too.

Tiffany quickly got out of his car and went up to Ethan. “Why are you here?”

Ethan had an extremely unsightly expression on his face. “If I didn’t see you in his car by chance, what would you two be doing? Do you understand why I’m in such a hurry to get married now? He’s the unforeseen event I was talking about. When you were dating me back then, you’d never go out alone with other men at night. Is he really that special?”

Upon listening to his words, Tiffany fell silent. Ethan was right. She would never have done something like this back then. However, she could not refuse Jackson’s invitation. It took her a while to muster up the courage to speak her mind. “Yes, he’s special. He gave me a good-paying job when I needed help the most. When my dad was hospitalized and waiting for surgery, he anonymously donated about thirty thousand dollars. His kind deeds saved me when I was on the brink of being crushed. We may not be friends, but there’s no way I can sever ties with him. You don’t have to fight with me over this. If there was something between us, it would have happened long ago.”

Ethan gritted his teeth as he forced himself to suppress the ridiculous jealousy in his heart. “Is that so? Then, I should feel ashamed and personally thank him. After all, he took care of you on my behalf when I wasn’t by your side. I should also be thankful that he doesn’t harbor any intention toward you. I’ll go and have a talk with him.”

When Tiffany saw Ethan get out of his car, she wanted to stop him. However, she knew that there was no stopping the man so she could only walk with him to Jackson’s car.

Jackson rolled down his car window with a somewhat cold and unfriendly expression on his face.

Ethan looked him in the eye and spoke indifferently, “I just learned that Tiffie had received your charity when her father needed the money for a surgery. Thank you for taking care of her in my absence. Now that I’m back, I don’t like my woman getting too close with other men. So can you please mind your actions, Mr. West? As for the thirty thousand dollars, I’ll have someone transfer it to your account tomorrow. I’ll throw in the interest rate as well and make it forty-five thousand dollars. I’m sure that small amount of money isn’t a big deal to you but a favor should still be paid back.”

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Tiffany felt Ethan was being rude, but she knew speaking up now would only worsen things. Therefore, she could only look at Jackson apologetically.

Jackson narrowed his eyes and spoke coldly, “There’s no need for you to repay the favor she owes me. I wasn’t doing you a favor in your absence since both of you were broken up back then. It’s not very nice of you to speak in this manner. God is always watching. Sometimes, you have to forgive others to forgive yourself. A mistake can be forgiven, but repeated mistakes will only prove that a leopard never changes its spots.”

Tiffany was taken aback. She did not expect Jackson would talk back to Ethan. After all, that man never took things personally. She had expected him to leave with a smile on his face.

Ethan clenched his hands into fists when he heard the underlying meaning in Jackson’s words, but he wore a mocking smile on his face. “You seem to have a huge problem with me. What is it that you want to say? Just say it to my face, there’s no need to hold anything back.”

There was no way Jackson could do that, and Ethan knew it. Jackson had no choice but to endure for Mark’s sake. He glanced at Tiffany and ignored Ethan’s provocation. He reversed his car a little before he disappeared into the night

This confrontation was undoubtedly Ethan's victory. He had only provoked Jackson so fearlessly because he knew the man would not reveal the truth. Jackson was never one to be swayed by women despite being surrounded by so many. There was no way he would betray his best friend for a woman.

Back in Ethan's car, Tiffany remained silent as she lowered her head. One was her boyfriend, the other person was Jackson who had helped her when she was in need. If these two men got into a fight, she would not be able to take anybody's sides.

Ethan was a little dissatisfied with her attitude. "What? Are you upset? You can just tell me if you are, there's no need to hide it."

She frowned slightly. "You knew he had helped me before. Why did you have to be so rude?"

He retorted harshly, "How do you expect me to speak to a man who invited my woman out at night alone? Are you feeling sorry for him?"

The way Ethan acted suddenly made Tiffany felt as though she did not know him. She could accept and endure it if he had lost his temper because he cared about her. However, he was being too extreme. It was to the point where he even had issues with Jackson, her benefactor, and used Jackson as an excuse to fight with her.

