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Naya sighed and returned to the cash register. After thinking for a moment, she was still worried so she called out to the kitchen. “Ari, come out and have a look.”

Arianne took off her apron and walked out. “What’s up?”

Naya pointed at Tiffany and Summer. “That seems like Jackson’s mother. They don’t look like they’re getting along. Tiffany asked us not to intervene.”

Arianne was silent for a beat and said, “Then let’s not intervene. She’ll be able to handle it herself. Tiffie will only be more abashed if we get in between them. If she can’t handle it, she’ll call for me.”

Both Tiffany and Summer refused to relent. After a while, Summer fished out another check. This time, the sum was not filled in. “You can fill it in yourself, is that fine now? I’m not going to try talking sense into you. You’re stubborn!”

Tiffany could barely keep herself composed. “Will you be able to pay me if I fill in billions and trillions of dollars? Humiliating people with money as you wish, you’re not the richest in the world. You can’t do this with the little money you have! Come to me after you’ve made enough! Who knows, maybe by then, I’ll have a load of children with Jackson already. What’ll you do then?”

Summer protested in equal fervor with her arms on her hips, “Sure, get married in my face if you can. I’d love to see what you have in store to make him a changed man and marry himself to you. I’ve wished this for years but he won’t get married. You’re not super pretty or special. What makes you think he’d

fall for you? Don't kid with me. I'm being courteous because you're Arianne's friend. How dare you shout at me, you rude girl!"

Tiffany exploded. "Okay, let's see then. The more you don't like me, the more I want to become your daughter-in-law and torment you slowly in the future!"

Summer laughed out of anger. "Hah, alright, remember what you said. I'll be waiting!"

She then left the dessert shop with the stride of a posh wealthy wife.

Tiffany gulped down a big glass of lemonade from her rage. "What a lemon!"

Arianne went to her with a grin. "What are we having for lunch?"

Tiffany was close to tears. "I was humiliated so badly by Jackson's mom and you're thinking about what's for lunch? Are you a pig? I'm dying from fury. If she weren't an elder, I'd have hit her just now. Oh, I'm so pissed!"

Arianne had a different view. "Why do I get the feeling that she's using reverse psychology on you?"

"What do you mean?" Tiffany was caught off guard.

Arianne patted her shoulder as a sign of comfort. “She embarrassed you like that because she knows that you won’t want the money. This way, you’ll get married to Jackson faster and give her a grandchild. She’s a true wealthy wife. Do you really think that she’d forget her manners just like that while coming here to shame you and argue with you? She did it on purpose. It’s not like I haven’t met Jackson’s mother. She’s not someone like that.”

Tiffany dared not believe it. “No way, why didn’t I feel it? Don’t comfort me this way, will ya? Things have already gotten to this stage… I knew that Jackson’s mom would have an opinion about me when she saw Ethan’s proposal. I understand.”

Arianne did not explain further and worked to order takeout for lunch. Tanya asked untimely, “Ari, why isn’t Lynn coming in anymore? Is she on leave?”

Tiffany exploded again. “She won’t be coming! Not anymore!”

Tanya was shocked. “You… You’re shouting at me…”

Tiffany felt exasperated. “I’m not… I just don’t feel good. Lynn really isn’t coming anymore. It’s just the bunch of us now. I won’t hire anymore no matter how busy we get. Who knows what kind of people we’ll get…”

Naya saw through the façade and pulled Tanya aside. “The takeout we had last time wasn’t too bad. Let’s have it again…”

Returning to the hotel, Summer knocked on Jackson's door. "I went to Tiffany just now and asked her to leave you."

Jackson was appalled. "Mom, you can't be serious?"

Summer rolled her eyes. "I am. I'm exhausted. I'll take care of you after a nap." She yawned and went back to her room, pretending that she didn't hear Jackson leave the hotel. She had told him so that he could go to Tiffany. Arianne guessed right. She went to agitate Tiffany in order to probe and prod her. It was more or less reverse psychology. It was not that she actually did not agree to the both of them being together.

When Jackson arrived at the dessert shop, Tiffany was having lunch with everyone else. She ignored him, mashing the food in her plate as if it was Jackson.

"Tiffie… I didn't know that my mom came to you…" Guilty, Jackson was also panicking and at a loss.

"You know now? Ah, I'm regretting it a little. She offered me so much money and I didn't want it. How are you worth so much…" Tiffany said with a cold expression.

"Don't speak like that… I'm worth so much more than what she offered. I'll talk to her nicely. I guarantee that she won't come to you for trouble anymore, okay?" Jackson dared not go near her, afraid that he would get beaten up.

"Come over, sit down and eat." Tiffany took one of the takeout boxes from Tanya and put it on the empty seat beside her.

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Tanya did not dare to make a sound. She ate the most among those in the shop. Everyone had only one serving, but she had two each meal…

Jackson sat down obediently. As Tiffany moved her hand to get him some food, he subconsciously moved away as though he was trying to block a heavy blow, stunning everyone.

Tiffany was startled as well. “What are you doing? You’re making it seem as though I beat you up all the time. It’s not like I don’t know how well you can fight. Are you trying to tarnish my reputation?”

Jackson said with a grin, “I won’t be able to lay a finger on you no matter how good a fighter I am. Even if you hit me, I dare not retaliate… You always beat me up anyway. Last night, you even kicked me…”

Arianne choked and coughed for a while before she finally recovered. “Enough, both of you. This isn’t fighting, this is being lovey-dovey, okay? Alright, Tiffie, don’t come in at noon. Go do whatever you want. We can’t take this.”

Naya, Tanya, and a new employee nodded in assent. They felt as though they were watching an episode of a drama today. Their hearts could not take it.

