Ruling 431

Chapter 431

Tiffany fought back. “I brought it up. I feel like I can’t go back to how it used to be with him anymore. Of course, it should be broken off as soon as I know that it won’t work out. It’s my personal affair, and it has nothing to do with you! You’re just afraid that I won’t be able to find some rich man, aren’t you? If Ethan weren’t Mark’s younger brother, you wouldn’t be supporting us being together. Since we’re on the subject of money, I’ll also remind you that the fortune fairy who gifted you a house is gone now. You’ll have to spend money on moving, so don’t go splurging on unnecessary things. We’ve gotten a taste of poverty, so don’t bring it back upon yourself.”

Lillian knew her daughter’s temper. From what she said, she knew that there was no turning back. “Forget it, I won’t waste my saliva on you either. Go out and have fun. When you come back, find a proper job. We can’t spend the money without making something in turn. Forget about moving into a mansion with that little money I have; it’s fine if we buy a bigger condo. Think properly when you date next time too. Date with the goal of getting married, don’t go latching yourself to men without a car and a house. I won’t approve of them!”

Rarely did Lillian not make a big show of protest—Tiffany could not help smiling genuinely. “Okay, mom!”

Around four in the evening, Mark and Arianne went back to the Tremont Estate for their luggage and went straight for Tiffany. The five of them met at the airport. Other than Mark, both Jackson and Eric were not in suits today. They were wearing casual attire, making Mark stand out like a sore thumb instead.

When Tiffany saw that Jackson and Eric were there too, she was no longer surprised. Just like when they had gone to the bar, she had thought that it would only be the three of them, but it was five in the end. No, to be particular, there was a group of bargirls too. Mark was so random and sporadic that Arianne had followed him. The only thing that Tiffany could do was to get used to it.

Boarding the plane, Mark and Arianne's seats were next to each other, and Eric and Tiffany's, while Jackson was alone. Flying first class was not crowded, so the journey was much more relaxed.

In the last few minutes before they took off, a tall woman in sunglasses boarded the plane in a hurry and headed straight to Jackson. "Sorry, my seat's inside."

When Jackson looked up at the woman, she suddenly looked delightfully surprised as she took off her sunglasses, revealing her overly fixed face. "Mr. West? What a coincidence! Our seats are together too!"

Jackson was startled before he plastered on a stiff smile and pulled his long legs aside. "Yeah… what a coincidence."

The woman began chatting after she sat down. "We haven't seen each other in more than... what, half a year? Do you have someone new now? Where are you going? We might end up with the same destination."

Jackson could already feel Mark and Eric's teasing gazes as he braced himself and said, "We're going to Sanya for a few days."

The woman hooked arms with him casually. "That's really a coincidence! I'm going to Sanya too! I'm there for a commercial shooting. Let's hang out then!"

Jackson did not reply, feeling a little choked. The woman's face did not look as botched half a year ago; he nearly could not recognize her… Smiling apologetically, he went to Eric and spoke with the lowest voice, "Change seats with me please…"

Eric arched his brow. "Nope. Your lovers are truly everywhere. Why should I mistreat myself when you should be relishing in it? I'm not the one she likes. It's that small time actress, right? Lisa? I have an impression; she's one of the considerably better looking ones among the women you've had… but she's had too much work done now."

Tiffany could not stand it. "I'll change with you." She then got up and sat herself down on Jackson's seat.

The woman was quite upset when she saw that the person beside her was swapped. "Who are you to Mr. West?"

Tiffany's temper was never the best one. "I'm his queen. He thinks that you're too noisy."

The woman flushed, no longer saying anything as she put on her sunglasses and earphones.

When the plane landed, it was already night. The sky had darkened completely. The five of them came to the five-star hotel that they had booked and planned to call it a night, only starting the fun tomorrow. Coincidentally, Lisa was also staying in this hotel and her room was right opposite of Jackson's room, only a two-meter wide aisle separating them.

Lisa winked at Jackson before she entered her room. "Mr. West, see you!"

As if knowing that Jackson would make a request to switch rooms, Eric scurried into his room in the blink of an eye. Jackson grabbed Tiffany pleadingly. “Your Majesty, please be kind…”

Tiffany rolled her eyes at him. “This is karma.”

When midnight came, Tiffany was woken up by hasty knocks. She opened the door, peeved, only to see a drunken Lisa. She rolled her eyes, “The person you’re looking for has swapped rooms with me, and I am still Her Majesty. Look properly and go away! I won’t be nice if you knock again!”

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Lisa had an opinion about her since the flight. With the alcohol in her system now, she stabbed a finger in front of Tiffany and questioned, “What Majesty? You’re Mr. West’s new girl, huh? Don’t be too full of yourself. The new will overthrow the old, and you’ll be replaced sooner or later. We’re on the same path, so no need to look down on each other. You’re young, that’s all, but he’ll dump you in less than three months. I was with him for three months too, a relatively long time, you know? What’s more, he bought me everything I wanted… Too bad, it won’t last. Good luck to you.”

Tiffany was repulsed and cussed at Jackson inwardly. Before Lisa left, she slammed the door right in front of her face and texted Jackson. “‘He bought me everything I want’, this is what Lisa said. Please, I can still feel shame when you can’t. If I’m woken up again, I’ll castrate you!”

Jackson did not reply when he saw the message, heaving a long sigh while laying on the bed. He wished that he would have known that he would meet an ex-lover here too. He blamed himself for being too unbridled in the past…

On the other side, Arianne tossed and turned in bed, unable to fall asleep. She was used to the bed she slept in; the one in the hotel room was too soft. The pillow was higher than the one at home too. She could not get used to them.

Mark had already fallen asleep but was woken up by Arianne. “What’s the matter?”

Arianne grumbled, “Can’t sleep. This is not my bed…”

Moving the pillow under her away, Mark replaced it with his arm and wrapped her in his embrace. “Is this better? Just pretend that you’re at home…”

Adjusting herself, Arianne felt better, but it was still a lot more different than being home. “I feel like this holiday is a punishment to myself. I can’t even sleep properly…”

Mumbling to her with closed eyes, Mark said, “I don’t think it’s too bad… This way, you won’t keep thinking about leaving the house to go somewhere far, since you’ll need a bed you’re familiar with or else you won’t sleep well.”