She really did not enjoy the way he showed his 'care'. Instead, she felt suffocated. "Ethan, I don't like how you're behaving. Please be more rational. Don't forget the fact that he'd helped me even when we didn't know each other. Even a stranger lent a hand in my time of need, and yet, as a boyfriend, you left me and kicked me into the dark abyss when I needed comfort the most. Although you've given me an

explanation, it still doesn't change the fact that you didn't care in the slightest about my feelings when you broke up with me! Do you have any idea what kind of ordeal I went through back then? Compared to your current achievements and money, I prefer to have you by my side when times are hard!"

She continued, "To be honest, I don't even buy your story. If you love me, you would never abandon me in that kind of circumstances without any hesitation. You wouldn't completely vanish from my life while planning for a future where I am included either! Ethan, just who am I to you? Why do I suddenly feel like… I've fallen out of love with you? All this time, I'm just obsessed with the fact that you're my first love, and I can't bear to give up because I still have many regrets in the past. But now, I feel like I want to let go."

Ethan's hands trembled slightly while holding onto the steering wheel. He admitted that he was fed up with her in the past. In fact, he even found her meticulous care to be irritating. He was used to living alone without being controlled by others so he responded to all her care with coldness. He even felt relieved after breaking up with her because he no longer had to put up with being mocked for riding on the Lanes' coattail. Not only that, but he had also finally gotten rid of this nagging and insensitive woman. There was no remorse nor hesitation when he did those things to her family. However, he gradually grew uncomfortable after they broke up for a period of time. He was used to her presence in his life...

All this time, he thought that he had only one purpose in life, and it was none other than to bring Mark Tremont down. However, Tiffany was a surprise to him. Hence, he made the decision to get back with her when the time was right. He could learn to like and take care of someone else. The lonely days terrified him so much that he started feeling guilty toward her and wanted to make up for it. Blackmailing Mark was never part of his original plan because he could always give Arianne the letter from George Sloane without a second thought. In the end, he did not get the outcome he wished for. The woman who used to look at him with starry eyes was finally giving up on him.

It was at this moment he wondered if he was too used to being selfish and did not do well enough. However, he just could not stop the jealousy from welling in his heart when he saw her with some other men! He even felt a trace of fear that she would disappear from his world and cut him off completely.

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“I’m sorry, Tiffie. I lost my composure. Please don’t say that kind of thing, okay? I want to stay with you…” Ethan compromised for the very first time in his life, and it was with her.

Although Tiffany was always indecisive, she would never waver once she had made her decision. “Forget it, Ethan. I just realized that I shouldn’t have been this indecisive from the very beginning. You shouldn’t come back looking for me again; it’s what’s best for both of us. Now that you have everything, you can have any woman you want. Ever since the day we broke up, you’re no longer mine. And now, I belong only to myself. I can’t lie to myself, I’m no longer in love with you.”

After saying that, she opened the car door and left without looking back. Under the dim street lights, her figure faded into the darkness. Ethan didn’t get out of his car to chase after her and just watched as she slowly disappeared from his view. His heart grew cold with every step she took, gradually reverting him to that orphan he used to be. The very same orphan who grew up with George Sloane, the Tremont family’s driver. Something like love should never have a place in his heart, which could hold only hatred in it.

In the end, he withdrew his gaze and forced himself to stop looking at her. His love was absurd from the very beginning. It was he who dragged her into the dark abyss. He wasn’t worthy to stand before her.

On the empty road, Tiffany had to take off her heels after she sprained her ankle. The rough surface of the road scratched the soles of her feet. She had been walking for a while and didn’t even see an empty taxi passing by. To alleviate her sadness, she took her phone out and called Arianne. As soon as the call got through and she heard Arianne’s voice, tears finally streamed down her face. “Ari, it’s over for me and Ethan. I broke up with him because I realized that I am no longer in love with him.”

Her voice was a little shaky but she suppressed her sobs, so Arianne didn’t know she was crying. “Really? Where are you now? Why do I hear the sound of cars passing by? Are you not at home?”

She sniffed and looked around her. “I don’t know where I am either… I’ll be fine though. It’s better to break it off with him since I’m no longer in love anymore. I still can’t help feeling a little sad, since I’m cutting ties with someone I’ve known for more than three years… I know you suck at comforting someone, so please just listen to my grumbling…”

Arianne pushed away Mark, who was exercising on top of her. Wrapping herself in her sleeping robe, she got out of the bed and went to the bathroom. She didn’t expect Tiffany to call her and talk about something so sad at such an awkward timing. It would be inappropriate for her to allow Mark to continue what he was doing. “I’m listening. I don’t think it’s safe for you to be out there all alone. Why don’t I come pick you up? Mark is at home, so I’ll ask him to send me over there.”