After lunch, Jackson pulled Tiffany away. The best way to appease her was to buy a lot of snacks for her. She was usually in a better mood when she ate. At that time, it’ll be easier for him to appease her with his glib tongue.

When they returned to the hotel with the snacks, Jackson softened his steps once they exited the elevator. “Softer. My mom’s in the room opposite mine. She came here early in the morning and is sleeping right now.”

Tiffany flung his hand away, looking glum. “I wouldn’t have come if I’d known. I’m out, bye!”

Jackson did not dare to argue with her in the corridor. He covered her mouth and pulled her into the room. He sighed in relief as soon as he closed the door. “Okay, my fair lady, you can do whatever you want now. Feel free.”

Tiffany took off her shoes and sat on the couch to unpack all the snacks, complaining while she ate, “Do you know how embarrassing it was when your mom came to the shop? You must’ve known that she doesn’t like me, but you still got together with me before you could change her mind about me. It’s your fault! I’ve suffered because of you!”

Jackson nodded. “You’re right. It’s my fault. I was not prepared. My mom isn’t usually like this. She’s easy to get along with. I won’t let it happen the second time.”

Tiffany bit a piece of dried fruit and said through gritted teeth, “I want to break up with you! I can’t take it! I put up with Lynn since the past is in the past, but how do I put up with your mom? If we really get married and live together... I don’t even dare to think about it!”

Silence descended on the room as soon as she finished speaking.

Jackson's expression turned solemn, and he remained quiet for a long time before he finally said, "Tiffany, you can't just simply say words like these."

Despite being frightened by his stare, Tiffany refused to back down. "I… I'm not… I'm not simply saying it. I want to break up with you. Let's talk after you deal with this matter…"

Jackson clenched his jaw as he tossed whatever Tiffany held in her hand aside.

Tiffany was shocked. "You won't even let me have the snacks just because we broke up? How petty! I'll transfer the money to you!"

Angered yet amused by her reaction, Jackson looked at her domineeringly and quickly wrenched off his tie. He took his jacket off and tossed it aside. He stared at her with a smirk as he removed his belt. "Do you still think the only thing I'm not allowing you to do is eat?"

Realizing what he was going to do, Tiffany wanted to run away. She did not even care about putting on her shoes. Alas, before she could even reach the door, she was carried by Jackson as though she was a tiny animal.

"Why are you running away? I told you, you can't simply say those things. You've got to pay for saying them. I, Jackson West, haven't had any woman break up with me before. You can't be an exception, no matter how special you are. Once you agree to become my girlfriend, it's impossible to break up!"

Tiffany struggled with all her limbs. "Let go of me!"

Jackson did not relent. His gaze seemed a little hazy as he threw her on the bed in a feigned punishing manner.

When Tiffany landed on the soft bed, she had a moment of vertigo. Before she could get up, he pressed her down again without saying a word and got to business immediately.

Tiffany knew that Jackson meant it. Her hands guarded her last line of defense, but they were forcefully tugged away and pinned above her head. His kisses on her fair neck were deep. She resisted with all her might in the beginning, but when she wore herself out, she could only let Jackson do as he pleased. At this moment, the scenes when she was caught and abused by Aery's men popped up in her mind in an untimely manner. She thought about curling up in fear and avoiding Jackson. However, she did her best to open her eyes and look at Jackson, telling herself it was him, not the other men. Only by doing so could she restrain the terror she felt…

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When Jackson lowered his body onto her, Tiffany widened her eyes. She could not hold back her fear anymore. "Don't touch me!"

Jackson stopped his movement at that moment. "What's wrong?"

She did not dare to voice out her fear. It was pathetic and disgusting. She could not force herself to forget the past. Her eyes became teary soon after. She begged him, "Can you please… not? I… I'm begging you…"

Since Jackson had gotten into the mood, it was extremely difficult for him to suppress his desire. However, when he saw the fear on her face, he held her face and placed his forehead against hers. He

looked at her gently and said in a coaxing tone, “Look at me. I’m Jackson. That kind of setback won’t be able to defeat you. No one cares about it. It’s in the past now. You’re with me now. I’m your man. I’m the one who loves you. Just look at me…”

She listened to him. She looked at him through her eyes that were blurred by tears. She gradually calmed down before she hugged his neck, feeling aggrieved.

It was the first time Tiffany went through with it properly. How could she endure doing it with Jackson given how experienced he was compared to her?

On the other hand, it was not easy for Jackson to be presented with such a good opportunity. They stayed in the hotel room the entire afternoon. He even persuaded her not to speak about breaking up with him again.

It was seven o’clock at night when Tiffany announced that she was hungry.

He quickly cleaned up and brought her out for dinner.

They bumped into Summer the minute they walked out of the room. Summer’s expression was cold, but she said, “I’m going out for dinner. Are you coming with me?”

Summer was referring to both of them.

Tiffany understood her clearly.

Jackson quickly tried his best to please her. “We’re heading out for dinner as well. My restaurant has a branch here. Do you want to have dinner there?”

Summer did not reply, she only walked to lift in response.

After they entered the lift, Tiffany felt really awkward. She had quarreled with Summer at the dessert shop once. If Jackson was not here, she would never ride on the same lift with Summer.

When they were standing outside the hotel, Jackson hailed a taxi.

Tiffany took the initiative to sit next to the driver. Otherwise, she knew Jackson would certainly take that seat, and she would be left with no choice but to sit with Summer at the back. It would be worse than asking her to commit suicide…

Suddenly, Summer asked, “Are you done with the company’s project? It costs almost a million dollars. Don’t screw it up. Remember your obligation and work properly.”

Jackson came here to have fun and did not want to ruin his mood because of work. “Mom, I’ve dealt with all the necessary matters at work before I came. Don’t treat me like a child, okay? You’ve never been so strict with me before.”

