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She continued ringing the doorbell for about five minutes before the door finally opened. Jackson was dressed in his pajamas, staring drowsily at her, “What are you doing here?”

She answered in a weepy voice, “Tiffie… Tiffie went out to buy some beer and hasn’t come home yet. I’ve been searching for a very long time, but I can’t find her… It’s been a few hours; I don’t know what to do. That’s why I’m here…”

Jackson’s sleepiness immediately disappeared when he heard that Tiffany had gone missing, “Wait right here. I’ll grab my car keys!”

The pair drove a few times around the roads near Tiffany’s home until it gradually turned to daylight. “Call the police,” Jackson finally suggested.

Arianne was bawling her eyes out. Jackson had also realized that this matter wasn’t as simple as it seemed, “What on earth happened? Tell me everything.”

She explained the matter in detail. Jackson pursed his lips and remained silent. He had long been aware of this, but he never imagined that Arianne would find out once they had touched down from Sanya. The more important matter at hand was to find Tiffany. He pulled out his phone and dialed 911. However, before he could call the number, a message notification from Mark popped up on his screen: Ethan’s got Tiffany.

Jackson’s heart skipped half a beat. He immediately sped towards the Tremont Estate. Now, they had to discuss this with Mark.

Realizing the difference in route, Arianne panicked, “Where are we going?”

“Mark told me that Ethan has Tiffany. We’ll have to speak to Mark to figure this out, since he knows,” he answered honestly. “Let’s just try and figure out the situation. I know you don’t want to see him right now, but don’t you care about Tiffany?”

Arianne was speechless. She wasn’t sure of how to face Mark at the moment, but she would never forgive herself if anything happened to Tiffany!

They arrived at the Tremont Estate. Jackson got down from the car and noticed that she remained still and was hesitant. He sighed helplessly, “Come on. Your problems are a bit complicated, but you can’t ignore Tiffany. Let’s just go inside.”

She still couldn’t find the nerve to walk in, “You… You go ahead. I’ll leave Tiffany in your hands. I’ll wait for you in the car.”

Jackson did not force her. He somewhat empathized with her.

Jackson spotted Mark on the sofa from the moment he walked in. He was still in last night’s clothes. It was clear that he had been sitting here the entire night and hadn’t slept at all. He seemed to have gotten haggard after last night. He could even see a light greenish beard stubble on his chin, “Mark, what happened? Why did Ethan kidnap Tiffany?”

Mark shifted a little. His deep, dark eyes seemed to have lost their light, “She’s with Ethan. He says that there will be consequences if we call the police and that he won’t hurt Tiffany. Calling the police isn’t the best option right now. A man like him would do anything. I suggest mobilizing every resource we have to find her. Don’t go to the police. He’ll find out the minute we do. It’s not worth the loss. As for why he’s kidnapped her, I don’t know.”

Jackson nodded solemnly. He pulled out his phone and made a few calls. Then, he sat down next to Mark, “Mark, Arianne is here too. She’s in my car. She… doesn’t want to see you right now. You knew this would happen. Take it easy, don’t panic. Tiffany knows that Ethan was behind everything, so she wouldn’t stay with Ethan voluntarily. She’s a hostage now. What’s his plan? I can figure it out. Logically speaking, if he wants to attack you, he should have kidnapped… Arianne. What on earth happened last night? Arianne said that Tiffany had gone missing when she went out to buy some beer. It’s been an entire night and I just can’t figure it out…”

Mark stiffened a little as he turned to look out the window. A sense of desolation flashed across his eyes, “I can’t figure it out either. You shouldn’t hope for anything from me. I don’t have the energy… If you need manpower, you can take your pick from me.”

This was the first time Jackson was seeing Mark in this manner. It was as if his spirit had left his body. Only Arianne could bring it back to him. He sighed helplessly, “I understand. Leave it to me. Try to calm yourself and think of ways to solve that mess.”

Arianne got down from the car to meet him when he emerged from the Tremont Estate, “Where’s Tiffie? What’s happened to her? What’s Ethan done to her?”

Jackson shook his head, “The situation is still unclear. Ethan’s only warned us not to go to the police and told us that she’s with him. He’s even assured us that he won’t hurt Tiffany. However, none of us can guarantee if he’ll do anything to her. I’ve mobilized every resource I have into searching for her. Don’t worry too much. Ethan won't do anything to Tiffany if he has any semblance of feelings for her. There’s no use in panicking now. Let’s just wait for an update.”

Failing to receive the good news that she had hoped for, Arianne's body swayed. She nearly collapsed, but Jackson managed to catch her, "Don't be like this… Tiffany's kidnapped and you've run away from home. It's distressing for me to be caught in the middle like this. Could you try to be considerate of me? You have to be strong, at least. Do you have any plans? You certainly can't continue staying at Tiffany's house. It's best to keep Tiffany's mother in the dark about this."

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Arianne was at a loss. She had suddenly left the Tremont Estate and was now unsure of where to go, "I… I don't know what to do… Just drop me off at a hotel. I'll grab my luggage bag from Tiffany's and stay at a hotel for the time being."

Jackson pursed his lips. He paused in thought then suggested, "Stay at my place. It'll be risky for you to stay in a hotel all by yourself. This doesn't really seem appropriate either, but it's the best idea we have, given the circumstances."

She nodded. She didn't want to give Jackson any more trouble at a time like this. If anything were to happen to her in the hotel, Jackson would end up worrying about her too.

In the Tremont Estate, Mark stood in front of the French windows in the living room, watching Arianne as she followed Jackson into his car then disappeared from view. His gaze lingered for a long time. At a time like this, he was the only one who wasn't allowed to be near her…

After a lengthy moment, he took out his phone and sent a message to Jackson: Take care of her for me.

Suddenly, something soft and furry brushed against his leg. He lowered his head. It was Rice Ball rubbing against his trouser leg, fishing for his favor.

He slowly bent down and stroked its furry little head, “From now on, it’s just you and me.”

