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Seeing as there were not many customers at the moment, Naya shut the kitchen door. She lowered her voice and said, “It’s alright. You can talk to me. My lips are sealed. I won’t tell anyone else. You’ll feel better after talking to someone about it.”

With Tiffany gone, Naya was the only caring companion she had. “Naya… Mark came over to my place last night, he was hurt. I couldn’t ignore him, but because of that, both of us are connected again… Apart from receiving divorce papers, I didn’t think I’d have to deal with him again.”

Since Naya was not aware of what had transpired between them, she could not jump to any conclusion. “You did the right thing. You wouldn’t even turn your back on a stranger, let alone your own husband. I may not know what happened between both of you, and I don’t know how he got hurt either, but the fact that he came to you when he’s most vulnerable shows that he trusts you the most. You definitely have a place in his heart. There’s nothing wrong with following your heart. You’ll have to ask yourself. If you really don’t love him anymore, cut him off completely. However, if you do, don’t ever let go because you’ll regret it. The price of trying to forget what could have been for the rest of your life is too great and too painful to bear. Even if something horrible happened between both of you and has turned into an obstacle that you can’t get past, remember this — finding a way around it is always better than suffering. There’s nothing you can’t get past. Take me, for example. There are times I just want to give up as well. Sometimes I want a divorce, I want to take my daughter away, and never come back. In the end, after I calmed down, I realize that he hasn’t done anything unforgivable.”

Arianne could not relate to Naya’s experience. “What made you feel like giving up?”

Naya sighed. “I’m pretty sure you’ll laugh at me. It’s just annoying family stuff. I gave birth to Lulu on the first day of my vacation. My mother-in-law pushed me into getting pregnant, offering to help take care of my baby. However, things are different after birth. I’m the only one taking care of her. My mother-in-law insisted that it’d be more convenient for me to breastfeed my baby at night, and during the day, she’d make excuses saying that she had to go to the market and would be back soon. After cooking, she’d come up with all sorts of excuses to get out of the house. I had to feed my kid once every two to

three hours, day and night. I never had a good night's sleep. It was so bad that I almost gave up. Perhaps, it's because my mother-in-law wanted a grandson instead of a granddaughter. Although she has never said it, I can sense it. It's fine now. I've pulled through. I couldn't work at all before Lulu started pre-school since taking care of her took up all of my time. On top of that, I had to do the housework as well. I cooked, cleaned, and washed the clothes. My mother-in-law waited on my father-in-law his entire life so he can't help out. My mother-in-law piled everything on me. There were many times when I felt suffocated. To top it all off, my mother-in-law used to sneer at me for being a stay-at-home mom with no income. She would criticize me for using her son's money when I used it to buy diapers and milk. She would grumble at me for wasting money…"

At this moment, Naya seemed less calm compared to before. Even a caring and graceful woman would turn into a nagging wife after enduring too many issues. "Did you know, Ari? I was so happy when Lulu finally went to school? I didn't waste any time and began to hunt for a job. However, I couldn't get my old job back since I stopped working for three years. I couldn't keep up. When I told my mother-in-law about my cashier job at a pastry shop, she laughed at me and said I was incapable of getting a real job. She said that I probably don't earn much. Actually, working with you has been great. You're flexible, and the pay is higher compared to most places in the city. I think it's pretty close to a white-collar job. The important thing here is that it's bad enough that she isn't helping me with my kid, she's using all sorts of ways to meddle in my personal affairs. She's been subtly asking questions about my salary and where it all goes. I have lost all good sentiment toward my father and mother-in-law. I've even thought of moving out. They're in pretty good health, they're not sick, they're not that old, and they can still go out the entire day and climb mountains. However, whenever they're home, they'd always complain and claim that they're not feeling well and that their daughter-in-law hates them. Do I owe them anything? No, I don't think so."

Arianne had never experienced this so she could not empathize. Regardless, she found the situation unbelievable and thought Naya was an incredibly strong woman. She could not imagine how it must be like to juggle a kid and household chores at the same time. It sounded exhausting.

Naya rarely talked about her husband. It was clear that her husband was the kind of man who only cared about his work. He was clearly aware of these issues and participated in them too. He would use his job as an excuse to live a carefree life, leaving Naya embroiled in her bitterness.

“Naya, I used to think I’m the only one having a difficult time. However, with time, I understand that everyone is probably having a difficult time as well. You’re not the only one, Tanya’s the same. I hope that we’ll be able to achieve whatever we want in life. Things will be better soon. Your life will definitely get easier once Lulu is all grown up.”