Arianne paused and diverted the topic. “That Lisa on the plane… She’s been together with Jackson, right? A small time actress too… Did you used to be like him too?”

Mark nuzzled her hair with a smile. “What are you thinking? I’m not like Jackson. I wasn’t interested in women before I was eighteen, and by then, I became too focused on taking care of a pig. I don’t have the time and effort for the girls out there.”

Taking care of a pig? Arianne was lost for a few seconds before she caught up. “You’re the pig!”

Mark laughed heartily, most of his drowsiness wearing off as well. “Jackson is the type who doesn’t want to get married. Dates, but never looks for marriage. His life’s goal is to sleep with every woman he finds easy on the eyes. To him, every woman is a different book; it’s only enthralling to keep changing and flipping different books. Eric and I have never condoned this thinking, don’t you worry. Speaking of which, he actually hasn’t been out sleeping around lately… According to his previous record, he wouldn’t mind women who send themselves knocking on his door, like when he met Lisa just now; they would have been together tonight. He’s a little strange tonight, probably because Tiffany was there.”

Arianne seemed to have caught onto something. “You think it has something to do with Tiffie?”

She was not happy with how Mark had stopped his words halfway. The suspense felt horrible, but Mark did not give her a chance to protest. The con of the bed being too soft was that any action that was too big would make strange noises. Arianne was anxious. “The bed is too loud. We’ll be heard. Eric’s just next door…”

Mark was not the slightest bit worried. “What are you thinking? The five-star hotel can close down if its soundproofing is that bad. Relax.”

…

The next morning after they had breakfast in the hotel, Jackson rented a SUV and the group made their way to the beach.

The sun was burning despite having just risen. Mark was finally not wearing a formal suit, dressed in short sleeves and board shorts. After a while of fun at the beach, Jackson caught Lisa and an entourage making their way to where they were with a load of equipment. Were they here to shoot the commercial?

He suggested that they rent a yacht to go to the sea without hesitation. Tiffany looked toward where Lisa was and instantly knew what Jackson was thinking. She taunted him mercilessly, “It’s hugs and kisses when you guys get along, but once you don’t, it’s hide and seek when you meet.”

Unable to argue, Jackson spent a fortune and rented a medium-sized yacht with a humorless chuckle. Tiffany and Arianne enjoyed the sea breeze with iced drinks, laying under the umbrella on the deck while the three men in sunglasses chatted with wine on the side. The sapphire sea greeted them with soft waves as the yacht pulsed gently, somehow lullabying.

Arianne fell asleep just like that. She did not get a good sleep last night, so she took a nap on the beach lounge chair.

Mark got a thin cover to drape it over her while Tiffany teased softly, “Had a lot of work last night? Ari could fall asleep even when we’re out. I really salute the two of you.”

Mark explained subconsciously, “She picks her bed.”

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Eric began heckling as well, “Stop trying to explain it. An explanation means that you’re hiding something, and whatever you’re hiding is the truth. The more you describe it, the worse it becomes. We’re all very much aware of what’s going on. There’s nothing to be embarrassed about. You’re not that young anymore, Mark. Stop acting so bashful.”

Mark happened to be in a good mood, so he didn't quibble with them. Instead, he stepped aside and gazed into the landscape in a distance, holding a bottle of beer. He enjoyed the gentle sea breeze. It was a rare moment of peace.

Tiffany was bored. She picked up her bottle of beer, walked next to Eric and asked, "How long do you plan on vacationing here?"

Eric shrugged, "Don't know. It's up to you guys. I'm fine with anything."

For some strange reason, Jackson found the sight of Eric and Tiffany sitting together unsightly, "We'll definitely go back in a week. We can't leave our companies alone, it's not like we're bums."

Tiffany narrowed her eyes, "Are you calling Ari and I bums? I really hate listening to you, it's like you're always trying to rip my heart out."

Eric laughed so hard that he was out of breath, "Seriously, Tiffany. You're the first person who's ever been annoyed with anything that Jackson has said. No woman can stand up to his teasing. You're the only one who can render him speechless."

Jackson lowered his eyes, turned around and walked away. One out of the group of five would feel awkward. He was now the odd one out. He had noticed that Tiffany had purposefully distanced herself from him. She wasn't as close to Eric as she was with him.

They finally returned to the shore at sunset.

Lisa's group was pretty much done with shooting the advertisement. They were frolicking on the beach and did not leave.

Lisa swayed her hips amorously and moved closer when she saw Jackson. Her already skimpy swimsuit was close to a wardrobe malfunction, thanks to her extensive movements.

"Hey, Jackson. Wanna have a drink tonight? I know a bar nearby that serves pretty good alcohol, the vibes are pretty great too…"

This time, Jackson did not reject Lisa's invitation, "We'll talk later. See how it goes."

Lisa cast aside all her reservations at this sign of a chance. She pressed herself against him, "Could you give me your number then? You've changed your number so I can't contact you."

After Jackson gave Lisa his number, she boldly planted a kiss on the side of his face, leaving a red lipstick stain, "Then I'll see you tonight…"

Tiffany got goosebumps all over her body. She waited for Lisa to walk far into the distance before roasting Jackson, "Jackson West, is that your type?"

Jackson did not look at her, "I'm not picky, you'll do just fine too," he replied in a nonchalant manner.

Tiffany's expression turned sullen. She quietly pulled on UV-protection wear. Was he ridiculing her for her flat chest? Her boobs weren't that small.

Arianne's cheeks were flushed from the heat, "Can I take off my UV protection wear?" She had been wearing it ever since they left the hotel. Mark refused to let her take it off, despite the fact that she was wearing a swimsuit inside.

"Nope," Mark flatly denied her request. Then he pulled out the magazine that he had brought along with him and fanned her. He certainly wasn't going to let other men look at her body. He was the only one allowed to see her in skimpy outfits like swimsuits.