On the bed, Mark looked sullen upon being interrupted. He was already very upset; how dare Arianne even suggest that he pick up someone!

Tiffany rejected Arianne’s offer. “No need, I want to take a walk and have some time to myself. I’ll take a cab home later. I feel so much better after talking to you. I’ll hang up now.”

Arianne got a bit worried after she hung up. After a moment of hesitation, she opened the bathroom door and looked at Mark. “Tiffie just broke up with Ethan. She’s really depressed right now. Although she refused my offer to pick her up, I’m still worried about her… Can you perhaps...”

Mark’s pupils immediately constricted at the news of their breakup. He could already guess what would happen next!

Rather than thinking about Tiffany’s feelings, he was only worried about Arianne’s reaction when she saw the letter.

Arianne was a little confused when she noticed the change in his mood. She ended up mistaking it for Mark being upset at the interruption earlier. “Mark… Tiffie is very important to me. Can you help me please? We can always... do that kind of thing next time…” God knew how much courage she needed to say something embarrassing like that.

He shut his eyes and stretched his hand out to her. “Come here…”

She went up to him obediently, only to be pulled into his embrace. He greedily sniffed the scent on her hair and held her so tightly, to the point that he was crushing her. In his deep voice was a trace of shakiness, “I’ll take you there when I’m done…”

Arianne was oblivious to his feelings. She nodded a little shyly since she was still hoping for him to take her to Tiffany. Besides, a quickie wouldn’t take much time so she was just going to do whatever would make him happy.

She didn’t expect him to be rougher than he usually was. The entire process felt like a violent storm and it terrified her. She breathed throatily while enduring his acts, “Mark… what’s wrong… with you?”

Mark didn’t answer her. At this very moment, he wished so badly for time to stand still forever so that she would never leave him. The woman under his body still belonged to him now, but he didn’t dare imagine what would happen after she read the letter...

Everything finally calmed down half an hour later.

After Arianne calmed down from the afterglow, she quickly took a shower and looked at Mark eagerly. While worrying about Tiffany, she neglected Mark's feelings.

Mark got up and walked to her. For the first time ever, he lifted his hand and scratched the tip of her nose lovingly. "Wait for me, I'll go get ready quickly."

Arianne was less shy now. She smiled at him sweetly but was still too embarrassed to watch him walking around in front of her naked so she went downstairs to wait for him.

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About ten minutes later, Mark was done changing and headed downstairs. "Let's go."

Arianne went up to him in delight, while Mark bent his arm naturally and gestured for Arianne to hold his arm. With a slight blush, Arianne wrapped her hand around his arm.

She called Tiffany as soon as she got into the car, asking her, "Tiffie, where are you? Send me your location. I'm coming for you right now."

Tired of walking, Tiffany had been sitting on the side of the road for some time. Mark stepped on the pedal after receiving the location, his focused look while driving attracting Arianne's gaze. She had never imagined that there would be a day when there would be no ill feelings between the two of them. Did the act of her heart thumping mean that she liked him then?

“If you continue looking at me like that, I’ll have to in the middle of the road,” Mark teased when he noticed her heated stare.

“You’re annoying…” Arianne peeled her eyes away from him and looked through the car window in feigned seriousness, observing the scenery passing by.

“Really annoying or not actually annoying?” Mark asked seriously.

“Not actually,” answered Arianne without any hesitation.

After a moment of silence, Mark brought up, seemingly carelessly, “Do you like how things are right now? Would you like to live like this with me? We can leave the past behind, the two of us. I love you, and I know you can try and love me too. Will that work?”

Arianne’s hand suddenly flew to her chest and gripped it tightly at his words. Confused, Mark subconsciously asked, “Have you forgotten to wear your undergarments?”

He received a childish glare from Arianne.

“No…” Arianne had suddenly felt her heart beating wildly after hearing his words, like it was going to jump out of her chest and fly away. Her hand reaching for her chest was completely unconscious, a reflexive action more than anything else.

Mark was impatient as usual. “Good. Answer me, I want to know your answer.”

Arianne bit her lips and nodded.