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Naya smiled. “That’s right. Lulu is a really obedient girl. She’s a good girl. She’s my one and only hope. Lately, I've been coming home late from work. When I get home, I try to avoid cleaning up my mother-in-law’s mess. I wash my husband and my clothes in the washing machine and Lulu’s clothes by hand. I’m exhausted. I can’t be bothered with them. They have hands and feet. I’ve stopped acting like their servant. They’ve been grumbling at me lately, but I don’t care. They used to complain about me not having an income, now I can take care of myself since expenses aren’t that high here. I’d love to see what else they can say once I stop relying on their son.”

Arianne agreed with Naya’s words. “You should have done that a long time ago. Just ignore them if they’re not happy, and tell them to talk to their son. It’s not like you’re their biological daughter, and they’ve never treated you like their own anyway. Why should you deal with the trouble anyway? By the way, I don’t think it’s healthy for us to order takeout every day. Why don’t we take turns stepping out from the shop and cooking our meals everyday? I’ll cover the cost of the ingredients. You can consider this as the shop subsidizing your meals, but remember, I’m not subsidizing your living expenses.”

Naya agreed that it was a good idea. She discussed it with the others before they finally agreed on it.

Although Arianne did not talk much about her problems and had mostly listened to Naya’s complaints, she felt strangely relieved.

When noon came around, she became worried about Mark and wanted to see if he had left. For this reason, she left work to check on him.

When she walked in, she discovered he had finished the noodles she cooked in the morning and washed the cutleries and bowl. The bedroom door was slightly ajar, and she could vaguely make out the figure of a man on the bed. He had not left…

She stepped forward and knocked on the bedroom door before asking nonchalantly, “What would you like for lunch?”

Mark knew that she would come home at noon so he lay very still on the bed, looking sickly. “Anything’s fine.”

Arianne checked the fridge. There were some groceries left, enough to make a simple meal. After she finished cooking, she left the food on the table again and returned to the shop. She did not stay a minute longer than necessary. After all, she did not know how to face him.

Honestly, Arianne’s cooking was not that good. Mark could not stomach it, but he could not bear to leave it uneaten. He struggled to finish the food, and his struggles only ended once he had finished eating. After that, he cleared the table. He did not have the nerve to let her clean it up when she came home. He deduced that she would ask him about when he was leaving after she came home from work. He had to come up with a good excuse…

As expected, Arianne’s first question to him when she got home from work was to ask him when he would be leaving.

Mark had picked up some tips from Jackson earlier on. “You can always send me to a hotel if it’s inconvenient.”

Arianne frowned. “I’m not letting you stay in a hotel on your own. I’ve tried calling Henry and Mary. Why can’t I get through to them?”

“I gave them a long vacation before coming here,” Mark lied unblinkingly, “They’re not in the estate. I came here on my own and plan on staying here to look after my new company.”

Arianne took a deep breath before she said, “You can stay here if you want, and leave once your wounds are healed. You can sleep on the bed, I’ll take the couch. Please don’t move around the house when I’m home. I don’t want to see you.”

Mark frowned. Her words upset him. He could feel his pretense slipping. “Honestly, Arianne, do you really think that I’m actually here just to manage my new company?”

Arianne felt annoyed. “I don’t know. You’ll irritate your wound if it gets wet. It’s best to avoid baths for now. If it’s unbearable, wipe yourself down. I’ve bought you some simple pajamas. Take off the clothes you’re wearing, and I’ll wash them for you.”

He had initially intended on laying his cards on the table and dropping all pretenses, but her sudden change in topic put him at a loss. He went to change his clothes, but he really could not tolerate not having a shower. “I want a shower.”

“Go ahead if you want to die,” she replied irritably, “It’ll probably heal without leaving a mark on your smooth and fair skin, but if your wound festers, it’ll probably leave a scar. You’ll never be able to get rid of it.”

His temper was rising. He ignored her and walked into the bathroom immediately.

She really could not let him be. She stepped forward and pulled the showerhead off its holder. “Can’t you listen to me just this once? Are you so used to controlling me that you can’t bear listening to me at all? Then, you really shouldn’t have come here! I wouldn’t be bothered about your wellbeing if you weren’t staying with me. However, since you’re living under my roof, you’ll listen to me!”

He glared at her with eyes that were like a dark and bottomless abyss.

She could not read his mind, but she realized that she was no longer scared of him even if he were angry with her. Why should she be afraid when she had already decided never to speak to him again?

Those few seconds felt like a few centuries. The small yellow chicks printed all over his pajama top and bottom were a stark contrast to his aura. This was probably one of the reasons why he did not completely intimidate her.