After they had returned to the hotel and had a rest, Tiffany sent a message to their temporary group chat, suggesting they go out for dinner. She had had a lot of alcohol in the day and was starving now. Eric used his phone to check the map and chose a nearby barbecue restaurant: How about barbecue? Does anyone else have any suggestions? Otherwise, let's just have dinner there."

Jackson quickly replied to the group: I have something to do. Not going. You guys go ahead.

Mark and Arianne were fine with the barbecue restaurant. Jackson was the only one absent. Everyone was well aware that he had gone to see Lisa. No one called him out, except Tiffany who boldly poked at him: You won't need to exchange rooms with me tonight, right? I'm just worried that you might get drunk and forget about the room exchange, then squash me while you and Lisa are humping around in bed.

Jackson simply replied to her with an “mm”, and seemed very cold and distant. The group chat promptly went silent. No one sent any other messages.

At dinner, Mark patiently helped Arianne in barbecuing her meat then placed them on her plate after it was done. He only started eating once he made sure that she was nearly done with her food.

Seeing this, Eric barbecued some meat for Tiffany as well. Men should be more gallant, after all, regardless of whether he was with a lover or a friend.

After dinner, the foursome took a walk around the nearby night market. Eric glanced at Mark and Arianne, then pulled out the small camera that he had brought along with interest, “Hey, you two. Look over here.”

Arianne and Mark turned to the side at the same time, and Eric captured that very moment. They were walking side by side. Arianne was dressed in a long white dress with a blue floral pattern. She had let her hair down, and her light brown sandals set off her fair ankles and dainty toes perfectly. She looked cute and lovable standing next to Mark. He, on the other hand, didn’t like the heat, so he was dressed in a white t-shirt and black sports shorts. He wore white sneakers and his hair was choppy, but in an elegant kind of way. He didn’t look as cold as he usually did in his suits. The pair had very nice skin and looked very photogenic.

The night market was crowded with people, and the lights were not all that bright, a stark and bright contrast with the neon lights of the buildings around them.

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Eric was very happy with this picture; he looked as if he had gotten a shot of some kind of precious treasure. “I’ll print this one out when we get back. One for me, and one for you two. I’m not sure why I’ve never noticed this, but you two look like a match made in heaven.”

Arianne lowered her head and smiled bashfully. Mark smiled as well and indulgently wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

They returned to the hotel to get some rest once they began feeling tired.

Jackson was still out when they arrived at the hotel. Eric clicked his tongue, “I think he’s going to have a really good time tonight.”

Tiffany went back to her room without another word, probably because she was feeling exhausted. When she saw Jackson’s things in her room, she irritably threw them aside. She had initially intended on having a good night’s sleep, but when she laid down, she realized that the bed was filled with his scent.

Left with no choice, she went to Jackson’s room again. They had been changing rooms from the start of their trip. She certainly did not want to sleep in a room filled with a man’s scent!

Suddenly, someone opened the door just as she had fallen fast asleep. When she realized that she was in a foreign country, she scrambled up from the bed and turned on the light, “Who are you?”

Jackson, who was about to close the door, had come face to face with her, “You haven’t… gone back to your room?”

She heaved a sigh of relief and lay down again, “Sleeping back there felt weird. Let’s continue the exchange. You can go back to Lisa’s place anyway. You have two rooms to sleep however you want, so why fight with me over this one?”

He mumbled something underneath his breath, then shuffled out, “Have a good night then.”

Tiffany felt depressed. She couldn’t figure out why she had lost her head.

The next day, the group of five was joined by a new addition — Lisa.

The advertising team that had been following Lisa around had already left. Lisa had stayed back to keep Jackson company.

Now that the group had three boys and three girls, they seemed more ordinary now. The only difference was the change in atmosphere due to Lisa’s presence. Lisa was friendly to everyone, especially men. When she realized that Mark wasn’t paying her any attention, she closed in on Eric and Jackson. Jackson was an ATM machine that she could never obtain; she was well aware of that. She and Jackson would have nothing to do with each other once they left this place. Hooking up with Eric wouldn’t be a bad idea.

Sanya’s beaches were crowded in the summer. Lisa was wearing a bold swimsuit, splashing around in the water. She would always remember to shoot a coquettish glance at Jackson and Eric, who were relaxing under the sunshade, from time to time. Tiffany was getting nauseous, “Ari, is something wrong with Lisa’s eyes? She keeps fluttering them. Is she trying to spoil her eyes?”

Arianne put her hand over her mouth and giggled, “I don’t know either… You don’t seem to like her very much, Tiffie.”

“I don’t know her that well, but she’s tagging along for some reason,” Tiffany replied in a muffled voice, “Of course, I wouldn’t like her… Look at what she’s wearing. She might as well be naked. It’s like she’s afraid that people wouldn’t notice how big her boobs are! Those men are ogling at her. Jackson is really hardcore.”

Arianne tightened her collar shamefully.

Tiffany continued, “Will you stop ‘siding with the enemy’? Look at the makeup on her face. It’d be smudged all over her face if the waterproof quality weren’t good enough. She probably looks at least thirty under all of that makeup!”

Mark chuckled as he listened to Tiffany’s grumbles. Arianne blushed as she heard his unconscious giggles, “Alright, Tiffie… Stop grumbling. It’s only for a few days, just try and put up with it.”

Mark got up and walked to the side, “Enjoy your chat. I’ll stop eavesdropping. Your topics aren’t suitable for me.”

Tiffany curled her lips, “You should have stepped aside long ago. Because of you, Arianne’s too shy to have a casual talk with me.”

Arianne laughed helplessly, “Alright, that’s enough. You’re acting jealous.”

Tiffany was taken aback, “Jealous? Of who? Jackson? Yeah, right.”

Jackson dragged Mark along with him into the ocean. Mark stared into the distance and spoke with a deadpan look on his face, “If you have feelings for Tiffany, stop fooling around with Lisa. She’s broken it off with Ethan, and I’ve made all necessary preparations. You don’t have anything to worry about.”