There was an inexplicable sense of security rushing through Mark, but it was not reassuring. Everything was uncertain right now. Before Arianne saw the letter, everything was only wishful thinking and hoping. He was only deceiving and indulging himself with what they had now.

Finding Tiffany at the location she sent, Arianne saw that her face was stained with tears, both shed and unshed. When the two women were seated in the back of the car in each other’s arms, one crying while the other comforted her, they completely forgot about Mark, taking him as an invisible driver.

Mark could not stand women crying. Arianne rarely cried, at least to his knowledge. Listening to Tiffany’s sobs, he became vexed and rolled down the car window to light up a cigarette. He had finally quit smoking, but he would puff one occasionally, usually when he was frustrated.

Tiffany stretched her hand out when she saw it. “Give me one as well!”

Mark tossed her the nearly full box of cigarettes.

Finishing one cigarette, Tiffany finally got ahold of herself. “Ari, I don’t want to go home. I want to go to the bar.”

Arianne looked at Mark in hesitation. She could not leave Tiffany alone now, but as long as Mark agreed, they could go together.

Mark breathed in lightly. “Let’s go. I’ll make a call for reservation.”

Hearing his words, Arianne thought about him previously being a regular in the nightclubs. He had actually had the club’s number in his phone. Who knew if it was some pretty PR manager…?

Upon arrival at the largest bar in the capital, Mark headed straight to the VIP booth upstairs, Arianne and Tiffany following him. The latter was a regular to places like this, so she was not repelled by the lavish interior. Arianne, however, was rather surprised as she looked around.

Tiffany filled her in on all the information, “This floor has all the VIP booths. Just a reservation alone would cost you at least $1,500, with complimentary alcohol, fruit platter and whatnot. Of course, people who can afford VIP booths spend more than that amount in a single night. Your man is pretty generous.”

Arianne said nothing. Glimpsing at Mark’s back, who was in front of them, she felt a little something. There were pretty waitresses standing beside each booth in this floor, dressed up in black and white bunny uniforms. They even had bunny ears on their heads. It was a treat to the eyes. Mark must have enjoyed coming to these places in the past…

Mark stopped when he reached a booth. Tiffany looked slightly unnatural. She had thought that it would only be the three of them but no, Mark did not reserve a booth. He had probably found out that Jackson and Eric were here when he made the call and decided to just join them. The two men were currently enjoying themselves with a group of girls.

Arianne looked rather uneasy too. Had Mark acted the same as Eric and Jackson in the past? With girls on either side of him?

When Jackson saw Tiffany and Arianne, the playboy smile on his face slowly froze. “Mark… I thought that you were coming alone when you called to say that were you were coming… Why didn’t you tell us earlier that you’d bringing the whole family?”

Mark frowned. “Shut it. Act quick.”

Before Jackson could say anything, a woman with an attractive figure and thick makeup on walked toward Mark with a glass of wine in her hand, naturally leaning towards him. “Mr. Tremont, you haven’t been here in a while. All of us here miss you every single day…”

The woman’s bright red nails circled his chest playfully while Mark’s frown deepened.

“Scram.”

The woman was shocked, suspecting her ears. “Mr. Tremont?”

Chapter 428

Jackson got up quickly and said, “You girls can leave. We won’t be needing any company for the night. Dismissed!”

The group of women finally caught the belligerence of Mark as they left the booth in a flurry. Eric quietly shuffled to Jackson's side while Arianne and Tiffany sat themselves down. Both women were on one side while the three men were on another side. The party atmosphere just now was long gone, as if summer had been swapped with winter in an instant.

Eric could not quite weather it as he braced himself in saying, "Mark isn't a regular here actually. Nor has he ever asked for an escort. What's more, other things…"

"I know, it's fine," Arianne said while slowly pouring her and Tiffany some alcohol.

The more composed she was, the more nervous the three men became. Mark subconsciously swatted at the spot on his chest where the woman had touched just now. "It's fine if she says it's fine. Go ahead and enjoy yourselves…"

The awkward air did not linger too long. With a few shots downed, Tiffany began a game of dice with Eric. No one noticed that she did not dare meet Jackson's eyes. Before Jackson came here, they had agreed to meet, but Ethan cropped out and the rest was history. She did not have the guts to look at Jackson now.

Jackson did not seem to follow her feelings, as he joined the game as well, even pulling Arianne and Mark into it.