“I can wipe myself down, right?” Mark finally yielded.

She filled up a bucket of water for him, then, threw a newly-purchased towel into the bucket. “Wipe.”

He cocked an eyebrow and lifted his shirt without any sign of hesitation, ready to take it off. “Are you sure you want to watch?”

She calmly turned around and walked out. She only realized how hot her cheeks were after she sighed in relief. What the heck was wrong with him? He looked so miserable and pathetic when he first arrived, and now, it seemed like he was no different from how he used to be. He was even trying to intimidate her. Unfortunately, she was no longer afraid of him! However, she had to admit that she weakened just a little when she looked him in the eyes… This was an old sickness that had been festering for the past ten years. She had to fix it!

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She suppressed her bashfulness after Mark finished wiping himself down. She helped him change his bandages before she washed up, cleaned the house, and washed the clothes. His suit was very expensive. It was so expensive that she would not be able to compensate him if it had gotten ruined in the washing machine. For this reason, she had to hand wash everything. When she was finally washing his underwear, she felt as though her hands were burning even though she had only been scrubbing a few times...

Mark sat on the bed and listened to the commotion outside. He wondered if the next part of his plan would work. He felt that Jackson's methods did not suit him at all. It did not fit his personality, and he felt like he would blow up at Arianne at any moment.

The more he stared at his pajamas, the more depressed he felt. She was doing this on purpose, right? She knew his preferred style, and yet, she bought him pajamas with little yellow chicks… He would have ripped these clothes off and thrown them as far away as possible if it were not for the fact that his clothes were still unwashed!

It was midnight when Arianne was finally done.

When he saw her switching off the lights and lying on the couch, Mark completely lost his patience to take things slow as Jackson had previously advised. How could this environment, this exhausting life be considered free and peaceful? He got up, walked to the couch, and looked at Arianne. "Come home with me."

Arianne stiffened in the darkness. She was still awake so she heard every word he said. However, she did not answer him.

Mark knew that she had heard him. He continued, “That’s right, I lied. I lied to you for many years. How can I let you go so easily after using every possible means to keep you by my side? I’ve mentioned this before; if you want freedom, I’ll let you go for one and a half years. Time’s almost up. I may be asking you nicely now, but the end result will always go according to my plan. I have ten thousand ways to make you return to the Tremont Estate. I’m sure you’re aware of this. However, you voluntarily coming back with me is the easiest way.”

Arianne sat up and stared at him. “Try challenging me again when you’ve made a full recovery.”

The thought of how he ended up getting hurt thoroughly embarrassed him. He felt even more depressed. “This injury is nothing. You don’t think I can persuade you?”

Arianne picked up a throw pillow and smacked him. “What do you want from me? How dare you try to intimidate me? Am I supposed to feel grateful to you? Am I supposed to feel grateful to the man who killed my father? It’s been ten years. I’ve had enough! Since you’re completely fine, please leave. Now! Besides, you’re Mark Tremont. I’m sure you’ll survive even if I drop you on some random place on earth!”

Mark remained standing in his spot. She might seem calm on the surface, but underneath it all, she was still highly unstable. This was her way of releasing her frustrations. No matter how piercing her words were, he had to endure them. “We’re still legally married. It’s completely reasonable for me to be here.”

He could not bear watching her live like this. He thought that he had prepared himself for a long battle before he arrived. Take it easy, take it easy — this was his mantra. However, in reality, he could not do it. He could only fall back on his habits when it came to her. As long as she returned with him, he could take it slow with everything else.

Arianne had lost it at this moment. “What the hell do you want from me? What the hell could you possibly do to me? What else do you have to threaten me with? I have nothing! Are you going to take a shot at Tiffie? She’s your best friend’s girlfriend now. So go ahead and try! I hate you, Mark Tremont! I wish you’d die! I’ve had enough of you…”

She suddenly lost her nerve in the end and stopped abruptly. Suddenly, she could not seem to remember how horrible he had been… Apart from lying to her for more than ten years and preventing her from discovering the truth, she could not think of how horrible he had been… How could she possibly bring herself to truly hate a man who had been closely connected to her for the first half of her life?

“Why did you stop?” he asked coldly.

She bit her lips silently, her chest rising and falling rapidly.

The smell of freshly-washed clothes permeated the air in this small condominium, intermingling with her scent. This was a special kind of provocation to his senses on this lonely night. He tried his best to fight back the urge to touch her, afraid of triggering an extreme reaction from her.