Jackson’s tone was exactly like Tiffany’s, “You think I have feelings for her? Yeah, right. I’m not worried about a thing.”

Mark did not say anything more. Instead, he swam towards a more secluded part of the water.

Jackson glanced over towards Tiffany’s direction. Suddenly, Lisa popped up from underneath the wanted and embraced him, splashing water all over his face, “What are you staring at? We agreed to meet in my room last night, why didn’t you come by? Tonight should be alright, right? I know that we won’t have anything to do with each other once we leave this place, so just consider it my way of leaving you with a fond memory, okay?”

He pushed her away with a straight face, “Your breasts are suffocating me.”

Lisa snorted, “Could you not say these things with such a straight face? Don’t you like it? I had to go through two surgeries to get these. Stop acting like a normal guy. Do you really think that I won’t know how wild you really are?”

He suddenly changed the topic, “How is it like to be in love?”

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His sudden change in topic surprised Lisa, but she answered him anyway, “I think that when I’m in love with a man, I’m the only one allowed to spend his money. All those other wh*res are not allowed to be near him. You’ve had so many women, Jackson. Have you never had any real feelings for any of them?”

As he stared at Lisa, he was suddenly disgusted by women like her. That was not love. That was no different from a material transaction. What felt even more terrifying was the fact that every other woman he had been with was just like her. In the past, he never really cared and had always felt that spending money for a bit of pleasure was the most normal thing to do, “I don’t think I have…”

They didn’t go back to the hotel at night. Instead, they found a nice spot along the beach, set up a camping tent and a barbecue. Their goal was to watch the sunrise.

The winds at sea were strong at night, and the temperature plummeted as well. Arianne sat on a small portable stool and stared at the barbecue grill. She looked like an obedient young girl. Mark fixed his gaze on her the entire time and never really turned away. There was a kind of yearning in his eyes and many other complex feelings, interweaving between each other. In the past, he could not get along with her at all. Now, the future was uncertain, and all he cared about was the peace that they now enjoyed. He regretted having mistreated her in the past; it was like they would separate at the very next moment.

“Mark, quit staring at Ari. It’s not like anything’s going to grow out of her face. You’re a married couple now. Aren’t you tired of staring at each other like that?” Tiffany munched on her barbecued kebabs as she took a jab at him.

Mark turned away and stared at the black surface of the sea in frustration, giving no reply.

Arianne's mind had been wandering the entire time, so she didn't realize that Mark had been gazing at her. She returned to her senses and felt slightly embarrassed, "Tiffie, doesn't your mouth ever stop? Get me two kebabs."

Seeing that the kebabs in Tiffany's hands had been thoroughly finished, Lisa snatched a batch of kebabs that Jackson had just finished barbecuing, "Jackson, these kebabs that you've barbecued are so delicious. I've never noticed it before."

Tiffany's outstretched hand, which was just about to take some kebabs, faltered back. She angrily downed her entire can of beer and threw the empty can into the rubbish bag. The can crashed loudly against the other items in the trash, promptly silencing everyone.

Arianne and Eric were puzzled, unsure of what was going on. Only Mark, Jackson, and Lisa had managed to figure it out. Lisa spoke up in a mystified voice, "Are you mad, Tiffany? Why are you angry? Don't just throw a tantrum like that. It's kind of a mood killer."

Tiffany smirked, "Are you telling me that you can't figure out why I'm pissed? You're eating the entire batch of freshly barbecued kebabs. Are you a pig?"

Eric burst into laughter, unable to hold himself back. Lisa was so mad that she turned red in the face, "You're the one who's been eating them!"

Tiffany showed her her hands, "My hands are empty. Who's the one holding a bunch of kebabs? You lesser known starlets are always making claims about being on diets, but you eat like pigs behind closed doors. I'll bet that you didn't get rid of the fat in your body through a fancy diet, but plastic surgery instead, didn't you?"

Anyone who heard her would know that Tiffany's goal was to point out the fact that Lisa was an obscure, no-name starlet who relied on plastic surgery. Every word was a gem.

Lisa couldn't win the argument, so she flirted with Jackson instead with accurate movements, pushing out her breasts and sticking out her butt, "Did you hear what she said, Jackson?"

Jackson focused his attention on the barbecue grill. His lips curled in the most subtle manner against the flickering flames, "I won't get involved in your womanly squabbles. There's no use in asking for my help. However… you have been eating quite a lot."

Tiffany finally had her comeback. She flashed a victorious smile and rolled her eyes at Lisa.

When Arianne and Tiffany went to the nearby washroom, Lisa tagged along, "I want to come too! I'm afraid of going alone. Let's go together!"

Tiffany was well aware that she had an ulterior motive, so she didn't bother with her.

Lisa dropped all pretense once they had walked far away enough, "Tiffany, you're in love with Jackson, aren't you?"

Tiffany imitated Lisa by pushing out her breasts and sticking out her butt, then cryptically replied, "Is that any of your f*cking business? Do you live in the Pacific Ocean? Is that why you have so much space

to concern yourself with these things? I thought you wanted to take a piss? Has your piss flooded your brain from holding it all in? Quit bugging me and get lost!”

Lisa burst out laughing, instead of going into a rage, “Are you acting this way out of exasperation? If Jackson really was interested in you, he wouldn’t hook up with me. I may be a tool to relieve his loneliness for now, but you’re less than a tool. You’re nothing! I’ve done my research; the Lane family went bankrupt ages ago. You’re a pauper, which is worse than what I am. Why ridicule me by calling me an obscure, no-name starlet? I’m seriously wondering where you got your balls from.”

Arianne couldn’t bear listening to any more of this, “Lisa, we’ve only allowed you to tag along with us for Jackson’s sake. If you’re going to insist on causing trouble, I’m pretty sure that Jackson wouldn’t choose you over us. You know that you’re nothing but a tool, so why do you make it sound like it’s such an achievement? Don’t you find that a disgrace? No one’s sneering at you for being an obscure starlet. Unknown stars can turn into A-list celebrities too. Your working style is the problem here. You’re never going to make it if you keep relying on men. You lack abilities of your own, so you have no choice but to fool around with men and make the most out of your youth.”