Mary, who had just arrived in the living room, saw this. Her eyes glistened with tears, “Mr. Tremont… It’s time for breakfast. You haven’t slept the entire night. Not even the strongest man can hold out that long. Have something to eat, then rest for today. Don’t dive into work. I may not be aware of what’s happened between you and Mrs. Tremont, but you’ve been together for so many years. How can it end like this? Have a good rest then bring her home.”

Mark closed his eyes ever so slightly, “I’ve lost her. I can’t bring her home.”

…

Plain Mountain Creek Villa

Tiffany was startled awake from a nightmare. She curled herself up into a ball in bed in silence. Regardless of how pretty the scenery outside the window was, she was in no mood to look at it. She was dressed in a black satin nightgown, which set off her fair skin and made it look even paler. It also brought out the bruises all over her body, making them even more obvious.

Soon, the room door was pushed open. She stared at the visitor. Her eyes naturally clouded over with hatred, “How long do you plan on keeping me here?”

Ethan placed a bowl of oatmeal on the cabinet next to the top of the bed, “I just think… that it’s been a while since we’ve really spent some time together. I really miss times like this.”

He could use the most deep and affectionate words in the universe, but she would still consider them a joke and feel utterly disgusted, “You miss it? Don’t make me puke. What the hell do you want?”

His expression showed no signs of hurt. At this stage, he no longer expected her to be amiable to him, “I know that you hate me. If love isn’t possible, then hate isn’t so bad. I’ll release you in half a month on one condition — you have to get along with me during this period of time.”

His words made her feel uncomfortable from top to bottom, “Are you sick?”

He didn’t seem to be bothered by her choice of words. He pulled out a medical balm from the drawer underneath the bedside cabinet, “Come closer, I’ll apply some ointment for you. This will help speed up the healing process of your wounds. Otherwise, you might end up staying here for longer than half a month.”

All Tiffany wanted was for her to leave this place. After a bout of hesitation, she agreed to apply the medicine. However, she did not want him touching her, “Give the medicine to me. I’ll do it myself.”

Ethan handed the medical balm over to her but showed no signs of leaving. Feeling annoyed, she frowned and said, “Are you going to just sit here and watch?”

“It’s not like I haven’t seen it,” he replied calmly. Then, his expression sank. He suddenly remembered everything that she had encountered in that shack. He had seen her body; they did not go through with the final step. In the end, unfortunately… Humans are fortune’s fools.

Seeing how reluctant she was in applying the medicine, he sat down on the side of the bed, “I’ve told you. Live with me in harmony for half a month and let go of all the conflict you have against me, or I will never let you go!”

Tiffany gritted her teeth, endured his gaze, and began applying the medicine from her cheeks to her neck, then to her collarbones and arms. When she finally arrived at her thighs, she was forced to pull up her nightgown. However, she couldn’t do it. “Could you not stare at me? Or are you going to make claims, saying that you don’t find me dirty at all and that you still have those kinds of urges towards me?”

Her eyes brimmed with tears as she said those words, but she forced herself to hold them back.

A hint of guilt flashed across his face and he turned his head to the side, “I don’t think that you’re dirty at all. I don’t mind whatever happened to your body…” Furthermore… He would always be with her, just like this, if she wanted. However, he couldn’t bring himself to say these words. He knew her very well. She would never be with him. It was impossible now.

She smirked, “Yes, that’s right. You don’t have the right to call out my filth because it’s all your fault!”

He didn’t object. It was true, even though he didn’t mean for it to happen.

He waited for her to finish applying the medicine, then picked up the oatmeal on the bedside cabinet and pushed it towards her, “Here, have something to eat.”

She stared at the fine, mushy, light brown oatmeal in the bowl. Suddenly, she covered her mouth, leaned forward on the bed, and retched, “Get out! I’m not eating!”

He seemed to have realized something. He turned towards the door and bellowed, “Take this oatmeal away. Change it to something else!”

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A middle-aged woman hurriedly came in and took away the bowl. Ethan lifted his arm to pat Tiffany’s back, but he put it down again and just moved the tissue box to a place within her reach. “That was Maria. She’ll be taking care of your daily needs from now on, so you can just tell her what you want to eat.”

Tiffany currently had no appetite at all. It was only normal for her to be quite irritable. She ignored Ethan’s words and just prayed that he would leave soon. She didn’t want to see him or any other men right now!

When Ethan came to see her the next day, she made a request to talk to Arianne. After all, Arianne must be panic-stricken by her disappearance. Since she still had to stay here for about two more weeks, she really didn’t want to make other people worried.

Ethan looked like he had just rushed his way here. His forehead was beaded by sweat as he took off his suit jacket and draped it over the edge of the bed. “I’ve already contacted them and informed them that you’re with me. I brought you some books that Maria will bring to you later. You can read them if you’re bored. I know you don’t like reading, so I brought you the more interesting books. I still have some matters to attend to, but I’ll be able to stay by your side from tonight onward.”

Tiffany could hear the dangerous tone in his voice. “I don’t need you to be by my side! I don’t want to see you either!”

He frowned at her. “If you want to be locked up here for the rest of your life, then just carry on fighting me. I have enough patience for that.”

That instantly forced Tiffany to quell her anger. Ethan was only asking for her to stay here half a month; she might as well fulfill his wishes so that she could leave this place and escape from this devil…!

This time, Ethan didn’t stay that long and left after twenty minutes. Tiffany listened as the sound of his car faded into the distance, then tried to get out of the bed to do something elsewhere. Ever since she arrived here, she had been keeping herself cooped up in this room. The room was quite huge, with its own bathroom and toilet inside. Regardless, it was still a prison. She had never been holed up like this before and couldn’t stand it anymore.

As soon as she walked into the living room, Maria hurriedly came up to her. “Miss Lane, where are you going?”