Clearly, that was not what Summer meant. She glanced at Tiffany and said indirectly, “It’s not good for you to come here all the time. You might disrupt your work. You better take care of the Jackson family’s properties and companies.”

Tiffany lowered her head, slightly displeased. Was Summer blaming her for taking up so much of Jackson’s time?

However, Jackson understood his mother. He knew that Summer wanted Tiffany to return to the capital. However, he had yet to discuss this matter properly with Tiffany, and he did not want Summer to interfere. He said, “That’s enough, mom. I’ll take care of my own business. Just spend a night here and rest well after dinner. I’ll book a plane ticket for you. You can fly home the next morning. It’s better if you go home earlier. Otherwise, your dog might go on a hunger strike since it misses you so much.”

Naturally, Summer missed her dog as well. It had been with her for such a long time that she had treated it like her son. Hence, she did not reject Jackson’s offer.

During the meal, Summer stared at Tiffany constantly, sizing her up.

Tiffany could not endure it. She felt really uncomfortable. Throughout the course of the meal, she scolded Jackson inwardly numerous times.

On the other hand, Jackson complained about it inwardly as well. He felt as though he was caught between a rock and a hard place. It was truly upsetting.

When they finally finished their meal, Tiffany excused herself, claiming that she had to go to the shop to lend a hand. She left so fast that Jackson did not even have time to stop her.

When Summer was finally alone with her son, she dropped her pretense. “Did you spend the entire afternoon with her at the hotel?”

Jackson said in a deep voice, “What do you think? Don’t you understand me? I know what you’re doing. She’s quite naive and innocent. Don’t scare her. She’ll take it seriously.”

Summer could not help but laugh out loud. “I was just helping you. Who knows if you’re lying to me again? I don’t want to be lied to anymore. If she’s unwilling to return to the capital with you, just quickly get her pregnant. When she’s pregnant, she’ll think about taking care of her family. At that time, she won’t have a choice but to return with you. Once she gives birth to the baby, let me take care of the baby for you. You can then lead the kind of life you want. Enjoy yourselves any way you like. I can’t be bothered about that.”

When Tiffany returned to the shop, she appeared listless.

They were not busy during dinnertime. Arianne was free as well so she approached Tiffany and asked her, “What’s wrong with you? Didn’t Jackson allow you to eat dinner?”

Tiffany smiled wickedly at her. “I’m quite full…”

Arianne patted her shoulders once. “Wow! You’re really strong to spend the entire afternoon like that. How frightening! I thought you’re in a bad mood. As it turns out, you’re just exhausted.”

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Tiffany sighed. “No, I’m really in a bad mood. His mom joined us for dinner, and her gaze was like a blade that didn’t leave my face. I didn’t have much appetite to start with so I barely had any food. On the way to dinner, his mom even mentioned that she doesn’t want him to keep coming here and asked him to pay more attention to the company. Does she think I’m holding Jackson back? His mom must hate me even more.”

Arianne was not around so she could not figure out Summer’s thoughts. She could only console Tiffany, “Stop overthinking it. Don’t confuse yourself. It’s not like your head is made for figuring out complicated issues. Just talk to Jackson after this. What if his mother wants you to return to the capital? We’ve talked about this. You should consider it.”

Tiffany paused. “I’m not going back. You’ll be alone if I leave. Ari, I won’t leave you behind. I’ve said it as well, I won’t return unless you return with me. I don’t think Mark will let you go so easily, but it has been so long. Why hasn’t he acted?”

Arianne frowned when Tiffany mentioned Mark. “Tiffie, stop bringing him up. Let’s put it this way. It’s true, based on his character, he wouldn’t let me go so easily. However, it seems like he did. It’s as you said, after so long, he hasn’t acted. I think he has let me go. I’ve gotten used to life here. Don’t upset me with these weird what-ifs, okay? I only wish he’ll come see me once in this life; that’s when he’s willing to divorce me.”

It was as though Tiffany was struck with a sudden realization. “Oh, right, both of you haven’t divorced. You’re still Mrs. Tremont as long as you’re both legally bound. It seems like it doesn’t matter whether he comes to you or not. You’re still his wife anyway. We’ve left the capital for so long that I’ve almost forgotten that you’re Mrs. Tremont.”

Arianne’s feathers were ruffled by these words. “You really… Why must you mention the things I told you not to. I’m ignoring you!” She went into the kitchen after she finished speaking.

Tiffany pouted and continued to space out. She suddenly received a text on her phone. She discovered it was from Jackson. The content was short and simple. “My mom hopes you’ll return to the capital with me.”

A mix of delight and worry hit Tiffany at once. She was happy that Summer did not think she was holding back Jackson, but she was also worried because she could not return now.

She replied, “No, I can’t leave Ari alone.”

A few minutes later, Jackson called her. “Is there anyone next to you? Step aside to talk. I have something to tell you.”

Tiffany looked around. “There’s no one around. You can speak now.”

Jackson hesitated for a beat before he said, “Just return with me. There’s no need for you to worry about Arianne. Mark will be coming for her soon. He’s caught up with something, that’s why he hasn’t been here. Plus, he wanted Arianne to cool down. Mark will take her back to the capital soon.”

Tiffany found it hard to believe. “Are you serious? You’re not just saying this so I’ll return to the capital with you, right? I spoke about Mark with Ari earlier, she’s really upset. What’s so important that he has to deal with it first? I think it’s an excuse. If he really has Ari in his heart, he wouldn’t have been able to hold himself back from coming for so long…”

Jackson did not answer her question because he did not want to mention Ethan again in front of her. How would Tiffany react if she knew that Ethan was killed by Mark's hired guns? He dared not risk it. "Don't question it so much. Consider what I said. If you're really reluctant to return now, I can wait. However, returning to the capital is just a matter of time. Also, don't tell Arianne about this. I'm already making it an exception by telling you."