Arianne was the only newbie among the group, thus she kept getting made to drink. After a few glasses, she found herself succumbing. "You guys continue. I don't know how to play… If this goes on, I'll have to drink all of these alone."

Mark picked up her glass and emptied it. “I’ll drink for you.”

His action earned him a series of eye rolls from Tiffany, Jackson and Eric. Tiffany teased, “Are you showing off that you have a wife? How are we bachelors and bachelorette supposed to feel?”

Jackson stole a glimpse at Mark with a look, already guessing that Tiffany had broken up with Ethan before he came here, not expecting his invitation to become the fuse that sparked the couple’s breakup.

When the group left the bar, it was already one in the morning. Tiffany was spewing nonsense, being thoroughly drunk. If Jackson had not been holding on to her, she would have already fallen on the floor. Arianne did not drink much, so she was considerably sober. Mark and Eric were fine as well. With something going on at work tomorrow, Eric left first. Mark looked at Jackson. “Send Tiffany back.”

Jackson paused. “You alright?”

Mark shook his head and led Arianne back to his car.

Arianne thought that Jackson was asking if Mark was intoxicated and did not think much of it. However, Mark knew what the question truly signified.

“Thank you,” Arianne said suddenly.

She was grateful that Mark had obliged to her tonight and allowed her to care for Tiffany's feelings. Of course, he had cared about her feelings as well.

Mark turned to look at her with a meaningful smile. "I don't want your thank-you. Show me something tangible if you're thanking me."

Flustered, Arianne glared at him. "You drank. Should we call a driver?"

Mark was indifferent. "I didn't drink a lot. It's fine."

Meanwhile, it took a good amount of effort for Jackson to put Tiffany in his car. He took a short break on the driver's seat, wondering if he should send her back home. It did not seem appropriate now that it was late night. What was he supposed to say if Lillian asked about it?

He usually stayed the farthest away from trouble, especially troubles between men and women. Pondering for a while, he tried to talk to Tiffany, "Tiffany, are you really drunk?"

Tiffany waved her hand. "I'm not drunk, I'm very much sober! Are you sending me home? About what happened tonight… I'm sorry… I apologize on behalf of Ethan!"

Jackson was quiet. Other than slurring her words when she spoke, Tiffany's mind was still working as usual. She was only a sluggish mess and could not walk properly. Was this unconscious?

After some time, Jackson asked, “Do you want to go to my place? It’s too late. It’s inappropriate for me to send you home!”

Tiffany suddenly sat up and hung herself on Jackson’s shoulder. “So it’s better to go to your place? If something… something happens… I can’t prove myself.”

Jackson smiled helplessly. “You’ve already broken up with Ethan. Do you care about proving your innocence? That’s it then.”

At the Tremont Estate, Mark pressed Arianne by the door once they entered, kissing her fervently like he was devouring her.

Under the influence of alcohol, Arianne did not reject him and even tried to wrap her arms around his waist.

They did not make out for too long downstairs, returning to their bedroom after a while. The noise woke Mary, who was asleep, with a startle. As she got up and went to turn on the light in the living room to check, she was quite astonished to see haphazardly placed shoes at the doors. Mark had always placed his shoes neatly when he got home…

Her doubt was answered when the blushing sounds came from upstairs. Mary smiled with a shrug and went back to sleep after turning off the light.

When they were done, Arianne panted softly in Mark’s embrace. “Do you want to call Jackson to see if he’s sent Tiffie home?”

Chapter 429

Mark shook his head. “It’s okay. Don’t worry about them. He won’t do anything recklessly even if he doesn’t send her back.”

Arianne was not that worried when it came to Jackson. She was only concerned about it being dangerous, since both of them had drunk. “Okay… Uh… you used to frequent the bar, huh? The people there seem to be familiar with you…” Of course they were, that flirtatious woman was already latching herself onto him!

“Jealous?” Mark asked instead of answering.

“No! Let’s sleep,” Arianne denied with a pout.

Mark adjusted their position and took Arianne fully into his embrace. “I’m taking you for a holiday tomorrow. You can’t say no.” He had thought about it. With the breakup of Ethan and Tiffany, he could only delay things, take Arianne away, and prevent her from coming into contact with Ethan and the letter. He would take however long he had to prolong it.

Arianne did not reject him, but she made a condition as well. “Can we take Tiffany as well? She’s just broken up with Ethan, so she needs a distraction too. Besides… It’ll get awkward going alone with you. Can we?”