After a while, Arianne calmed down and said determinedly, “I’m not going back with you. I won’t abandon my shop, and I’m not abandoning my employees. The only unfinished business between us is divorce. It’s true that I can’t completely hate you, but I can’t forgive you either. So why don’t we let each other go?”

Mark sat down next to her and spoke, almost as if to himself, “Let each other go? How? How can I let myself go if I let you go? I’ve tried it, I can’t do it. Come home with me, okay?”

Come home…

These words brought tears to Arianne’s eyes. She managed to conceal her emotions perfectly in the dark. He might not be able to see it, but she could not lie to herself. “That’s not my home. My home was destroyed… by you. I lost my home a long time ago! If we end this right now, perhaps, I might still have some fond memories of you. At least hatred wouldn’t be the only thing on my mind whenever I think of you in the future. Stop trying to force me. I just want to live my life in peace. This is the life I want. Please don’t ever come into my world again. I don’t want another heartbreak…”

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“Is that all I am to you? A heartbreak?” His voice held a hint of bitterness.

She did not answer him. She did not want to think about it. Regardless if their past was sweet or bitter, it was all torture to her now. The conflict between them did not seem to have faded with time. They still could not sit down and speak about it calmly.

Mark’s expression was a blur in the dark. After a long silence, he rose to his feet and picked his laptop up before leaving the condominium.

Arianne flinched slightly when the door closed. For a fleeting moment, she was overcome with the urge to ask him to stay. However, she knew he would be fine since he dared to walk out the door. There was no need to worry about him.

Mark hailed a cab immediately after walking out of the condominium and made his way to a nearby hotel. He had fired that chauffeur and brought Brian over. He could only trust Brian to drive him around and did not want to see that idiot who had nearly turned him into a hornet's nest.

He sat on the hotel bed and turned on the laptop. Feeling annoyed, he video-called Jackson.

When Jackson answered the call, his surroundings were pitch black. Mark could only see his face.

Jackson seemed a little irritated as he asked, "Why are you video calling me at a time like this? Am I not allowed to have some personal space?"

It was obvious to Mark that there was a woman in Jackson's bed. "I'm in a hotel."

Jackson was taken aback. He got up and walked to the bathroom, lowered his voice, and asked, "She threw you out?"

Mark shook his head. "I walked out on my own accord. I couldn't control myself, and then, the conversation went to shit."

Jackson frowned. "That's bad. I knew you wouldn't be able to take it. By the way, what on earth are you wearing? Little yellow chicks? So this is what you're into?"

“Big. Picture. Please,” Mark said through gritted teeth, “I think force is the only way to deal with someone with her personality. At this point, I don’t care. As long as I can get her to return with me, it’s fine. I’ve given up hope that she’ll live happily ever after with me.”

Jackson checked himself out in the mirror as he sighed. “You know Arianne better than I do. I’m sure you know how to get her to come back to you. However, whatever it is that you do, make sure you don’t cross the line. At this point, I feel like you’re borderline obsessed with her. I’ve got nothing for you, and I’ve got to go. Tiffie is here. I’m dead if she hears any of this. Bye.”

Jackson went back to bed after the video call. Tiffany got up and stared at him blearily. “Who were you video calling?” she asked sulkily, “Why do you have to sneak around and go to the bathroom to do it? Were you cheating on me while I was asleep?”

Jackson was helpless. “Honey, why would I do such a thing? It was Mark. You can check the call records if you don’t believe me. I was afraid that I’d wake you. You’d just fallen asleep; if I woke you, you’d smother me with your bad mood. Alright, go back to bed.”

Tiffany was half-suspicious. She did not actually check his phone. Although they were in a relationship, she could not help but feel insecure. However, she simply could not bring herself to check his phone even if he was fine with it. That was the final defensive line of trust.

She was currently worried over the fact that Jackson had been clinging to her and made her sleep over every night. Would he get tired of her over time? She still remembered Lisa from the beach in Sanya. All of Jackson’s previous women had only stayed with him for a very brief period.

She was not very good at hiding her emotions. Although she did not say it, it was written all over her face.

Jackson knew she was feeling insecure again based on the expression on her face. His past was now considered a taboo between them so he would never bring it up on his own. “Stop overthinking. It’s really nothing. Go to sleep. I’ll drive you home tomorrow, and you can consider coming back to my company. If you don’t want to work, I can always take care of you.”

Tiffany lay down, turned her back against him, and closed her eyes. “I’m not going back to your company, and I don’t want you to take care of my living expenses either. I can find a job on my own. I was doing well with Ari at the dessert shop, but I came back to the capital for you. I’m kind of at a loss over what to do, but I think I’ll go back to my old career — back to fashion design. Good night.”