Lisa could afford to provoke Tiffany, but could not afford to do the same to Arianne. Hence, she simply turned around and left angrily.

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Lisa acted as if nothing had happened when she arrived back at the beach. She continued talking and joking with Jackson. Realizing that Jackson was too busy barbecuing skewers to eat or drink, she took the initiative to feed him some barbecued meat skewers and some beer. She even remembered to glance provocatively at Tiffany from time to time.

Tiffany was enraged, but her head was clearer thanks to the icy sea breeze. Why was she angry? Jackson could be nice to anyone to whatever degree he wanted, and it had nothing to do with her. However, why did she have to get involved? She had always had a bad impression of Lisa, even on the plane. Wasn’t Jackson to blame for causing all of this?

Now that her mind was clear, she could no longer be bothered to compare herself with her. She concentrated on eating and drinking and would chat with Arianne from time to time.

Tiffany and Arianne huddled together in a tent late at night, listening to the rolling tides and chatting softly. Tiffany suddenly got up and stuck her head towards Jackson's tent in the middle of their chat. The light was still on in his tent, and its material was thin enough for her to make out the figure inside. Lisa was inside too. Their shadows were separated, and it looked like they were chatting.

Arianne saw right through her and found it rather hilarious, "Everyone's here. They wouldn't be that eager to hump each other's brains out at a time like this, right? Stop meddling. The sun will be coming up in less than four hours. Let's not sleep, or we'll miss the sunrise. I'm a little hungry. Could you check if the fire in the barbecue pit is still burning, Tiffie? So we can cook something for ourselves?"

Tiffany grunted in reply, got up, and walked towards the grill. The charcoals were still burning, but they were close to burning out soon. She added a little more charcoal. Her hair was blown all over her face thanks to the sea breeze. It felt itchy, so she rubbed her cheeks a little, leaving a black smudge.

Arianne burst into laughter at the sight of this, "Tiffie, there's something on your face. You look like a large spotted cat!"

Tiffany mischievously smeared some on her face as well, "There. Now we have two!"

For some reason, probably because of wrong technique, Tiffany couldn't seem to ignite the flames. She had even managed to extinguish the previously tiny flame and ended up getting ashes all over her body.

When she saw the way Arianne was staring at her, Tiffany went to Jackson's tent, "Hey, chef. Grill something for us to eat. Your sister-in-law is hungry."

Jackson pulled open his tent, bent down, and crawled out. He sighed at the sight of the pair, who were both covered in ashes. He had been the only one managing their daily essentials during their camping trip, as he was the only one who knew how to cook. After he walked towards the barbecue pit, Arianne and Tiffany spotted Lisa through the half covered tent entrance putting on her clothes. The pair gaped. Not because of how exaggerated Lisa's body was, but because they did not expect to see this. Lisa and Jackson clearly weren't having sex, prior to this… Or had they just finished?

Lisa did not try to avoid their stares. She walked out after she had finished putting on her clothes.

Tiffany was an inexperienced little girl, no matter how valiant she acted. She couldn't help but blush.

Lisa was the first to start eating after Jackson had finished barbecuing his first batch of skewers. "I'm actually kind of hungry. Jackson, don't put too much chili on mine, okay? My skin will break out if I have too much chilli…" she said with a whine. "I've had a lot of advertisements to shoot lately. Gotta maintain my looks…"

Tiffany shivered all over. She truly couldn't understand why some women enjoyed talking in that babyish tone. Did it make them sound more attractive? Did it make them seem cuter? She did not see any of these possibilities in Lisa.

Arianne stared at the skewers on the grill and suddenly asked, "More chilli for me."

Tiffany sniggered in secret. Her simple-minded best friend was finally standing up for her.

Lisa shot Arianne a look but did not dare say a word. Arianne was Mrs. Tremont; she did not have the nerve to do a thing.

Mark and Eric had been strolling nearby and talking about work. By the time they got back, the three women were having an eating frenzy. Jackson was sweating from barbecuing. It was clear that he wasn't barbecuing fast enough to keep up with their appetites.

Eric snatched two beef skewers from Tiffany, "You women usually eat less than anyone else. I see that you've finally shown your true colors."

Lisa wasn't used to eating chilli, so her face and ears had turned red from the spice in her food. However, she continued trying to compete with Tiffany and Arianne until the leftover ingredients were completely grilled and Jackson stepped aside to wash his face with some mineral water. Lisa suddenly lowered her voice and said, "Nothing happened between us. He rejected me, which was a first."

Tiffany paused but didn't say a word. How was it any of her business if they'd had sex or if Jackson had rejected her or not?

Not long after, the first rays of sunlight illuminated the sky from the coastline. Arianne watched it all through the space between her fingers and couldn't help sighing. It was a truly beautiful sight. This was her first time witnessing and admiring such a beautiful thing with such carefree abandon.

Eric took a few pictures. The group finally returned to the hotel when the sun shone high in the sky.

Lisa left all on her own at noon. They didn't actually manage to enjoy themselves that much during their few days in Sanya, but the experience wasn't exactly vexing. At least, it was a rare moment of relaxation for someone like Mark, who had been busy with work for a very long time.

Chapter 437

Jackson and Tiffany's seats happened to be next to each other during the return flight. The pair did not speak throughout the entire journey. The past few days seemed to have drained Tiffany. She put on an eye mask once she got onto the plane and fell asleep. Arianne was the one who woke her up when the plane landed.

They went home on their own.

It was past nine in the evening, and Arianne had just stepped through the door. Mark was behind, bringing the luggage. Initially, Henry wanted to send some staff members to greet them at the airport, but she refused, as she did not want to draw attention. If Henry were to do it, it would be a great display of extravagance.

A Tremont Estate housemaid suddenly stepped forward to greet them, "Madam, someone's sent something over, saying that it's for you."

She wondered who it could be from, "What is it? Do you know who sent it?"

The housemaid shook her head, "I don't know, I've never seen them before. I think it's a letter."