Tiffany did not give Jackson an immediate reply before she hung up. She was unwilling. The dessert shop had just gotten on track. With the convenience of the location of the shop, they were making profits now that they had time and people on their side. She could not bear to leave this place and return to the capital now. Even if she could leave the shop, she could not bear to leave Arianne alone.

When the shop closed for the night, Arianne could already guess what was on Tiffany's mind when she saw Tiffany's weighed-down expression. "If you decide to return to the capital with Jackson, leave the shop to me. I'll slowly return the money you've invested. I know you can't bear to part with the shop, me, Naya, and the others. However, such is life. We win some and lose some. We have to let things go to chase after what's more important. It hasn't been easy for you and Jackson to get together."

Tiffany suddenly hugged her. "Ari, I really don't want to leave you here all alone. You don't have family with you, you only have me."

Arianne felt slightly teary. "What are you saying? If you forgo your happiness because of me, I'll regret it for life. The Wests thrive in the capital. You have to return at some point. You can't stay here with me for the rest of your life. It's not realistic. Just go, honestly, I'll be fine. This shop won't tie me down forever either. I plan to keep it for a few years and save some money before I travel. I like being free. Don't put such pressure on me."

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The pair of scales in Tiffany's heart had already tipped to one end. She was always serious in her relationships. For this reason, she had been hesitant and was unable to forget Ethan previously. Now

that she was with Jackson, she knew what she would be facing. When it was time to leave, she had to leave.

She did not tell Arianne that Mark was coming for her. After all, she could leave without much worries because she knew Mark was coming soon. “Then… I’ll leave? I’ll stay for half a month and teach Tanya how to make the beverages so she can take over my position in the future. The shop is yours now. I’ll visit you frequently. You must promise to miss me.”

Arianne felt relieved when she saw Tiffany relenting even though there was a hint of reluctance. “It’s best that you figured it out. I’m afraid of you staying here to keep me company. Jackson will hate me to death by then. Okay, stop being mushy. Let’s go home, wash up, and sleep. I’m dying from exhaustion.”

Tiffany wiped her tears and released her. “Alright, let’s go home. But…”

Arianne looked at her. “What? But what?”

Tiffany’s emotions switched quickly. She said in a slightly bashful tone, “If I’d known that sex feels so good, I wouldn’t have been so conservative.”

The corners of Arianne’s mouth twitched. “You really… You were persuaded by Jackson so quickly? I’m impressed! Don’t tell me this. I feel like my ears will get pregnant!”

Tiffany was relentless. She was insistent on talking about it. There were not many people on the streets on a quiet night like this so no one could really hear their intimate conversation.

Arianne's face burned. "I've long gotten bored of his face that I've seen since I was little."

Both girls chased after each other as they slowly vanished at the end of the street. Such was the best friendship. There was nothing they could not speak of and no secret they could not tell each other. They shared their clothes and slept in the same bed…

The next day, Jackson and Summer returned to the capital together after he had obtained Tiffany's promise to return to the capital after half a month.

Tiffany began to teach Tanya how to make the beverages in detail. The latter was meticulous and making beverages had a slightly higher pay than sending takeout. Tanya, naturally, preferred making beverages. In addition to the miscellaneous job, the salaries from both jobs were enough to feed Tanya and her grandfather in this city that did not have a high cost of living.

With Tiffany's impending departure out in the open, the shop was not as lively as usual. Prior to this, Lynn had abruptly left, and now, one of their bosses was leaving as well. Naya and the rest of the employees could not help but worry about Arianne suddenly leaving as well. If that happened, this meant the shop would close down and all of them would lose their jobs.

When they had lunch at noon, Naya asked, "Ari, since Tiffany is leaving, are you planning to leave as well?"

Arianne shook her head. "That's not in my plans for now. She's leaving for something more important in her life. I don't have anything important in my life anymore so I can stay as long as I want. There's no need for all of you to worry."

Naya forced a smile and remained silent.

On the other hand, Tanya was still worried. “Ari, you mustn’t leave. We’re happy working here with you. If you close the shop, we might be able to find other jobs, but it won’t be as fun as working here.”

Arianne answered with a smile, “I won’t, don’t worry.”

Tiffany felt guilty upon hearing their words. “You guys are making me feel like I’m a sinner…”

Naya scooped some food for Tiffany. “No one thinks you’re a sinner. We’re just talking, don’t think too much about it. It’s good that you’re with Jackson. I’m envious that you met the right one when you’re so young. Happy days are coming up. Don’t feel guilty.”

About one in the afternoon, when business was the slowest, a patron entered the shop when everyone was on their afternoon breaks. Naya was the only one manning the counter. “What would you like to order?”

The patron scanned the environment arrogantly and scoffed lightly. “Give me a serving of the most expensive dessert and coffee in your shop, to go.”

Naya disliked this customer. She was arrogant that her nose was pointed to the sky. If she was not a woman, Naya would have ignored her. “Sure, please hold on.”

After receiving the order, Naya called for Tanya to make the coffee and went into the kitchen to pack a serving of the dessert that was made in advance on that day. Not all desserts were made to order since certain desserts were complicated and popular so they had to be prepared in advance.

Arianne would prepare them in advance and store them with caution to hygiene.

When the woman saw the packed dessert, she was annoyed. “So fast? It’s not freshly made, yeah? I only have made-to-order desserts! I demand to see your boss!”

Tanya’s hand shook from being shouted at and the coffee spilled a little.

Arianne walked out from the back of the house when she heard the commotion. “What’s the matter, Naya?”