Tiffany didn’t have a good impression of anyone associated with Ethan, even if Maria looked like a kind lady. “Can’t I just walk around? Even prisoners are allowed to get some fresh air at allocated time slots. Do I look like a prisoner to you?”

Maria had a troubled look on her face. “Sir has ordered for you to not be allowed to leave the room when he isn’t around. If you have a request, you can just tell me and I’ll get it done for you.”

Tiffany observed the villa. She had to admit, Ethan had really done a good job in the protective measures. In order to prevent her from escaping, he sacrificed the aesthetic of the villa by installing window grilles outside every window. The front door was probably locked too. This made her wonder why Maria was so anxious. Even if she wanted to escape from this place, she wouldn't be able to.

In the living room, she caught a pile of books on the sofa. Tiffany picked out a few that looked at least interesting enough for her to read before returning to the bedroom. As soon as she entered the bedroom, she heard the sound of the door locking from outside.

She didn't feel like bothering about it and just flipped through the books. When she was still a student, she would doze off every time she read a book. It seemed like this problem never went away until now. Just like that, the whole day passed. Tiffany made two scratches on the wall with her nails, counting the days that she had been imprisoned here. The thought of being able to leave this place in about ten more days made her hopeful. At least Ethan had given her hope. Otherwise, she wouldn't last...

In the middle of the night, Tiffany suddenly felt someone lying beside her and he even tried to wrap his arms around her while she was asleep. She was instantly startled awake as her body turned stiff. As soon as she recovered from her shock, she shoved away the person beside her with all her might then jumped off the bed to turn on the lights. "What are you trying to do!"

Ethan was in his pajamas, looking like he was planning to sleep with her. "What do you think I'm trying to do?"

"Don't even think about it!" Tiffany just couldn't accept it.

His eyes suddenly turned harsh. “So Jackson West is allowed to do this, but not me? How long have you known him? Even if you two haven’t done it, he must have at least touched your body, right? Don’t think that I don’t know that you’ve stayed the night at the West family’s residence with him before!”

“Yes, it’s just as you said, I’ve done everything with him! He’s my ideal type of man. Other than having sex, we’ve done everything. I don’t recall having gotten back together with you at the time! So, you’ve been stalking me since then? What a creep! Did I owe you in your past life so much that you have to ruin my family? What else do you want!” she snarled at him.

All his previous gentleness and compliance vanished without a trace. He dragged her back to the bed roughly and pinned her under his body. “What else do I want? You still don’t know what I’m trying to do? I just f*cking want to own you and make you mine! Then I want to take obscene pictures of you and send them to Jackson so he can take a good look at them!”

Tiffany trembled with fright and didn’t dare to utter another word. She had only talked about Jackson that way to piss him off, but now she was afraid that Ethan would really do what he just said...

Looking at her terror-filled eyes, Ethan gradually calmed down. He didn’t let her go but caressed her cheek lovingly while whispering, “Don’t always anger me and make me lose control of myself, Tiffie… I can treat you very well and give you whatever you want, alright? I’m even willing to give you time to accept me. Can you give me a chance, please?”

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She shook her head in despair as tears fell from the corners of her eyes and soaked into the bedsheets. “Don’t touch me… Don’t touch me!”

Ethan lifted her chin and forced her to look at him. “We should have done it a long time ago. Can we make up for our past regrets? After half a month, I’ll let you go if you want to leave. If you choose to

stay, we'll get married. I won't force you, but my patience is also limited. I know that the incident has traumatized you a lot, but you must overcome your fear. I'm helping you too!"

In Tiffany eyes, Ethan was undoubtedly a lunatic. He was the one who personally orchestrated that ridiculous farce that traumatized her so badly, and now he wanted to do the same thing to her in the name of making up for past regrets. Not only that, he still wanted to make her stay and get married to him. Was he the one losing his mind or her?

She mumbled tearfully, "I'm not traumatized… I have no fear to overcome, and I don't need your help either! I can promise you anything you want as long as you don't touch me! Just half a month… half a month is enough… Let me go… Ethan… Don't make me feel that even being alive is meaningless…"

Ethan looked hurt. "You hate the idea of me touching you this much? Tell me, how can we go back in time?"

Tiffany laughed while crying. Her smile looked even more ugly than her crying face. "We can't! There's no way we can go back in time again! Ever since you ruined my family, we can't go back to how things were anymore! I once gave you everything, but how did you repay me? You're only keeping me here because you're afraid that I'll call the cops and they'll obtain all the evidence from me! If that happened, then all your efforts would be wasted! Anyone can touch me, except you…!"

Yes, he had planned everything since the beginning. He was imprisoning her and would only release her when all the evidence on her body was gone. He shouldn't have touched her, for it was no different from courting death.

During this period of time, he had destroyed most of the evidence. The men who had kidnapped her had been disposed of by him. Only Aery was still alive. He hadn't dealt with her yet because Helen Cameran

wasn’t a simple woman. Acting recklessly might just end up inviting more troubles. After all, Aery was involved with too many things.

Seeing that Ethan was not making his next move, Tiffany was slightly relieved. She was right that he wouldn’t dare to do anything recklessly.

All of a sudden, he lowered his head and smashed his lips against hers without giving her a chance to breathe.

Just when Tiffany closed her eyes and waited for the humiliating moment to pass, Ethan suddenly got up and left. The slam of the door made her realize that she was once again safe. He didn’t do that out of confusion, but only his hate for losing.

She looked up at the ceiling and breathed a long sigh of relief. All she could hope for was for the remaining days to pass peacefully.

In the White Water Bay Villa, Jackson and Arianne sat on the sofa while staring intently at the phone resting on the coffee table. They were waiting for a call that would provide them with news of Tiffany. Things were starting to look up after two days.

Jackson lifted his arm to glance at his watch. “It’s getting late; maybe you should rest. Don’t worry, I’ll be keeping an eye on it. As soon as they find out where Tiffany is, I’ll bring people there without any further delay.”