Then, the housemaid handed the letter over to her. Arianne stiffened when she saw it. It was in George Sloane's usual stationary…

She accepted it and tore the envelope open then took out the letter. Every word in that letter tugged on her nerves; her breathing gradually quickened, her hands and feet went cold, and her body began to tremble. The letter was not addressed to her, but to Mark. However, the person who sent it had made it clear that it was for her. Were they hoping for her to find out the truth?

When she heard the footsteps behind her, she turned around in fright. Then, she backed away. Her cheeks had been stained with tears long ago.

Mark stopped and released the luggage in his hands.

He saw the letter in her hand and knew that he could no longer keep it from her. Ethan had seized the opportunity to send the letter over.

"Wh-why?" She couldn't bring herself to formulate a complete sentence. She felt as if her breath had been caught in her throat. Everything in front of her gradually darkened.

Mark was too afraid to approach her. His intense pupils gleamed with cautiousness, "I'm sorry…"

Sorry? He apologized without even asking. That meant that he already knew about what was on that letter, which confirmed the validity of its contents. She could no longer stand and had to support herself with the railing on the staircase to forcibly steady herself, "You… Your sudden change in… in attitude towards Ethan. It's… Because this… This letter was in his hands. Right? He hurt Tiffie's entire family and did all of those things, right? You were lying for him! You… refused to let me investigate that airplane

crash… Because… Heh… Because my dad was your scapegoat?" She didn't need to guess. She knew that Ethan sent this letter. She wasn't an idiot.

She remembered it very clearly. His reaction was extreme when he found Mr. Sloane's letter. She thought that it was because he didn't want to bring up the past. Now it seemed that that wasn't the case. At the time, she was happy because there was a possibility that her father was innocent. At last, she would no longer need to stay by his side as a sinner. However, his reaction felt like a splash of cold water. Now she knew that there was an even darker secret behind it all!

He took a deep breath and slowly closed his eyes. He couldn't bear to tell her that his mother was behind it all. His mother was a source of purity in his heart, just like Arianne. And so what if he could admit to it? There was no real significance over whether it was his mother or if he was behind it all. Either way, he owed her.

The sudden transformation from a sinner's daughter to a victim's daughter suffocated Arianne. The man she thought she owed was actually her debtor. Now she realized that his willingness to raise her wasn't out of kindness but guilt. All of these years, she had suffered so much oppression and lived so carefully, but what was it all for?

The hatred in his eyes that he had always directed towards her probably wasn't actually for her, but someone else? Her existence reminded him of those unbearable things, yet he had to take her in, despite feeling conflicted!

The most terrifying thing of all was that Mark was capable of killing his entire family at eighteen, including her innocent father! She could not believe that this dexterous plan had come from an eighteen year old boy, "Why… did you do it?"

Mark balled his hands into fists, “My mom… gave her life to the Tremont family, but my dad did such a horrible thing to her when she was deathly sick, and he let her find out about it too. I couldn’t forgive him. That’s right, that’s just the kind of person I am. I always have been!”

She did not have any doubts about his confession. He may have been nice to everyone in the world and no one would say anything bad about him, but he had always been terrifyingly strict when he was with her. That was his true nature. This side of him that he had hidden away was much more horrifying than his strict facade!

There was only one thing on her mind — she had to run away from this frightening man!

She stumbled as she rushed towards the door, snatching up her luggage along the way. When Mark tried to stop her, she screamed, “No! You stay away from me!”

He paused in his footsteps. Fear flashed across his eyes, “Could we talk about this tomorrow? It’s late, it’s not safe for you to go out alone…”

However, the concern and gentleness that he now displayed felt staged to her, “Please don't be so nice to me. Stop wearing a mask and pretending to be someone else! You’re not that kind of a man, you’re not!” Then, she ran out straightaway. The letter in her hand was now a crumpled mess.

Chapter 438

The housemaid shrunk into a corner, too afraid to speak. She had given her the letter but had not expected to cause such a commotion. Henry and Mary ran out to the living room and saw it happen. No one dared to say a word. Servants like them were not allowed to get involved in such matters.

Mark slowly walked towards the sofa and sat down. His face was deathly still. He raised his trembling hands and placed them on his chest. He felt as if a thousand knives had pierced through his heart. The one thing that he had feared most of all had finally happened…

Half an hour later, he forced himself to steady his breathing, “Have someone follow her, make sure that she’s safe…”

Henry agreed, summoning a bodyguard and leaving quickly.

Arianne was all on her own. Tiffany was the only person she could turn to. She walked to the intersection, flagged down a cab, and gave the address. She did not notice the black Rolls-Royce behind her.

She sobbed as she banged on Tiffany’s door when she arrived. She didn’t even have the strength to carry her luggage bags.

Tiffany was in complete shock when she opened the door and saw her, “What happened Ari? What did Mark do to you?”

She couldn’t speak. She buried her head into Tiffany’s arms, weeping and sobbing aloud. She thought that she could live a good life with Mark and that everything was developing towards a good direction. He would let her learn to love him, and she really was trying. Instead, it was only the calm before the storm. He had planned this long ago!

Downstairs, Henry called Mark, “Sir, Mrs. Tremont is staying with Miss Lane.”

Mark's voice from the other end of the line sounded breathless, "Have someone follow her everywhere she goes and ensure her safety, 24/7. Come home when it's arranged…"

Henry sighed. He told the bodyguard to stay behind, ended the call, and drove away.

Once Arianne had finished crying and forced herself to calm down, she revealed everything to Tiffany.

Previously, Arianne had been the only one crying. Now, both women were sobbing. Once Tiffany had found out about everything Ethan had done, she burst into tears, "Ari… I've suddenly realized that I made such a grave mistake. Thank goodness I didn't end up marrying Ethan. If I did, I'd probably never find out about what he's done to my family! Mark Tremont… The Tremont family… They've always presented such a grand and impressive facade, yet they're capable of committing such a foul act. What did you ever do to them? What did your father ever do to them? What did I ever do to them? What a shame that everyone thought of you as a criminal's daughter when he's the one who was really behind all of this! He racked his brains to marry you, treated you well, and brought you to Sanya for a holiday, acting as if you're the only one in his eyes, but what was it all for? Does he really love you? So was his conscience in turmoil? Or was he just trying all sorts of ways to hide the truth? You reap what you sow. Now look what's happened. No one's going to have any peace now!"