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Before Naya spoke, the woman smiled. “Arianne, I didn’t expect you to be working at a place like this. Mark darling doesn’t want you anymore? How delightful! Didn’t I tell you that you won’t have a happy ending.”

Arianne’s expression darkened, she did not expect to see Aery here. “Aery, watch your words. I didn’t expect to see you here in this place either. You weren’t able to survive in the capital, were you? Eat if you want, scram if you’re not. I have no obligation to serve you.”

This was Naya's first time seeing Arianne's harsh side. She felt greatly satisfied since her anger was vented. "This is our boss. We're the employees."

Aery did not think much of Arianne just because she owned a dessert shop. "I heard the dessert shop here isn't bad with desserts that taste like a master's work. I was wondering who it is, but now I know it's nothing but a gimmick after seeing the owner. Even if you're not an employee, you're only an owner of a dessert shop. What's the big deal? I came here for a break, how am I anything like you? Arianne, quickly tell me, how did you get chased out of the Tremont's? I can't wait to hear about your tragic story…"

Arianne spoke coldly. "I'm the one who doesn't want Mark, understand? Someone whom I don't want doesn't want you. Who's more tragic?"

Aery turned pale from anger. "What did you say? Repeat yourself if you have the guts!"

Arianne repeated it word for word. "Listen again if you didn't hear it the first time. The man I don't want doesn't want you!"

Tanya sent the coffee that she had prepared at this time. "Coffee's ready."

Aery picked it up and hurled it at Arianne. "Bitch!"

Arianne side-stepped to avoid it and the coffee slammed against the wall behind her, making a huge splash.

Naya picked up the phone on the counter. “Let’s call the police.”

Aery grabbed the phone in Naya’s hand and threw it on the floor as well. “Who are you? Who gave you the right to speak?”

Arianne rolled up her sleeves soundlessly and hinted at Tanya with her eyes to close the shop’s door. She had put up with Aery for far too long. She had wanted to retaliate for a long time now, especially after learning that Aery had colluded with Ethan to kidnap Tiffany. She had not been able to get over that.

Tanya was able to discern that her boss was going to beat this woman up. Naturally, she would help. She quickly ran to close the door and turned the sign to the side that said they were on a break.

Meanwhile, Naya prepared herself to step in should the need arise.

Aery was still throwing things in a frenzy, sweeping everything on the counter to the floor.

Arianne took a step forward and yanked Aery’s hair with one hand and slapped her with the other. “Are you done?!”

Aery was momentarily stunned. “You… You hit me… How dare you hit me?”

Arianne arched an eyebrow and said, “Why can’t I hit you? No matter what, I’m still your elder sister. Since your parents aren’t here, I should discipline you on their behalf. Is it wrong for me to hit you? Kids who aren’t sensible should be taught a lesson. I’ve put up with you for a long time!”

When Aery regained her senses, she fought back, trying to yank Arianne’s hair like a crazy woman. Since Arianne usually tied her hair up in the shop, her attempt was in vain.

Arianne slapped her a few more times, sending her to the floor.

When she saw Naya and Tanya, Aery knew she was outnumbered and could only be beaten up. Cowering a little, she said, “Arianne… aren’t… aren’t you scared that I’ll tell mom about this? You’re finally showing your true self when you pretended to act so frail in front of Mark! You’re disgusting!”

Arianne smirked. “I’m not acting. I’m not like you, I despise doing things like that. You can tell whoever you want about this. Do you think I care about what Helen thinks about me? You’re overthinking things. You provoke me time and time again, and I’ve been silent all this while. Is that why you think I’m a pushover? If you didn’t kidnap Tiffie, I wouldn’t be bothered with you. Since you sent yourself here today, let’s settle the accounts once and for all. You’re the one who started this fight, it’s not like you’ll be able to say anything even if you go to the police.”

Aery gritted her teeth in anger. Her colored hair was in a mess and was stuck on her face. Her bare thighs were scraped when she fell on the floor. She looked wretched. “It was not my intention to kidnap Tiffany. My target was you. She was unlucky to be wearing your clothes while out. Otherwise, the one who’d be raped should’ve been you!”

There was a buzz in Arianne’s head.

Naya and Tanya were dumbfounded as well.

“You… What did you say? Repeat it!”

Aery held her face that was burning from the slaps and spat viciously, “That’s right, I’ve been wanting to seek revenge from you! It’s the fault of those idiots I hired. They must have been blind to abduct the wrong person. If Ethan didn’t come so fast, she’d have died from the fun that day! What can you do about it, huh? Kill me if you can!”

The blood in Arianne seemed to have flowed in reverse. She did not expect Tiffan to experience something so harrowing and kept it from her. Was Tiffany worried that she would feel guilty? She hated herself for letting Tiffany go out wearing her clothes that day, she hated herself for letting Tiffany go out to buy booze… Otherwise, something like that would not have happened…

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The commotion woke Tiffany from her afternoon nap.

When Tiffany came out and saw Arianne and Aery’s expressions, she knew everything had been exposed. “Ari…”

Arianne’s lips moved, but no words left her mouth. Her eyes seemed as though they would bore holes into Aery who was lying on the floor. She bit her lips before mustering all her strength to kick Aery as hard as she possibly could. “Die! Why don’t you kill yourself? You’re nothing but trouble for living in this world! You killed my children, and you harmed Tiffie. I shouldn’t have put up with you for so long!”

Tanya and Naya who had heard Aery's words kicked Aery as well.

Crying, Tiffany pulled Arianne who seemed to have gone berserk. "Ari, don't be like this! It's enough! You're going to kill her! Jackson knows what happened to me, and he doesn't mind. I'm living well. I can start a new life. I'm really okay. Don't be like this for my sake…"

Arianne's tears streamed down her face. "I want to kill her…" This was the first time she had felt such extreme killing intent toward someone. The hatred that had laid dormant in her was triggered at this moment. She might not be able to bring herself to kill ants, she might scream from the sight of a soft wriggly worm, but at this moment, she felt fearless of the consequences.