Arianne shook her head. “I can’t sleep until Tiffie returns. Although her mom usually doesn’t care about her, we definitely won’t be able to hide it from her if Tiffie is gone for too long. I’m really worried that something will happen to her… Hopefully, Ethan won’t do anything reckless.”

Jackson wanted to say something but kept the question to himself in the end. He had his own suspicions. Why was Tiffany suddenly taken away? By right, Ethan would have expected Arianne to leave the Tremont Estate after she received the letter from him. Instead of capturing Arianne for the sake of getting back at Mark, why did he capture Tiffany? The whole thing just didn’t make sense.

Furthermore, Mark had sent bodyguards to protect Arianne. He had interrogated the bodyguards who were keeping watch around the area, but no one had seen any suspicious person. That meant after Tiffany’s disappearance, Ethan didn’t try anything funny on Arianne again. Even so, it was obvious that Ethan wouldn’t stop until he had gotten back at Mark.

Just when Jackson was lost in his own thoughts, the phone screen suddenly lit up on the coffee table, accompanied by a loud ringing. He quickly picked it up and answered, “Hello? How’s it going?”

The person on the other end of the line hurriedly reported, “We’ve located her! She’s currently being held at Plain Mountain Creek Villa. The villas there aren’t selling very well because the surrounding area hasn’t been developed yet, so the occupancy rate is very low, making it a perfect hiding place. According to our investigation, the villa isn’t Ethan Connor’s property since he isn’t so stupid as to kidnap and imprison his victim in his own house either. We can set out to recover the victim at any time.”

Jackson could barely contain himself and rushed out in his pajamas. Arianne wanted to follow but was afraid that she would end up causing more trouble to Jackson if something would happen there, so she could only wait obediently at the house.

Ethan, upon receiving a call when he was in the Plain Mountain Creek Villa, thereafter quickly woke Maria, who was sleeping soundly. “Pack up and leave this place. Remember to not tell anyone that you’ve worked here once you leave. I’ve already sent the payment to your bank account. Remember to clean up every single trace left in this house. You only have forty minutes, so move faster!”

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When Maria took on this job, she already knew that it wouldn’t be a simple one, so she was mentally prepared for it from the beginning. She promptly started cleaning up the house.

Ethan knew that he should leave too. He hadn’t expected them to track this place down so soon, so he couldn’t bring Tiffany with him. Even so, perhaps they both needed some time apart to ease the tension between them.

He went to the bedroom and hesitated at the door for a moment before pushing it open. Tiffany seemed to be asleep inside the bedroom, but she actually wasn’t. Such a petty trick wasn’t going to fool him. He knew that she just didn’t want to face him. Even so, he didn’t expose her. Ethan went to the bed and whispered, “I have the video, I believe you know what you should or shouldn’t do when you leave here.” After saying that, he stared at her deeply then turned around and closed the door.

Maria cleaned up every single spot that might possibly have fingerprints left on it and removed every single strand of hair in the house. By the time she was done cleaning, she was panting heavily in exhaustion. “Sir, I’m done cleaning up. We can leave now.”

Ethan took a deep breath, “Let’s go.”

By the time Jackson arrived with his men, the Plain Mountain Creek Villa was dead silent. Only the bedroom Tiffany stayed in was dimly lit.

When Tiffany heard the chaotic footsteps, her first reaction was to cower at the foot of the bed in fear. By the time she managed to identify the person who had just barged into the room, she was stunned before her vision turned blurry with tears. “Jackson… You came…” Only now did she understand Ethan’s warning to her. Ethan knew that Jackson was coming and she would be released from his captivity.

Jackson was suddenly at a loss for words. It had only been two days since they saw each other, but she seemed to have lost a lot of weight. Her face was horribly pale and the bruises were still fresh on her body. Only God knew what had happened to her.

After a moment of silence, he finally spoke up. “I’m here to take you home.”

She nodded and finally gathered the courage to get up and throw herself into his arms. Even if she hated the touch of every man in the world, he was the only one that wouldn’t terrify her. A man whom she had shared the bed with so many times without doing anything to her would never treat her that way.

Jackson didn’t send her home immediately. In the car, he only cautiously asked, “Do you need to... get examined at the hospital?”

Ethan’s warning echoed in her mind and she frantically shook her head. “I’m fine! Things aren’t as complicated as you think… Ethan just wanted to get back at Mark, so he teamed up with Aery. He paid her to carry out his dirty deeds but didn’t expect her to catch the wrong person. I was wearing Ari’s clothes when I went out. Their target was her...

“I’ll be fine. Just suffered a little in Aery’s hands, but Ethan wasn’t that bad. When he discovered that Aery got the wrong person, he didn’t allow her to continue treating me that way. I was only held captive

for two days, no big deal! Let's just forget about this matter. Ethan won't be looking for trouble with me anymore. His initial plan was to release me after half a month, but he didn't expect for you to track me down this soon. Please don't tell Ari anything about them catching the wrong target; she'd be crushed by the guilt."

Tiffany didn't even dare to look Jackson in the eye when she said all that, for fear that her eyes might betray her feelings. She tried so hard to pretend that she was fine when she was actually bleeding in the heart. Her video was still in Ethan's hands, so she didn't dare to do or say anything. She was also clearly aware that it was impossible for Ethan to not come find her again.

The suspicions in Jackson's heart were finally confirmed. He knew all along that they had gotten the wrong person. The entire thing must have caught Ethan off guard, so he had no time to deal with Arianne afterward, as all his efforts were spent on Tiffany.

He didn't buy Tiffany's story either. Although she said that she claimed that she had only suffered a little in Aery's hands, he didn't even have to guess how. The bruises on her body might be able to fool normal people, but not a 'seasoned' man like him. Those were marks that could only be left by a man when they were doing something...

Since she didn't want to tell him, he respected his decision. "I won't tell Arianne. Well then… do you want to go home now or…?"

Tiffany didn't know if she would break down in tears when she saw her mother. After thinking for a moment, she asked, "Can I go to your place for tonight and then go home tomorrow?"