Mark agreed only after a moment of hesitation. “Okay…”

He was afraid of her not wanting to go. As long as she agreed to leave here with him temporarily, forget Tiffany, he would say yes even if they had to bring Rice Ball along.

Compared to their comfort, Jackson was having hell. His house was the only one lit among all the other White Water Bay villas. Tiffany had thrown up since she arrived and he could only help her up nicely, afraid that she might fall into the toilet…

After throwing up, Tiffany was disgusted with herself and insisted on showering. Jackson waited for her at the door, holding on to the robe. Whenever there was no sound coming from the bathroom, he knocked until he received her response.

Suddenly hearing the sound of teeth brushing inside, Jackson was shaken. “Don’t tell me that you’re using my toothbrush!”

Wrapped in a towel, Tiffany opened the door slightly and popped her head out. There was still white toothpaste foam in her mouth. “Your toothbrush? Isn’t this my house?”

“Never mind… Brush your teeth. I just changed the toothbrush anyway. As long as you don’t mind that I’ve used it before…”

With her teeth brushed, Tiffany wiped her mouth dry in contentment and leisurely made her way to Jackson’s bed and lay down, boldly spreading her legs apart. Jackson threw the robe on her in terror. “I didn’t see anything. I’m going to sleep on the couch outside. Call me if there’s anything. Don’t do anything else, I’m utterly exhausted…”

Tiffany suddenly turned to look at him with an unsettling smile. She generously patted the space beside her. “Come sleep beside me, it’s not like we’ve never slept together before!”

Jackson admitted that he really wanted to go over and lie down to sleep together. Like she said, it was not like they had never slept together before, but that was when both of them were sober. Right now, he had no confidence in himself. He was not a saint. “Knock it off.”

Tiffany teased him with a lisp, “You said that you’ll date me if I break up. Are you backing down now? Tsk, tsk… you men are all liars.”

Jackson rubbed the space between his brows helplessly. “Tell me this when you’re sober tomorrow morning. What you’re saying now doesn’t count. Alright, quit it now.” He then closed the door and went to the living room, not having the desire to sleep on the couch…

Sometime later, Jackson felt a weight on him that was knocking him out of breath. Struggling to push away that weight, he heard Tiffany’s voice in the dark. “I’m cold…”

Feeling a headache, Jackson went to turn on the light without his slippers. Luckily, the girl was in her bathrobe, so she was not exposed. “The bed has a blanket. I just have a thin one with me… Don’t be difficult. I have a meeting tomorrow morning.”

Muttering while wrapping herself up with the blanket, Tiffany laid down where Jackson had been sleeping previously. “There’s no blanket on the bed. Stop bluffing me…”

Seeing that she was settling down on the couch, Jackson turned off the light and went to his bedroom. He did not like sleeping on the couch anyway. This was the best. Upon entering the room, he realized

that the blanket was kicked off to the floor. He picked it up quietly and went to sleep. Before falling asleep soundly, Tiffany came in again. “See, I said that the blanket is with you…”

No longer able to hold himself back, Jackson pulled her to the bed. “Make a fuss one more time and I won’t be nice!”

Tiffany provoked him boldly. “Then don’t be nice… I know that you can fight, you’re very good at it. Try and lay a finger on me?”

Her incessant talking caused Jackson to lose it as he pressed forward to stop her mouth with his. He had been a little frustrated and agitated, but when his lips touched her soft ones, his lower abdomen tensed as his hand subconsciously went to her waist.

When he saw Arianne, she was usually thin and weak, but she was eye-catchingly fresh in her beauty. As for Tiffany, she was not a stunning beauty at first glance, but the more he looked at her, the prettier she appeared. She was average in figure but there was a sense of leanness when he touched her.

Perhaps realizing that she could no longer move, Tiffany began struggling. “Mm, mm… Let… let go…”

Chapter 430

Moving away slightly, Jackson was still above her. “Why should I let you go now? Tell me that you’ll quit fussing first!”

Tiffany’s hand went to Jackson’s head and gave it a rough rub. “No! I don’t feel good! I need to vent!”

With his breath choked from the touch, as no woman had dared touch his hair yet, Jackson's gaze darkened. He pinned her troublesome hands above her head and said, "The worst it can get is falling in your hands. You provoked me first, don't regret it."