Naya felt that Aery was revolting, but she was afraid of the situation going out of control. She opened the door while Tiffany shouted at Aery. "Are you an idiot? Leave now! You think Ari won't chop you?"

It was only then that Aery staggered out of the shop. Even then, she did not forget to turn back and said tauntingly, "Just you wait! I won't let you go! If I'd known you're here, I wouldn't have let you live in peace for so long!"

Arianne wanted to chase after her, but Tiffany had hugged her in a steel grip. "Don't go. Let her run her mouth. She's poor and without any power now, what can she do? Don't do it yourself when it's something we can solve by calling the police. We'll get into trouble. You're not in the Tremont's now, no one can bail you out!"

It took a long time before Arianne finally calmed down. However, she felt like she could no longer face Tiffany. Her best friend had gone through such an ordeal because of her… She really wished she was the one who was kidnapped.

The shop was closed the entire afternoon, but none of them left.

Arianne lay on the single bed in the staff's lounge, staring blankly at the ceiling as though her soul had left her body.

Tiffany sat by the bed and muttered, "I found it hard to accept in the beginning as well. I wanted to kill myself, but I still think that being alive is better. I have a mom, whom I can't stop worrying about. I have you, you're so nice to me. I can't bear to leave all of you behind. Fortunately, I didn't die. I finally met my Mr. Right, and you're still by my side. My mom's attitude seems better as well. See, there's always a rainbow after a storm. I managed to weather through the storm, and I found my rainbow. I'm really fine, Ari, don't be sad. You've beaten her up. At least, you vented your anger a little."

Arianne's voice was a little hoarse as she said, "I've thought about it. You'll have to testify if we report it to the police. I don't want you to remember those things again. It's been so long. Moreover, it has something to do with Ethan as well. It won't be so easily resolved. I'm going to make Aery pay in my own way. I'll take back what she owes both of us. I'm disgusted at how weak I was in the past. I'm no saint, why was I so kind? I won't show Aery any mercy because of Helen anymore, not anymore…"

Tiffany stroked Arianne's forehead. "Do you know how you were like to me when I first got to know you? Introverted, taciturn, distant, and kept pushing people away. However, you're pretty. You attracted my attention immediately. I wanted to be your friend so I used every way possible to approach you, and ultimately, I got what I wanted. Maybe it was due to the guilt Mark made you feel, it seemed like you felt that you owe the whole world. You walked with your head lowered all the time, so diffident, that I felt like pulling your head up for you."

She paused before she continued to speak, "Then, you met Will. I saw how you began to change. You knew how to smile, you finally acquired some sense of life. However, when Mark forced Will and me out of the country, and I came back again, you were totally different. This time, you were so determined to

leave Mark. You didn't even know how to fight before, but now you can hit Aery. This is your life experience. We grow up by struggling in pain, it's the same for me as well. If I can make you into someone better, I think the price I paid was worth it. So don't be sad anymore."

Arianne cried her heart out. She wailed as she got up to hug Tiffany. Did they have to pay such a hefty price to grow up? She had lost three children and given up on the man she loved. She had hurt her best friend unintentionally. It was too high of a price to pay.

Tiffany gently patted her back. "It's all in the past. There's nothing we can't get through. Aren't we fine now? I've been keeping in touch with Will, I just didn't let you know, afraid that it'll disrupt your current life. Will's doing fine overseas. He has a girlfriend now from his parents' arrangement. He finally has someone he belongs to. It's pretty cool. I told him that you're doing well, and he's happy for you… Ari, I like to see you smiling. I'm always happier when you smile."

Chapter 498

The next day, the dessert shop operated as usual under Tiffany's request. She made everyone forget about what happened yesterday, including Arianne, but Arianne was still rather down, not as motivated in her preparation of the sweet treats as usual.

Around ten in the morning, Jean charged into the shop angrily with Aery in tow. Seeing that there were still other patrons in the shop, Naya remained polite. "Is there something you need?"

Jean pulled Aery who was injured all over to the front. "Did all of you hit my daughter? Assaulting her alone when in a group, I'll call the police!"

Naya frowned. "Why don't you ask your daughter what she did?"

“Do you have proof?” Aery smirked.

Naya was speechless from her rage. “Stop making a fuss here!”

Jean only thought about avenging his daughter as he announced to the shop’s customers, “This is a thug’s shop. My daughter came here to buy desserts yesterday and got beaten up by them. They even closed the shop to beat her up. How dare all of you patronize a shop like this?”

The customers watched the pair of father and daughter as though they were watching a soap opera. After all, they were frequent patrons of the shop. Most of them did not doubt Arianne and her employees’ characters.

Jean flushed red with anger when he saw no one was bothered with him. “Call Arianne out! I’ll teach that bastard child a lesson today!”

Tiffany could not hold herself back when she heard the words, ‘bastard child’. “Say it again. Who’s the bastard child? Aery’s more like the bastard child based on how lawless she’s behaving. Ari’s got a good education. Mark taught her personally. Who dares to say that she’s uncultured? Question Mark if you’re so capable, ask him how he taught Ari. Why are you making a fuss here?! If you continue, I’ll call the police!”

Arianne dropped her work in the kitchen and walked out. “Jean, the only tie we have is Helen. Why don’t we call her and ask her how we should settle this matter? I don’t want to fight with both of you here. It’s nauseating.”

Jean was a little nervous. He had lied to Helen that he had brought Aery to study abroad. He was enraged when he found out that Aery was beaten up that he had forgotten all about it. He knew that he had messed up now. If Arianne told Helen, he would be exposed. “You… You uncouth girl! I’m your elder. I won’t lay a finger on you. I just want an explanation. At least pay for the medical fee!”