The next day, Arianne went to work as though nothing had happened. Mark’s appearance made her slightly anxious. He mentioned wanting her to come back, and although he left, he did not make things clear so it did not mean he was dropping the matter.

The clothes that he had left in her house were a constant reminder to her that he was there. It was like a time bomb. She was never going back. Some things could never be ignored and could never be truly left in the past.

Naya had taken the day off for an emergency today. This meant that Tanya and the other staff would be busier than usual.

Arianne was the only one who was familiar with the cash register. For this reason, not only did she have to man the kitchen, but she had to keep an eye on the cash register as well.

Naya would never take the day off unless it was for something important. Naturally, she did not mention why she needed the day off.

At around ten in the morning, the shop was not exactly busy, but it was not empty either.

A relatively fashionable woman around 50 years of age walked into the shop. She walked up to the cash register immediately as she studied every inch of the shop. It did not look like she came to have a meal.

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Arianne happened to be at the cash counter at this moment. “How may I assist you, ma’am?”

The woman tucked a lock of her curly hair behind her ear and asked in a secretive manner, “Does Naya Palmer work here?”

When Arianne heard she was here to see Naya, she promptly replied, “Naya took the day off. She’s not here. You won’t find her here today.”

The woman smiled. “I know she took the day off, she’s my daughter-in-law. My granddaughter had a fever last night. I’m just here to confirm if she works here. How much is her monthly salary?”

Arianne’s impression of the lady plummeted once she heard that she was Naya’s mother-in-law. She examined the woman in front of her intently. She came off as the kind of woman who was not to be trifled with. She sported the popular ‘teddy bear curls’ and dyed it light brown. She even had semi-permanent eyebrow embroidery done. She wore high heels that were around four centimeters high, and the bag she carried was exquisite. With just a glance, one could see her skin was well-maintained.

She was a stark contrast to Naya's usual natural self. Naya was simple, and yet, her mother-in-law was extremely over the top, appearance-wise. Her mother-in-law did not seem to have any major health issues and was in the pink of health!

"You should ask Naya about her salary, ma'am. It's not appropriate for us to say."

Naya's mother-in-law looked displeased as she retorted, "How can you be so rude? I'm only asking about my daughter-in-law's salary. Why won't you tell me? This isn't a real company anyway, it's just a dessert shop. Why should someone's salary be kept a secret? Besides, I'm family. She's been going out early in the morning and coming home late at night, and she's always in such a good mood when she comes home. She doesn't look like someone who's been working all day in a restaurant at all. Who's to say if she has been doing shady things behind our backs?"

Arianne was mildly angered, but she maintained a polite smile anyway. "You can't say that, ma'am. We have surveillance cameras here. This is Naya's first time taking the day off. She's usually in the shop. You can see it for yourself if you don't believe me. We're usually quite busy, and we don't have much to do during our free time. It's not as exhausting as you may think. Naya enjoys working here so it shouldn't exhaust her to the point of sighing and grumbling all the way home. Furthermore, she had brought her daughter here many times so you can't say that she has been neglecting her child. If there's nothing else, please excuse me. I have work to do."

Naya's mother-in-law was probably not the kind of person who was used to defiance. She slammed her hand on the sales counter. "I want to see your supervisor. I don't believe you!"

Arianne's smile vanished from her face. "I'm the owner of this shop. I've made my stance very clear."

Naya's mother-in-law did not expect Arianne to be the owner. After all, she was working at the cash register and was so young. She rolled her eyes angrily and stormed out.

Tanya rushed forward and murmured, “Is that Naya’s mother-in-law? I didn’t think she’d be so different from Naya. Naya’s pretty young, but she’s not as over the top as that old lady. That mother-in-law of hers isn’t someone you want to offend.”

“You should really open your eyes and see how your in-laws are like when you look for a husband in the future,” Arianne said irritably, “Otherwise, you’d be busting your butt for no good reason.”

After a while, they suddenly received a takeout order. Arianne was taken aback when she saw the order notification on the computer screen — it was from Mark. Although there was no name or phone number provided, the order was directed to his company’s address. The order also consisted of his favorite dessert and americano.

She typed out the order and told Tanya to watch the cash register before heading into the kitchen. No matter how much she wanted to maintain her composure, she could not help but get riled up when it came to him.

Tanya delivered the order.

Arianne was not going to deliver it. When she saw the filled seats in the shop and thought of her quiet life, she was even more certain of her decision to stay in this place instead of returning to the capital. She had made a promise to Naya and the others when Tiffany left. She would not abandon them.