Jackson nodded. "Arianne happens to be staying at my place. She's been worried sick for the past two days. I'm sure she'll be relieved to see you."

Tiffany nodded and silently wiped her tears away in the dark. Fortunately, it was dim in the car so Jackson definitely didn't notice that.

As soon as Tiffany arrived at the White Water Bay Villa, Arianne ran up to her and hugged her best friend. "Tiffie! Are you alright? Did Ethan do anything to you?"

Tiffany grinned carefreely and said, "Nope! What could he possibly do to me? I'm fine! It's really late now; you guys must have been worried sick. Let's wash up and go to bed. Everything will get better when we wake up tomorrow!"

Jackson pointed to the guest room. "I prepared a guest room when Arianne came. You girls can share the room."

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Tiffany nodded with a smile then went into the bathroom. She took off the black silk nightgown and threw it into the trash basket with a look of disgust. She could no longer retain the smile on her face anymore. Only when she was alone could she express her sadness and let her tears flow freely.

She scrubbed her skin until it started turning red before putting on a nightgown and going to sleep in the guest room. Arianne turned off the light and hugged her. "Tiffie, I saw the bruises on your body. Did Ethan hit you? You don't have to tell me if you're uncomfortable. It's all over already."

In the darkness, Tiffany desperately held back back her tears. "There's nothing much to talk about… because... nothing really happened. Ethan just got upset because I dumped him and wanted to get back at me. If you guys hadn't found me, he would have let me go in just a few more days. I'm dead tired, let's sleep."

Arianne hardly got a wink of sleep for the past few days. After humming a response, she fell asleep almost instantly.

Tiffany took a deep breath then murmured to herself, “Seems like you weren’t lying when you told me the first time’s gonna hurt like hell...”

Arianne wasn’t that deeply asleep yet, but she didn’t hear her clearly. “Hmmm…?”

Tiffany quickly turned over. “G’night…”

After leaving the mountain villa, Ethan went straight to the nightclub that he owned. His fear of getting into trouble didn’t mean that he couldn’t deal with Aery in some way.

After he walked into a private room, someone brought Aery in. Thanks to the revealing dress and thick makeup she wore, she no longer looked like a sweet-looking lady from a wealthy family. Some of her kinky customers even left bruises all over her body.

At the sight of Ethan, she looked as though she just saw her savior. She rushed up to him and knelt at his feet while begging, “Please forgive me… I know I screwed up… I really do… I’ll do whatever you ask me to! I don’t want to stay here anymore… Let me go… I promise I won’t tell anyone anything! Let’s just pretend nothing ever happened, alright?”

Ethan reached out and lifted her chin, showing a look of pity on his face. “Tsk tsk… How pitiful. The past two days here must have been hell for you.”

Tears dripped down Aery’s face. “No… of course not… It’s my fault for catching the wrong person. I swear I’ll never do anything to Tiffany Lane again! I didn’t know she’s your woman…”

The sentence ‘I didn’t know she’s your woman’ was what saved Aery’s life. Ethan released her chin and looked at her condescendingly. “You may leave after tonight. I’ll get in touch with you again when I need you. Don’t go thinking that you can escape from me. If I can’t find you, then your video will be leaked online. You better think things through. If you hadn’t disrupted my plan, Mark Tremont would have been in immense pain by now. You’re truly the dumbest woman I’ve ever met.”

Aery jolted at the mention of Mark’s name. Only now did she discover that Ethan’s objective was to hurt Mark. Although their target was Arianne this time, Mark was still someone she loved. Aery agreed to his words but was secretly planning to tell Mark about the entire incident once she left this place!

Unbeknownst to her, there was no way Ethan would let her go this easily. The next morning when she came out from the club, she could barely walk straight. Her body was hurting all over and the sun above her head was more piercing than usual. Aery couldn’t help but slump on the side of the road and break down in tears. She couldn’t even bring herself to recall the terror of being locked up in a dark and terrible place like that for two nights!

A kind passerby saw the scene and asked her out of concern, “What’s wrong, girl? Do you need help?”

Aery went berserk from being addressed as ‘girl’. “Scram! I’m not a call girl, you are!”

Thinking that she was a loony, the passerby quickly walked away after spitting, “Crazy bitch!”

After she was done venting, Aery hurried home and cleaned herself up from head to toe. The delicate makeup hid the bruises on her face, but the ones on her neck were too conspicuous so she could only cover them up with a silk scarf. As for the bruises on her arms, she could only wear long sleeves to hide them.

She felt extremely terrible when she looked at herself in the mirror. There was nothing beautiful about her at all. Not willing to meet Mark in this state, she could only perish the thought and get in touch with him through the phone instead.

After dialing his number a few times, she smashed her phone on the dusty ground in despair. Mark had long blocked her number, so she couldn’t contact him at all. The messy living environment around her made her realize that she was no longer the wealthy daughter of the Kinsey family. She was just a nobody who lived in a cheap house in an extremely poor conditioned suburb that was no different from a slum.

Her father couldn’t stand this kind of environment and had been egging her to pester her mother with him. For most of the time, the father and daughter had been living with Helen.

At the thought of Helen, she wiped her tears and went out. If she wanted to live a good life, she could only rely on Helen. After all, she was her biological mother. Whatever Helen owned belonged to her.

As soon as she reached the intersection, she was blocked by a Rolls-Royce Phantom Coupé. Despite her plunging net worth, she hadn’t lost her taste. The owner of this car must be no ordinary person. The window of the car rolled down before she could even go up to it, revealing to her that the owner of the car was Jackson West.

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“Jackson…?” Aery was a little stunned. At the same time, she was also wondering about the purpose of his sudden visit. Apart from Mark, Jackson was also a very attractive man. After all, no one would dislike a rich and handsome man.

The man emotionlessly gestured for her to get into the car. Overjoyed, Aery opened the car door on the passenger side and got in. “Long time no see, Jackson! What’s up?”