Arianne curled into Tiffany's arms, sobbing profusely. The only thing she wanted to do now was to lie quietly down and do nothing. Back when she and Tiffany had gone to visit George at the convalescent home and run into Ethan, she thought that it was a coincidence. Now, it seemed that Ethan was there on a visit to see George. Not too long after, when George was whisked away from the convalescent home, his tall and handsome son that the staff member had mentioned was Ethan!

If she had known all of this long ago, would the result have been better?

Arianne was consumed with hopelessness now. Mark Tremont, whom she had relied on for more than ten years, was now her enemy. She couldn't bear it. Tiffany knew this. She had to be stronger than her, "Ari, it will be fine… It's not too late now that you've found out about it. Now you know that you don't owe Mark anything. You can leave him and have your freedom. Cut your losses. It's not as bad as it seems. Don't cry, okay? My heart breaks whenever I see you like this…"

Arianne sniffed, "Do you have any alcohol? I need a drink."

Tiffany got up and searched around, feeling a little annoyed, "None. My mom likes to drink too. We don't usually have them in store. I'm afraid my mom will be too busy with mahjong to come home tonight. I'll go down and get some for you, okay? Just let me change first."

She dug through her closet and suddenly realized that Lillian had pretty much thrown all of her clothes away, telling her that there was no need to keep ragged items from the past and that they'd only bring them bad luck when they moved into their new home. She was helpless. She hadn't washed the clothes that she had brought to Sanya. Therefore, she didn't have anything to wear now.

Seeing this, Arianne pointed at the luggage bag that she had brought along with her, "I have some clothes in there. I don't plan on going back, so I grabbed this luggage bag in the spur of the moment… I forgot about Rice Ball… Hopefully, Mark won't do anything to it…"

"It will be fine," Tiffany soothed, "If he's cruel enough to kill a cat… Then he really deserves to die."

After a change of clothes, Tiffany grabbed her keys and phone and walked out the door. The convenience store downstairs had closed early today, so she had no choice but to travel a little more to make her purchase.

The bodyguard that Mark had assigned for Arianne thought that she was Arianne, as she was dressed in Arianne's clothes and it was dark. When he realized that he had been mistaken, he continued standing watch nearby.

Chapter 439

Tiffany had just bought some beer from a small shop and made her way onto the road. Suddenly, a van arrived and blocked her way. Before she could react, two burly men got down from the vehicle and covered her nose with a cloth soaked in chemicals. Then, they carried her into the vehicle. She dropped the plastic bag full of beer bottles onto the ground, causing the bottles to shatter. The last thing she felt was a splash of cold beer on her ankles.

After some amount of time, she opened her blurry eyes and found herself in a completely unfamiliar place. It seemed to be an old shack. The ground was cold and damp and unbearably dirty. A group of men sat on one side, drinking beer and chatting with filthy speech.

She had only moved a little when one man turned towards her, "Oh, the girl's awake. Quick, ask them for instructions. I can't stand it any longer."

She was gripped with fear. Based on her current observations, there were at least five men in front of her. Her hands were tied behind her back, as were her legs. Her limbs were useless at the moment, as she had just been drugged. She was pretty much left with no chance of escape!

One man pulled out his phone and made a call. He put it on speakerphone, probably to ensure that everyone else could hear the call. Once the call was connected, a woman's voice answered, "Did you get her?"

The man who had made the call glanced at Tiffany and smiled despicably, “Yup. The clothes she’s wearing are exactly the same as the one in your picture. It’s gotta be her.”

Tiffany stiffened. That woman’s voice… clearly belonged to Aery! Furthermore, she was not Aery’s target. It was supposed to be Arianne. Of all the days she had to wear Arianne’s clothes, it had to be today. That’s how she ended up getting kidnapped by mistake!

Aery’s voice sounded less coy than usual and was tinged with viciousness, “Since you’ve got her, don’t be modest. Do whatever you want, just don’t kill her. Do it slowly and send me the address. I want to watch. Don’t forget to record it on camera. I want everyone to witness Arianne Wynn’s degradation!”

Once the call had ended, the men promptly turned to face Tiffany.

Tiffany immediately broke down, “What… What are you going to do? Get away! Aery Kinsey sent you all here, right? You’ve got the wrong girl! You can’t catch her anyway! I’m not her! Go away! I’ll call the police! You’ll never get away with this!”

One man threw a slap right across her face when she threatened to call the police, “You’ll never get the chance to call the police. Shut your mouth. You’ll get the chance to scream as much as you want… Soon.”

…

By the time Aery had arrived, their foul activities had only just begun. The complacency on her face froze in place when she saw Tiffany's face, then it gradually disappeared. She flew into a rage and pushed the men away from Tiffany, screaming madly, "You've got the wrong girl! Idiots! I've paid a lot of money, and this is how you complete the job?"

The men looked at each other and were just about to pull their pants back up when Aery changed her attitude again, "Forget it. This is pretty much the same. They're both b*tches. Go and get Arianne Wynn once you're done with this!"

Tiffany had suffered enough humiliation. Her eyes brimmed with tears as she glared at Aery and gritted her teeth, "Aery Kinsey… I won't let you get away with this! I won't!"

Aery glanced at her disdainfully then pulled out her phone to make a call, "Those idiots have gotten the wrong girl. They didn't manage to get Arianne. They got Arianne's friend instead."

The man's purposely lowered voice answered through the receiver, "What friend?" He could not conceal the hint of panic in his voice.

"Tiffany Lane," Aery replied honestly, "It's her dumb luck for wearing the same clothes as the ones Arianne wore in that picture. Those idiots are blind…"

"Don't touch her! I'm coming right now!" the man roared then immediately ended the call.

Aery was slightly puzzled. Don't touch Tiffany? But they already had…

She stared at the group of men, whose pants had become increasingly restless, and waved her hand, “Stand aside and cool off. Your paymaster says that you can’t touch this woman.”