The shop closed early for the night. Tanya and the other staff went home first, leaving Arianne to take care of the accounts. By the time she had finished and looked up, she realized that it was already very late. She could not help but feel a little defeated. The journey home was not exactly long or short.

Calling a cab would be too expensive but walking home would take quite a while. Usually, she would not walk home this late. It was pretty scary after all.

She locked up and left for home quickly. She finally felt safe when she arrived home and locked the door behind her. Only then could she finally relax.

When she got home, she tossed her dirty clothes into the washing machine after her shower. Mark's suit, which was hanging on the dryer in the balcony, caught her attention. She took down the dried suit and folded it, wondering when she should ask Tanya to return this to him on her behalf. Leaving his clothes here made her feel uneasy, as though a man was living with her…

Chapter 516

Arianne's phone, set on the coffee table, suddenly rang.

She dashed to answer it and found Tiffany on the other side. "Yellow, Ari! How's it been lately? Gotten used to living without me around yet?"

Arianne feigned dolefulness. "No, I'm not used to it, and I'm still scared to tears living alone! Do you know I never walk if I could instead run to the café or back home every night? Oh, but when I think about it, there isn't anything specific to be concerned about; I'm just a scaredy-cat. Say, how're things on your end lately? Everything's going well with Jackson, I presume?"

It was one of those days when Tiffany could not spend the night with Jackson; this time, it was because someone had come to visit her. "Oh, it's okay, I guess? …Alright, I'll be honest with you — I'm like, a little bit insecure, okay? I read a lot of articles about relationships and love and stuff on the internet, and I've concluded that a guy like him should have his desires denied a few times, once in a while. Like, I can't just say yes all the time, or he's gonna get real sick of me in no time," Tiffany prattled on. "So, after returning to the Capital, I made up some excuse to not see him for two days, and dang, that ticked him

off real bad! And from then on, if nothing comes up, I'm always spending the night at his place every day. Seriously, Ari, do you think he's gonna grow bored of me very soon? God, I can't predict where this is going."

For a euphemism, "spending the night" was quite bare-faced, especially when Arianne had experienced it before.

"Hold on, back it up. 'Every night if nothing comes up?' He's a little insatiable, isn't he? But then again… I don't think I'm the right person to give a say about this…?" Arianne mused. "I mean, in the past, he didn't strike me as someone who would commit to a relationship, but with you, it might be different? You're my best friend, Tiffie. If he ever hurt you, you bet imma come after him for blood. Look, what I'm trying to say is that you don't need to be too worried about this, 'cause doubt is bad for a healthy relationship. Besides, you'll know it when he's starting to act fishy, girl. Have faith in your womanly instincts! No matter how much you lack in brain cells, you're still a woman, endowed with a sixth sense!"

Tiffany snorted. "You're not at all subtle at calling me dumb, are ya? Anyway… Do you know how it's like for us now? We're both busy with our affairs during the day, and then when the evening rolls, he comes to take me for the night without fail. Then comes the morning, and he sends me home. Does this seem, well, normal to you? It feels less like a relationship and more like, well, me being paid to be some guy's company — arrgh! Enough is enough; I'm gonna put a stop to this! I wanna be slow and steady; I'm not gonna let it go on like this any longer!"

Since Arianne herself had zero experience in an actual relationship, she could not offer any valuable insight either. "Um, okay? I don't know what to say to that, honestly. So I guess you do whatever you think is best? Anyway, I'm starving, so I'm gonna go make myself a bowl of noodles. You should go to sleep early."

Suddenly, Tiffany jumped and butted in before she hung up, "Hold on! Er, I was wondering — has Mark come to see you yet?"

Ariane could feel the muscles in her brain suddenly pulling taut. “Tiffany Lane! You and Jackson both knew that he was coming to see me, didn’t you? God, you’re already in cahoots with him before you’re officially Mrs. West! Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

Tiffany wished she could kick herself for the slip. “I knew you were going to see right through me if I asked — but I just can’t keep my damn mouth shut!” She moaned. “Alright, Jackson and I knew, alright? We knew Mark’s gonna visit you soon after I’ve left, but Jackson insisted that I leave you in the dark! In a way, I guess it’s also for your own good? Even if I’d told you that Mark was coming to see you — what then? Abandon the café and run away? There’s no way you could hide from him, honey. If he wants to see you, he will turn over every stone just to see if you’re hiding underneath.”

“Ugh, whatever,” Arianne replied, putting on faux anger. “I’m way too tired to argue with you, so I’m going. Bye!”