Before Tiffany could fight back, Jackson closed the distance between their lips. It had been light kisses earlier, but he deepened them this time. Tugging at the belt of Tiffany's bathrobe, he saw that Tiffany looked rather petite in the large robe. Jackson's rational mind came back in the last moment as he asked in a low tone, "You and Ethan, have you…?"

Tiffany shook her head vehemently. "No! We didn't get to… Not before our first breakup… Not now either…"

Recalling that she had unintentionally said that she was a pure and innocent girl, she realized that her words meant that she was still a virgin…

Jackson repressed the burning passion within him and went to the living room, locking Tiffany in the bedroom. The small blaze from the cigarette both dimmed and brightened up the dark. If she had replied that she had done it with Ethan, he would not have hesitated at all.

…

Around noon, the first thing Arianne did after she woke up was to call Tiffany. The moment the call was connected, Tiffany exploded in an avalanche of questions. "Why am I in Jackson's house? I remember that he sent me home last night and he seemed to be in my house too…?"

Arianne put some distance between her ear and her phone. “Tiffie, speak softer please. I almost went deaf. You mean you’re in Jackson’s place? Are you guys okay?”

Tiffany broke out of it. Other than her untied robe, there was nothing peculiar. “No… I’m probably okay… I think he slept on the couch, since it looks like someone slept on it. He’s not here now either. Isn’t he scared of me robbing his house?”

Arianne was quite tickled, “I noticed that the last time I was at Jackson’s place too. His house is huge but it’s also quite empty. There’s nothing too valuable there. If you’d like, you can move his whole house away. Back to the topic, Mark said that he’d taking me out today. Probably out somewhere farther. I want to take you along and he agreed. I think we’ll leave at night.”

Tiffany agreed easily. “Sure, I’ll pay for myself. I’m not taking advantage of you guys like this, I’m not poor now. I’ll go home to pack and wait for you. Give me a call when you’re coming.”

As Arianne hung up, Mary came into the bedroom directly. “Ari, Sir asked that you go to the office after you wake up.”

Humming in acknowledgement, Arianne got up happily, washing up and changing into her favorite white slip dress, even putting on some light makeup. Looking at her lively reflection in the mirror, she realized that Mark had really put the past away, just like he said he said. Perhaps she could live well without leaving the Tremont’s, all because she had him.

Upon arriving at Mark’s office, Arianne had thought that the first thing he would notice was the change, in her. She wasn’t expecting him to ask for her phone first. She obediently passed him the device after fishing it out from her purse. “What are you doing with my phone?”

Mark gave her a quick glance, “I have an issue with my phone, I need yours to do something. I ordered dessert and milk tea for you. Go ahead and have them, they’re over there.”

He had not discovered that she had dressed up! Somewhat disappointed, Arianne sat down on the couch and watched him while she had the sweet treat.

Mark’s attention was fully on her phone. He had changed the settings on Arianne’s phone so that it blocked all unsaved number and text messages, but he was not yet relieved. “I’ll change your sim card.”

“Why? I’m fine with this number…” Arianne was puzzled.

“I don’t like it,” Mark’s tone was adamant.

Not only was he stopping Ethan from finding her personally, he was stopping him from disclosing the letter’s contents to Arianne through phone calls or texts. This was the reason he had asked her to come to him in the office right after she woke up. Mark wanted Arianne to stay right by his side.

It was just a phone number, so Arianne did not insist. “It’s up to you, change it if you want to. I called Tiffie. When are we departing?”

Thinking about it, Mark answered, “I’ll finish work a bit earlier. I’ve already asked Henry to pack our suitcase. We leave around four, but let Tiffany prepare in advance. Oh yeah, Eric and Jackson are coming with us too.”

To Arianne, it was great that there were more people. She could prevent feeling restless due to being alone with Mark. She would eventually get used to being natural with him, but they were not there yet.

Returning home, Tiffany began to pack.

Seeing this, Lillian asked, “Where are you going?”

Without lifting her head, Tiffany answered, “I’m going on a holiday with Ari for a few days. Oh yeah, I’ve broken up with Ethan.”

Lillian’s face fell. “Again? Did you decide or did he mention it? You guys were already talking about marriage, are you sure about this? You can’t even date properly, what can you do? And you’re out for a holiday? Stop wasting money!”