Arianne pressed her lips together coldly. “Still thinking about the property and money that Helen gave me? I didn’t want them, but I’m going to keep them safe and sound now. You won’t even get a cent. I’ll call her if you stay here.” She could see both Jean and Aery were uneasy even though she did not know what they were afraid of. However, the changes in their expressions when she said she was going to call Helen were obvious.

When the money and properties were brought up, Jean erupted in anger again. “How dare you talk about it? What have you done to deserve them? Those are the Kinseys’ money and house! You’re shameless!”

Arianne looked unfazed, staring at the father and daughter duo like she was watching performing clowns. She was delighted. “The Kinseys? I only know that they’re assets that Helen obtained after divorcing you. I’m her daughter. There’s nothing wrong with her giving me what belongs to her, right? As for why she didn’t give them to you, I think you should ask her, not me. Since you want me to pay for the medical bill, sure, but the coffee and dessert that Aery ordered yesterday aren’t paid for. Also, she dirtied my wall and floor. I need to claim for the cleaning fee as well. She also smashed a phone from my shop and many more things. My people have taken photos of them. She can’t escape from this.”

Jean had gone bankrupt, but he still had the air of a wealthy man. Straightening up, he jeered. “Believe me when I say that I’ll stop your shop from running!”

Arianne shrugged indifferently. “I don’t believe it. Try if you can.”

Jean left with Aery, fuming, and said threateningly, “Alright, just you wait!”

After the episode, the patrons in the shop were still eating as they should. To express her apology, Arianne sent a complimentary dessert to every customer in the shop.

Naya was a little worried. “I think Aery’s father looks like trouble. Will he actually do something to us?”

Arianne was not bothered. “Let him do what he wants. He has gone bankrupt a long time ago and has nothing now, living his days depending on a woman. What trouble can he cause? Once I make a call, his source of finance will be cut off. He won’t dare to make a big fuss.”

“That’s good then.” Naya nodded.

Tiffany, Arianne, and Naya stayed back at night to check the account. It was the end of the month so they had to calculate the finances of the month. Once they started, they were kept busy until past eleven at night.

Suddenly, a group of thugs on bikes approached the shop. Before the ladies noticed them, the shop’s door and glass wall shattered.

Naya screamed in fright and hid under the counter while Tiffany and Arianne were shocked.

After vandalizing the place, the group sped off from the crime scene. Forget about catching them, they did not even know what the bikers looked like since all of them wore helmets!

Chapter 499

There was no doubt that Jean was behind this. The crux of the matter was it was done so fast. Unlike how easy it was for them to catch Regina previously, they had no evidence that this was Jean's doing!

After they calmed down, Arianne called Helen. The call rang for a while before it connected. Helen's drowsy voice sounded from the other end of the line, "Arianne? What's the matter? It's so late now, did something happen?"

Looking at the mess that was her shop, Arianne said, "Aery came looking for trouble in my shop, and I beat her up. She brought her father here to settle scores with me today, but I chased them away with a few words. Before Jean left, he threatened me, asking me to wait for it. Tonight... Actually, it just happened, a group of people wrecked the door and walls of my shop. Who do you think did it?"

Helen woke up instantly. "What did you say?! How could Jean do that?"

Arianne replied lightly, "He's the man you chose, shouldn't you know what he's like? Women love bad boys, it's too bad my dad's a gentleman and isn't a thug like Jean. I hope you settle this once and for all. That's your ex-husband and daughter. If they come looking for trouble with me again, I won't let them off the hook so easily. Remember this." She hung up as soon as she finished speaking.

Tiffany felt her heart breaking. "The walls and door are shattered. How much will they cost us? What if thieves or robbers break in? We have no door or wall to hold them back. What should we do?"

Arianne gave it a thought and said, “Pour some ketchup on the floor. No matter how bold the thieves are, they won’t dare to come in. They’d think a murder had taken place here when they see the ketchup on the floor. It’s so dark they won’t be able to see clearly. It should be fine. Let’s lock up what we can and should and call it a day. It’s late now. Let’s go home after packing up the important stuff.”

It was nearly one in the morning when they got home after cleaning up. Arianne slept like usual, as if nothing happened.

Impressed with her indifference, Tiffany slept without worry as well.

Tonight, however, Jean and Aery would have a hard time sleeping.

Helen had called Jean directly after receiving Arianne’s call.

Both the father and daughter did not dare to pick up, afraid that they were already exposed.

Knowing what they were like, Helen ceased calling them and texted a long message. “Jean, I didn’t expect you to be someone like this. I know that you and Aery didn’t go abroad and are living here, waiting for my money every month. From now on, I won’t give you a single cent. If you look for trouble with Arianne again, well, don’t say I didn’t warn you. She has Mark supporting her. At that time, you won’t even know what’s the cause of your death! That’s all I have to say. Since she doesn’t want to study and she’s already an adult, I won’t care about what Aery’s up to anymore, nor will I be bothered with you. Live or die, it has nothing to do with me now.”

After reading the text, Aery could not hold herself back and called Helen. “What did that bitch Arianne tell you? Do you believe what she said? I’m your daughter. She’s just a bastard you don’t want! Are you cutting ties with me because of her? You’re ruthless!”