When the call ended, she let out a sigh of relief. They knew, after all; the only one who did not know anything was Arianne herself. The information came a little too late, too, considering the fact that he had already stepped into her house by this point.

On the other end, Tiffany believed she had upset Arianne. She was so worried that she dared not call her again to explain herself — not that she trusted herself in making things better that way, since she did keep a vital secret from her best friend.

Just then, her mother’s voice boomed from the living room, “Tiffie! What are you doing, hiding away in your room? Your aunt is here!”

Tiffany rolled her eyes and marched out of her room in impatience.

The “aunt” Lilian was referring to was nothing but a distant relative of hers and someone entirely unfamiliar with the Lanes. A few years ago, the woman and her family hit a jackpot of some kind and gradually became a nouveau riche over the course. Naturally, when the Lanes’ fortune went downhill, auntie dearest had never deigned herself to visit Tiffany, but somehow she was making an exception today.

Tiffany mustered her best impression of a docile kid and beamed sweetly at her mother. “Oh, Mom. Aunt Deborah probably enjoys chatting with you more so than with me — generation gaps and all that.”

Lilian was having none of it. She tugged her daughter down to a seat. “Aunt Deborah is here to introduce a candidate for your hand, Tiffie. For the past few minutes, our topic has been you!”

Aunt Deborah might be draping expensive branded wears all over herself, but her fashion statement left much to be desired. Just as Tiffany thought, no amount of brands and bling-bling could ever cover a parvenu’s origin. Honestly, she did not mean it as a jeering insult to the woman’s beginning; Tiffany just despised toadies and crooks who changed their attitude according to status. A parvenu who foolishly believed that glib wealth was enough to revamp who she really is would also be the same person who would stick her head into your bottom when you were at the height of your wealth, then run away more quickly than Usain Bolt could when she sensed your fall.

Nothing could make a husk with a rotten core appealing, no matter how much they tried.

“Oh, you shouldn’t have, Aunt Deborah,” Tiffany said. “I’m not ready for relationships right now.”

It was as strong an implication as can be, yet Aunt Deborah had the power to tune it out and countered. “But darling, you haven’t even given him a chance yet! How are you so sure that he’s not gonna suit you without even dating him? I’ll have you know that he’s my nephew, dear. He’s very handsome and has a very, very promising career. I think he’s just the match for you!”

Tiffany cracked out a forced smile. “What do you mean, ‘just the match for me’? You mean I can’t be a match for anyone better than that, don’t you? Look, you don’t need to trouble yourself over one of the most critical issues in my life, Aunt Deborah. You know exactly what our family has become. We’re bankrupt! We’ve got nothing left.”

Chapter 517

Aunt Deborah came with the mission of matchmaking Tiffany and her nephew, and she would be damned if she did not sell him hard with a beaming smile. “Aww, don’t misunderstand me, hon. Everyone knows that your family owns this invaluable plot that if sold, could rake so, so much money! From the way I see it, you and my nephew are just the perfect fit for one another, so how about you get to know him first before you judge? Oh, in fact, I’m gonna arrange your date right now!”

Lillian kept quiet. She was admittedly gung ho about marrying her daughter off as soon as possible in the past, but that was only because she was taking her sudden impoverished life very terribly, and she wanted out of it as soon as she could. But now, her outlook had changed. Good things come to those who wait, and since Lillian had a bit more money to support her patience, she was no longer desperate. Still, a casual meeting between her daughter and a suitor was fair, she thought.

Tiffany, on the other hand, loathed having buttinskis like Aunt Deborah dictate her life. “I. Am. Not. Doing that!” she snapped. “I’ll be honest — I have a boyfriend, so please excuse me from all of these matchmakings, okay? Thanks.”

“Wha-what? You — who?” Lillian stammered, startled.

A grimace of contempt dawned on Aunt Deborah's mien. "Please, darling. I highly doubt that your boyfriend is on par with my nephew," she countered. "Honestly, you really should stop acting like you're out of his league or something. I only bothered to introduce him to you out of my familial sentiments from watching you grow up, you know."

Tiffany was sure that her eyeballs were going to get stuck in her skull from eye-rolling that much. 'Watching her grow up?' What, she meant crashing her house every Thanksgiving to lavish Tiffany's family with flatteries — did an annual event of gratuitous bootlicking count as 'watching her grow up' now? Please, auntie-dearest here had avoided her family like the plague since the Lanes lost their wealth, and now suddenly, she was lapping them up again!

Tiffany could never find a sliver of respect for toadies like her. "Gee-whizz, I totally appreciate your effort, Aunt Deborah! Now, if your nephew attracts so much of your fancy, then maybe you should be the one dating him instead," she quipped.