Jackson was a man who would never lay a finger on the women of his close friends. He had only been polite to Aery in the past for Mark’s sake. The reason for his sudden visit was to find out everything that had happened to Tiffany from Aery. “Tell me everything that transpired after Ethan came looking for you.”

A look of disappointment washed over her face when she realized that Jackson was no longer the guy who allowed her to act like a baby around him. He had chosen to side with Arianne and Tiffany. She should have known that the moment Mark dumped her, she was already kicked out of their circle.

“What if I don’t want to tell you?” Aery changed her attitude and tone. Why were Arianne and Tiffany always at the center of attention while she had to lose everything?

Jackson pressed a button and locked the doors. “You don’t want to tell me? Then let’s have a good chat. I have photos of you entertaining some guests at the nightclub. Don’t you think others will be interested to see the once glorious Miss Kinsey being reduced to an escort at a nightclub?”

Aery gritted her teeth and complied, “Yes, I was jealous of Arianne. Mark dear dumped me for her. If it weren’t for her, Mark wouldn’t have withdrawn his funding, which caused my family to declare

bankruptcy. Not only that, my mom even gave her all the assets she received from her divorce. I've always wanted to get back at her but never got the chance. I had no one and no money when Ethan approached me. He offered me both money and the chance to exact my revenge.

"I was given a photo of Arianne, then told to hire some people to kidnap her and take a video of her being raped. I didn't know the intentions behind his action, but we shared a common purpose. I only found out later that he wanted to get back at Mark dear. If I had known that earlier, I wouldn't have accepted his request.

"The men I hired caught Tiffany by mistake because she was unlucky to be wearing Arianne's clothes. It so happened that Tiffany had also offended me before. By the time I arrived at the scene, she had been raped. I quickly called Ethan and he told me not to lay a finger on Tiffany when he found out about the mistake. But mistakes had been made, so I was forced to entertain guests at the nightclub. I didn't even know Tiffany was his woman. From the beginning to the end, I didn't gain any benefits from all of this. That's all I know."

Tiffany was Ethan's woman? The words pierced into Jackson's ears. He gripped the steering wheel tightly as hostility filled his eyes. "How can you be this vile despite your young age? Arianne is your older sister! And did Tiffany deserve all that even if she had offended you in the past? You really deserve all this misfortune!"

Aery found it ridiculous. "How did I deserve this? People who have offended me should all be served their karma, especially Arianne! Why did my mom give her all the assets? Why is Mark dear so smitten with her but not me!"

Jackson didn't even want to waste his breath to educate someone this stubborn. "Get out!"

Aery knew that there was no point in staying any longer. These people were all ruthless. She had learned this since the day she had a fall out with Mark.

As soon as she got out of the car, Jackson sped away and nearly knocked her to the ground. She suppressed her anger and hailed a cab to Helen's house. Before she even went into the house, she saw Jean standing by the door. "Dad? What's going on? Why are you here?" She was a little surprised.

Jean wasn't the only one outside the door, even their luggage was thrown out!

Jean was furious. "Your mom is heartless! She tricked me into going out and buying things for her, then locked me out and threw all our stuff out here! While I was out to freeload off of the air conditioning, she even asked someone to change the door lock. The key in your hand won't work anymore! I've been out here all night!"

Aery took one hit after another. At this very moment, she directed all her hatred on Helen. She took off her high heels and desperately knocked on the door, "Helen Cameran, I'm your daughter! How can you do this to me? If you won't let me in, I'll go find Arianne! If I'm going to die, I'll make sure she goes down with me!"

Helen listened to Aery's death threats while she paced around in the living room irritably. If she let the father and daughter in, they would leech every drop of her blood and take her kindness for granted. If she didn't let them in, she was worried that Aery would really find Arianne. She had been keeping an eye on Arianne and knew that she had left the Tremont Estate. As for the reason behind her departure, she was still looking into it. Things would be bad if Aery went to find trouble with her now.

After a while, she finally caved in and opened the front door. Both Aery and Jean immediately rushed in. "If you dare to drive us out again, I'll take it all out on Arianne! I can finally tell now—you have no one in your heart but that b*tch!" Aery yelled at her.

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Helen said with a cold expression, “Aery, watch your mouth. I’ve been teaching you how to act and treat others since you were young. Why have you still become someone with a foul mouth? I’m letting you two in right now so that you have time to settle yourselves down. I’ve divorced, so I have nothing to do with Jean anymore. You’re legally an adult too and you’re still studying. I don’t want custody over you, but I’ll provide half of your living expenses and tuition fee. Other than that, no more. Jean, you should go find a job as well. I won’t be fully responsible for Aery’s expenses, nor will I pay for you!”

All Aery thought about was living comfortably while depending on her mother, but Jean was level headed now. Helen’s attitude was resolute. There was no room for discussion. He shamelessly fought for the most benefit he could get. “Aery is going overseas to study. You know that studying abroad is expensive. How could I afford it now? Even when we’re separated, you should still care for your daughter. I’ll find a job and accompany her overseas. I’ll be with her physically while you spend the money. It’s fair, isn’t it? Forget about halving the expenses; sponsor it and we’ll stay far away, no longer pestering you.”

Aery was unwilling when she heard him. She wanted to stay in the city to wait for Mark, not go overseas for some studies. Once she looked at Jean’s expression, however, she knew that it was not as simple. Currently, their biggest worry was having no money. Jean might not really want to send her abroad for her studies. They just wanted to get some money from Helen!

Helen thought about it and replied, “Alright. As long as you guys go abroad, I’ll pay for Aery’s living expenses each month. Before she completes her studies, I’ll pay $15,000 a month. Once she graduates, I won’t give a cent more. Whether both of you are lying to me or being honest, that’s all I’ll provide.”

Jean thought that it was too little, but before he spoke, Helen glared at him. “No more! You two better arrange to go abroad at the earliest possible opportunity. My patience to face the two of you is limited!