Aery remembered the tone in the man’s voice, hesitated for two seconds, and said, “No.” She had always wanted to exact her revenge on Arianne, even if she didn’t have any money or manpower to do it. Finally, someone had found her and given her some money and an opportunity. It was best to avoid offending the other party.

Half an hour later, they heard the sound of a car outside the shack. The car parked very close by too, causing the house to tremble. Tiffany, who was lying on the ground, clearly felt it. She didn’t know what those men were planning to do to her. She may be mentally strong, but she had long broken down when faced with these foul things. She really wanted to kill herself and end it all!

Hurried footsteps grew closer and closer, then burst into the shack. The man’s ramrod body blocked out a part of the light from the lightbulb, which had moths hovering around it. Tiffany couldn’t see the man’s face, but they had spent a lot of time together for three years. How could she not recognize him? If she had a trace of spirit lingering in her bones, she would have lost it completely at this very moment…

Chapter 440

Ethan. Not only was he the cause behind her family’s bankruptcy and her father’s early demise, but now, because of him, she was reduced to this state! She had initially thought that Aery was behind it all, but now it hit her. Aery’s family had gone bankrupt as well. She wouldn’t have the money to pay for this. It was Ethan all along!

Slap!

A loud slap was heard. Aery stared at the man in front of her in astonishment, “Why did you hit me?”

She received another slap. The man’s chest was rising and falling rapidly from his extreme rage.

Aery was too afraid to speak now. “What have you done to her?” the man asked in a grim voice.

Aery avoided his gaze; she held her cheeks as she answered in a hushed voice, “It wasn’t me… It was them… They’d already started by the time I arrived. Wasn’t that part of your instructions? The picture you gave wasn’t clear enough. They’d gotten the wrong girl because they couldn’t get a clear view of Arianne’s face.”

The man’s tone grew even colder, “Are you implying that I’m to blame? Alright, Aery. Don’t say that I never gave you a chance. You’re the one who let it slip through your fingers.” Then, he turned towards the trembling men, “Do whatever you want to this woman.”

The men looked at each other and immediately reached a common consensus. Then, they dragged Aery into the next room. Aery’s screams were soon muffled.

Tiffany watched as Ethan slowly closed in on her. She instinctively shrunk backwards. She wasn’t afraid of him seeing this unbearable side of her, for she was purely afraid of him. This man whom she had once loved deeply had become so unfamiliar, so terrifying to her!

“Tiffie…” Ethan stretched out his hand to touch her, but it stiffened in mid-air. His expression was complex and indistinguishable.

Tiffany scowled, “Don’t call me by that name. It disgusts me! Are you happy now? I know everything; you were behind it all. You’ve never loved me, you only love yourself! My father helped pay for all of your expenses during your three years stint out of the country. Even if you did pay him back, does that give you the right to cross the line? If you have any semblance of a conscience, let me go!”

He took off his coat and draped it around her, “I’m sorry… I never meant for things to turn out this way. I only wanted to take my revenge on Mark. My target was Arianne, not you! Why did you have to walk out in Arianne’s clothes? Why?”

Tears streamed down her face, but the corners of her lips curled into an unbearably cold sneer, “I’m glad that I wore Ari’s clothes today. If this happened to her instead, she wouldn’t be able to endure this torture. She would lose her mind and end her own life. Enough with the crocodile tears, Ethan. Let me go!”

Ethan didn’t respond. He got up and picked up the video camera, which was still recording.

Tiffany was instantly seized by madness when she saw this. Everything she had suffered was in that device. “Give that to me! Give it to me!”

He was unmoved. She couldn’t figure out what he was planning to do next. This man’s psychotic tendencies were beyond her imagination!

Ethan took the video recorded and went into the next room. The movements in the room went on for a while before stopping. Ethan stared at the tragic-looking Aery on the ground. There were no traces of sympathy in his gaze. He simply waved his hand and sent the men out.

He waved the video recorder in front of Aery, “I’ve recorded everything. I’m afraid that you won’t be able to take back whatever’s on this device so easily.”

Aery’s eyes were red from crying. “What… What do you want?” she asked with a croak, “You approached me, gave me money, and asked me to hire a few thugs to attack Arianne. I’m not the one who caught the wrong girl… Why are you doing this to me?”

He lowered his head and smirked disdainfully, “That’s right, I asked you to do it. I knew how much you wanted revenge, but you didn’t have the money to exact it. I simply wanted to pave the way for you and use you in achieving my goals. Do you know why you’ve lost to Arianne? It’s because you lack brains. You’re an idiot! You failed to kidnap her, despite being given a picture. They may not recognize Arianne, but don’t you? Do you have any idea of whom you’ve kidnapped? F*ck. She’s the woman I love! Why do you think I’m doing this to you?”

Aery finally understood her mistake. She knelt at his feet, sobbing and pleading, “I know I’ve done wrong… Please let me go… I’m begging you… Spare me…”

Ethan kicked her away, “This matter won’t be settled so easily. I’ve started up a little space. You’ll be working there; the job requirements are exactly what you’ve just done. I’ll release you when I’m satisfied.”

Aery’s face turned ashen. She felt as if her entire spirit had been drained, “No… I don’t want to be a hostess, I’m not that kind of girl!”

Ethan’s laughter in the darkness sounded like that of a malevolent spirit from hell, “Hehe, I know. You used to be the wealthy daughter of the Kinsey family. It’d be difficult for you to adapt to the life of a wh*re. Don’t worry. It’s fine, just take it slow.”

…

Arianne was going stir-crazy. It was getting late and TIffany still hadn't come home. She went out and searched for a long time but still couldn't find her.

She tried calling her, but the call wouldn't connect. As time went on, she finally realized that something may have happened to her.

She definitely wasn't going to ask Mark for help now. She instead took a cab to see Jackson at White Water Bay Villa. Only Jackson could help her now!

At this time, none of the lights in Jackson's home were on. She kept on ringing the doorbell, praying that he was only asleep and not away from home…