Helen scoffed on the line. “I’d rather not have a daughter like you. Don’t think I don’t know what you’ve done. If it weren’t for you, Arianne wouldn’t have been unable to bear a child anymore! She let you go because of me. Otherwise, you’d be done for good! However, you still haven’t come to your senses and see where you’ve gone wrong. I’ll never not want her, and she’s not a bastard. I was blind for taking the wrong path and choosing your dad! If I can go back in time, I’d live in peace with Zachary so I wouldn’t owe Arianne as much nor would I have an ungrateful child like you!” She continued, “Do you know how many times I’ve covered for you both openly and in secret? I thought you’d change, but you’ve grown even more bold and self-centered. Why are you so full of yourself? You have nothing now, face the reality! No matter how bad Arianne is doing, she’s still a Tremont. She’s Mark’s woman. I won’t stop you and Jean if you guys want to commit suicide, but I’ll no longer plea for mercy on your behalf!”

Aery was unhappy that her mom seemed to be siding with Arianne and found her words piercing. “What do you mean Mark’s woman? She’s not. She got chased out of the Tremont’s and has opened up a dessert shop in a stupid place. She’s not Mark’s anyone! I’m not scared of her. Turn a blind eye on me if you want, alive or dead, I have nothing to do with you either! You’d rather side with someone who won’t even meet your gaze or forgive you and reprimand the daughter you raised. Amazing! Don’t regret this!”

Helen no longer wanted to hear anything from the pair of father and daughter. She hung up directly and even pulled out her phone card. She had accumulated much disappointment over the years to finally decide on a divorce. This was how she had always been. Once she had made up her mind, she would act decisively. This applied to the man once loved and her biological daughter. It was at this moment that Helen discovered her strength was being ruthless. She was only left with this steel heart of hers now…

Chapter 500

The next day, Arianne called for someone to put up a new door and windows. By afternoon, it was finally done, and they could continue with business.

She knew that Helen had already spoken to Aery and Jean Kinsey. However, knowing Helen, the most she could do was completely cut ties with the father and daughter. She could not possibly limit their movements. She was not sure if Jean would continue to look for trouble with her, she had to take appropriate measures according to the situation. As long as she managed to get evidence on Jean, he would be sent to jail!

Realizing that the date for her return to the capital was drawing near, Tiffany grew anxious. “Ari, how about I talk to Jackson about staying here a little longer? I’m really worried about leaving you here at a time like this”

Arianne stubbornly shook her head. “I can take care of this. You should go. I owe you too much. I don’t want you to sacrifice yourself for me anymore. Listen to me this time, Tiffie. Jean and Aery aren’t exactly dangerous people. This is a civilized society. They’re not going to hurt me. Even if they do, I’ll make them pay for it ten times over. None of them will be able to get away with it.”

After a bout of hesitation, Tiffany remembered Mark would be coming soon. In the end, she decided not to worry too much and nodded. “Alright… If… If Mark comes to see you, will you give him a chance? Will you give yourself a chance? You’re obviously in love with him. I know. No one knows you better than I do. You’d spend every bit of your energy tormenting him if you really hate him. Leaving him was his biggest salvation…”

Arianne could not understand why she was bringing Mark up again. She said half-heartedly, “Okay, okay, I understand. You should worry about yourself, don’t worry about me. Make sure Tanya knows what to do as a barista. I don’t want the shop to collapse once you leave.”

Tiffany knew Arianne would change the topic once Mark was mentioned in a conversation so she stopped talking. She had advised Arianne to accept Mark back again because Arianne was in love with him. Hate was a terrifying thing, but hating the man you love was an extremely painful thing. She hoped

Arianne would be able to open her heart and give Mark a chance. She did not want Arianne to suffer for the rest of her life.

Jean seemed determined to attack Arianne. After falling out with Helen, he completely lost control. He sent some men over to the shop to destroy the door and windows again.

When Arianne arrived the next day, she was not surprised at all. Instead, she simply called the police. This was the second attack. If Jean wanted to play games with her, she was down for it. Regardless of what he did, he would not be able to get away once the police got involved.

The door and windows repairmen were puzzled when they arrived. “Why are people always vandalizing your place?”

Arianne stood at the side and calmly explained, “Someone’s out to get me. If they’re going to look for trouble with me, I’m not backing down. Will you fix this up again please?”

Tiffany was extremely uneasy when she saw this. She secretly sent a message to Jackson. “Jean has gone crazy. He sent men to the shop to break our windows and door two days in a row. Ari has reported this to the police, but the vandals are all bikers in helmets. They couldn’t identify their faces. The police’s involvement will probably make everything trickier, and I’m worried that Jean will become even more violent. Can you help us take care of this? Or maybe get Mark to come over sooner? I’m not sure if we can hold on for much longer…”

When he received the message, Jackson’s first thought was to book a flight and fly over immediately. However, after further consideration, he got rid of the idea and sent a message to Mark, telling him exactly what happened. It would be better if Mark dealt with this. Perhaps, Arianne might feel grateful.

Tremont Tower, the CEO's office.

Mark did not seem too surprised when he received Jackson's message. He had already been made aware of this. After all, he always had eyes around Arianne. He would know even with Lynn out of the picture. He was updated in regard to Arianne. However, it seemed like it was not enough. After mulling it over, he called Henry. "Henry, take some men with you over to where Ari's staying. I want Jean and Aery locked up. Don't let Ari find out."

After the call, he called Ellie into his office. "Cancel all of my plans after the thirteenth, hand everything over to the vice-chairman. I'll deal with the important contracts, leave the minor work to the vice-chairman."

Ellie responded and hurried off to get everything in order. Mark's itinerary had been fully packed every day for nearly half a year now. He had pretty much turned into a workaholic. His schedule had long been arranged until kingdom came so she had to move fast in order to avoid dropping the ball.

Past nine at night.

Aery and Jean were eating takeouts in their rented high-end condominium when they suddenly heard a knock on the door.

Aery was frightened. "Dad, do you think Arianne called the cops? Do you think they found us?"

Jean was panicking as well, but he soon calmed down. “It’ll be fine. I’ll answer the door. No one can do anything to us as long as we don’t confess. Eat.”