After Helen went back to her room, Aery asked Jean softly, “Dad, are we really going overseas? What can we do with $15,000 abroad? If I have a party with my friends, I’ll have nothing left for the month. Is that even humanly possible?”

Jean sighed. “Your mother made herself clear. We can’t depend on her, and of course, we can’t go overseas. Let us complete the procedures and then stay back secretly. It’s fine as long as we don’t appear in front of her. This way, we can still live decently here since she’s giving us $15,000 a month. It’s just that you can’t keep buying branded clothes. We’ve got to be more thrifty and rent a nice house. We can use excuses like you being sick or something to get more money in the future but that’s all we can make do with for now.”

…

In the Tremont Estate, Mark sat before the French window in his room while carrying Rice Ball as he watched the clip playing on his phone. It was a clip of Arianne that Jackson had secretly recorded for him. He could only see her through this method now.

He had thought about keeping her aggressively, but once he thought about her tearful look on the day she left and the fear in her eyes, he could not bear to hurt her anymore.

She must have lived uncomfortably in the Tremont’s estate all these years. Was the current freedom and life what she wanted?

Mary sighed softly when she saw the scene through the gaping door. “Sir, the office called. Do you want to go have a look? You haven’t gone to the company these few days. They’re having a hard time there. Don’t you dislike small animals? You can let Rice Ball go…”

Mark put down his phone and gently placed Rice Ball on the floor, answering faintly, “I know.”

Mary paused. “The temperature is lowering for the day. It’s a bit windy too. Watch out, don’t catch a cold.”

When Mark looked at the trembling leaves from the wind through the window, he muttered, “Fall is here… It’s going to be winter soon. It’s reminiscent…”

Mary turned to go downstairs with tears welling up in her eyes. When she met Henry, she could not help grumbling, “Ari and sir are both poor children. My heart aches for them.”

Henry was not as sentimental as Mary. “Go do your chores.”

Mary glared at him. “You emotionless old thing! That’s why nobody wants you and you’ve stayed single for so many years!”

Henry was speechless. He had lost his wife very early on and had not remarried, nor did he have any children. With his tender spot being picked on, he subconsciously retorted, “Nobody wants you either!”

Mary jabbed back as she headed to the kitchen. “I lost my husband late!”

Henry ignored her and patted his clothes down before going upstairs. “Sir, madam is temporarily staying at Mr. West’s White Water Bay villa. I’ve sent people to keep guard. It’s very safe. Any further instruction?”

Mark, who had changed into a suit, faced away from Henry. He buttoned up his sleeves as he stood in front of the bed. “Not for now. As long as her safety is ensured. Ask someone to send desserts and tea every afternoon. If there’s someone else around, add the serving to the headcount. Still buy it from the shop she’s always had it from.”

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Henry nodded and went out.

Mark drove to the Tremont Tower and passed the key to the security to park his car. When a senior citizen fell down by the road, Mark subconsciously wanted to go up and help, but he was suddenly reminded of Arianne’s hysterical words when she left, “Stop acting with a mask, okay?”

Was he being too hypocritical like this? He was supposed to be someone cold. He should not have been so kind.

Ultimately, Mark stepped into the tower without turning back while the security, who was striving to showcase himself, helped the senior citizen up.

…

In the White Water Bay villa, Arianne and Tiffany were just done fooling around. The living room and the couch were a mess. Luckily, Jackson was not home. Otherwise, he would have grumbled.

“Ari, now that you’ve left the Tremont’s, what’s your plan?”

Arianne thought about it for a moment. “I haven’t gotten a clue yet… I don’t want to stay in this city anymore. I want to go somewhere completely foreign and start anew.”

Tiffany pictured the new life that Arianne mentioned instantly and looked envious. “I want to leave with you too and start afresh. That’s a new word…”

Arianne shook her head with a smile. “You’re different from me. You still have your mother. If you leave her, she won’t know how to survive. I’m alone, so I can go wherever I want. I can find a job to feed myself or maybe open up a small shop, live normally… It sounds good.”

Roused, Tiffany felt like leaving even more. She had things that she did not want to face in this city and people whom she did not want to meet. Lillian could actually live as well without her. “Ari, didn’t you learn how to make desserts before this? We can go to a brand new city and start a dessert shop, and sell some coffee and milk tea and stuff. What do you think? Since my mom still has some money laying around, we have the funds for an investment. You decide!”

Arianne was hesitant. It was a big move in life. It could not be decided simply. If she really wanted to leave, it was not as easy. She had spent the earlier half of her life in this city, bitter and sweet. It had her most important people and a cat. Funny enough, there was not a sliver of hatred when she thought of Mark now. How could she hate a man who had taken care of her for more than a decade?

Giving it another moment of consideration, Arianne made her decision. “Give me a month. I’ll tie the loose ends and we’ll leave together. Tiffie, getting to know you is the best thing that’s happened to me.”

Tiffany smiled so wide that the corners of her eyes sparkled with tears. “I think so too.”

Before Jackson came back, Tiffany was sent home by Arianne. Once she entered the door, Lillian could be heard complaining, “Do you still think of me as your mother? You didn’t even call when you hadn’t come home for days. Are you trying to kill me from anxiety? I really—” Before she could finish her words, Tiffany suddenly hugged her. “Mom… I missed you so much…”

Lillian’s words were choked. Her daughter’s sudden act of love stirred a lot of sentiments within her. “Tiffie, what’s up? Is the sun rising from the west now?”

Tiffany shook her head and went into the kitchen, still hugging Lillian. “I’ll make you a meal but you have to help me. I’ll leave the task of washing the vegetables to you. Ari sent me home just now; she’s left. I asked her to stay for the meal but she refused. Right, I lost my phone. I want to get a new one. Mom, can you buy one for me? I have no money.”

Lillian stuffed a bank card into Tiffany’s pocket. “I worry about spending all the money I have. I’m giving it to you for safekeeping. This is what’s left after purchasing the house. We can move in after another two months. We don’t have to stay in this awful house anymore.”

The long forsaken warmth almost made Tiffany tear up. Her mother was not just all burdens. She was still her mother, after all.

Jackson was terribly pestered by Mark in the afternoon and could only leave his office to go home. Although there were people standing guard around, Mark still feared something happening to Arianne and urged him to check personally. If Mark were not his best friend, he would not have endured it for so long.

Once Jackson entered his house, he saw Arianne spacing out while staring at the dessert on the coffee table. There was no doubt that Mark had sent them. He thought about an excuse before he spoke, “Uh… the desserts from this shop are very nice.”

Arianne looked up at him. “Ask him not to send them to me anymore. I don’t want to have anything to do with him now. And… I may have to disturb you for some time. I’ll leave this city a month from now to start afresh. Don’t tell Mark. I’ll pay for the living expenses and rent for the month that I spend staying at your place. I don’t have too much money, so please make it cheaper.”

Amused, Jackson opened the box of desserts to have a piece. “Why are you Tremonts so dominating? Staying here as you please without having to discuss it? Do I look like someone needing that bit of money? If you really want to be particular, renting a villa is not cheap. Besides, I, a marvelous chef, am making you good food every day and providing you with nutrients. This is more expensive than the rent. How cheap could it get? It’s nonsense to talk about money. Just stay however long you want. But… are you really leaving the city?”

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Arianne nodded. “Yeah, Tiffie says that she’s leaving with me. We’re planning to start a dessert shop, but we’re not sure yet. If all else fails, we’ll find a job and feed ourselves.”

Hearing that Tiffany was leaving too, the smile on Jackson’s face faded. “Oh… Have you girls thought about where you’re going?”

Arianne shook her head. “Not yet. We aren’t in a hurry. It’s too sudden, and we haven't decided on much yet. Right, can you ask Mark to give Rice Ball back to me? I have to take it with me; Mark doesn’t like it.”

Jackson suddenly thought that his best friend was pitiful. He was less valuable than a cat to Arianne. “You really aren’t thinking about taking the man too? Just the cat?”

Arianne replied seriously, “Stop kidding around. I don’t want to have anything to do with him again for the rest of my life. I won’t make it public that my dad’s innocent, nor will I have the case be checked again and expose him. I just really can’t live with him anymore.”

Jackson scratched his head and probed her with a question, “What if… what if Mark weren’t really the one who did it? What if it were only a misunderstanding between you and he has unspoken sorrows as well?”

Arianne would never consider these possibilities. “No if’s. Take care of the dessert for me. I’ll go take a nap.”

Seeing her closed the door to her room, Jackson called Mark and said in a lowered voice, “Your little princess does not accept your kind gesture and asked me to take care of the desserts. Also, she wants me to ask you for the cat.”

Mark was silent on the line for a while before he answered, “Tell her that I’m not giving it to her.”

The call then hung up.

Jackson heaved a long sigh and rested himself on the couch to eat the spoonful after spoonful of dessert. There was no sense of delight on his face. He had borne all the hassles to himself. He had always been a man who lived freely, but from now on, for at least a month, he had to come home punctually to make dinner every day and could not be out for fun. It was pure torture! If Arianne did leave, the one torturing him would then be Mark.

…

For now, Tiffany did not plan to tell Lillian that she was leaving. She would keep it for later. It was one of those rare days where Lillian did not head out for mahjong but took her to visit their new house in the afternoon instead. It was still under renovation and there wasn't much to see, but it was their future home.

When they exited the new house, it was time for dinner. Lillian was thinking about splurging at the White Water Bay Café, and Tiffany did not oppose. It was acceptable to splurge once in a while. Suddenly, Lillian's phone rang. When she checked the caller, she was startled. "It's Ethan. Why is he calling me?"

Tiffany jolted and her voice shook, "Mom… let me… let me answer it. He must have been unable to contact me since I changed my number so he called you instead. I've broken up with him, but it's not like we don't contact each other."

Lillian did not suspect a thing as she passed her phone to Tiffany.

Tiffany walked off to a side and answered it, "What do you want! Why are you calling my mom?"

Ethan's cold voice spoke on the line, "I don't know your new number, so I could only call her. Don't panic. I only want to treat you to dinner. I'll pick you up. Come downstairs now and wait for me at the first junction. I hope it'll only be the two of us for dinner."

As the call ended, Tiffany barely supported herself by holding onto the wall. Ethan knew that she was here. Why was he after her?

When Lillian saw that Tiffany was still standing there, she walked over. "What did he say?"

Forcing a smile, Tiffany replied, "Uh… He wants to treat me to dinner. I have something to discuss with him. Mom, go to the restaurant and dine alone. I'll ask Jackson to leave you a table."

Lillian muttered something and took the elevator down with Tiffany.

Tiffany only went to the junction for Ethan when she saw Lillian's car leave. Ethan was already waiting for her in his car. Forcing the unwillingness and fear in her away, she pulled the door open and sat in the backseat. "What do you want?"

Ethan looked at her from the rearview mirror with a small smile. He was dressed nicely and looked gentle, just like a kind and righteous heir of a rich family. "Don't overreact. I just want to treat you to a meal. I know that you've been good and didn't do what you shouldn't. I'll keep my promise too and won't make your life miserable."

Both of them had zero interaction on the way. It wasn't until the car stopped that Tiffany discovered that it was her old address, the house that the bank had taken back after her family went bankrupt. She hadn't expected Ethan to have auctioned for it. She gripped the door handle, "Why did you bring me here? This is now your house, isn't it? Aren't we having dinner? What are we doing here?"

Ethan patiently explained, "I've bought this house for you. You grew up here, so you must be missing it. I've brought you here for dinner. Do you have to be so alarmed? Come down."

Not daring to even think about Ethan switching into another person when they entered the house, Tiffany said, "We can go to a restaurant for dinner. I don't want to be here alone with you!"