Aunt Deborah's expression immediately turned stormy. "What stupid things did you just spout, young lady?"

Tiffany cared so little about her aunt's opinion that she was already marching back to her room.

Lillian, too, shared her daughter's distaste for people like Deborah, but she put up with her for the sake of familial courtesies. After sending the woman off, Lillian strode into her daughter's room and promptly asked, "Did you mention a boyfriend? Now, who could that be? Spill the tea, child!"

"Oh, that? I was kidding," the girl deflected. Truthfully, Tiffany only said what she said to stymie Aunt Deborah's attempt to butt into her life; she did not want the truth to come out so soon.

Lillian was skeptical. “What kind of mother would I be if I can’t even tell when my daughter was lying or telling the truth? C’mon, honey, it’s Jackson West, isn’t it? Don’t think I didn’t notice it — you hardly part with your phone, you keep getting texts, and you don’t come home at night. I bet my squishy brain that your mysterious man is none other than Jackson himself!”

Tiffany was stunned, her eyes sizing up her mother carefully. She had believed, for most of her life, that her dearest mother was ditzy and air-headed, but now she realized the woman might be more perceptive than Tiffany had given her credit for.

“Wait, well, um… Urgh, fine, it is him,” Tiffany relented. “But I wanna go slow and steady, Mom, which is why I didn’t want to tell you yet! Please don’t sound the horn over this so soon; you should let us, you know, hang out for a little while longer and see how it goes. The ‘relationship’ we had in the past was basically a monetary partnership, so we were just goofing around. Now, it’s different — this time, it’s serious, though admittedly, I still haven’t completely figured him out yet. Which is why, Mom, can you like, please not meddle into our affairs?”

Contrary to her character, Lillian agreed. “Oh, I won’t meddle in your love life, Tiffie; you have my word. You should progress it however you like — yes, it’s fine even if the two of you don’t wanna tie the knot. Listen, I’m not getting any younger by the years, honey, so I don’t even have any extra energy to worry about how somebody else wants to live her life anymore. Plus, worrying about those things would only dampen my mood. But you know… It would still be lovely if you could marry into a rich family,” Lillian finished. “But ultimately, it’s your happiness that counts.”

That was probably the wisest thing her mother had ever said to Tiffany, and it made her smile.

“You can say that again, Mom.”

The next morning, Mark Tremont, with Ellie Amore for company, arrived at his office by car. Initially, he had not planned for companions, but he soon stood corrected on how useful Brian and Ellie were in his life. One was a whizz in managing his business affairs, while the other was indispensable in working out the creases in his life; with these two around, Mark needed not micro-manage everything.

Ellie was a knockout in both looks and figure, so her entrance was immediately greeted by entranced attention from the men in the company. Naturally, the office began to suspect a clandestine relationship between Mark and his bodacious Miss Secretary.

It was not a far-fetched assumption. The world was not wanting of people using underhanded wiles to get what they want, after all.

Mark's office in this building was nothing like his commodious one back in the Capital. Since the common working space was right outside, it meant that his secretary had no space to claim as her own, and she was thus poised to work inside Mark's private office for the time being.

It did not take a long time for the queasiness to settle within Ellie. While she used to work outside of Mark's office, she was now trapped in the same room as him, which meant she had to do her job with her exacting boss breathing down her neck. Ellie was essentially forced to remain on high alert at all times.

She reckoned that her female coworkers would probably be too green-eyed over her proximity with their boss to recognize Ellie silently suffering the immense pressure this arrangement had brought to her.

Mark was quick to catch Ellie's slightly more mechanistic behavior today. "What's the matter? Not used to this?"

“Admittedly, yes. A bit,” Ellie muttered softly, hanging her head. “But I’m sure I’ll get used to it soon enough. Don’t worry.”

Mark strode toward his desk and sat in front of it. “Order a cup of coffee and some desserts, please.”

Ellie knew precisely what desserts were on his mind. In fact, she was also cognizant that Mark was not at all here for the mundane goal of managing this unimpressive, fledgeling branch-company.

The secretary chose against ordering them online and started toward Arianne’s café opposite the building, determined to use the trip as a much-needed breather. The less time spent cooped up with Mark alone in the same room, the better; she needed some space to ease her building nerves.

Arianne recognized Ellie the instant she arrived at the café and was mildly surprised. Did Mark not tell her that he was coming alone? Why did he bring his secretary with him?

“Good morning, ma’am! What would you like today?” Naya, who came to work earlier than usual today, greeted. It was early, so the café was mostly empty.

Ellie returned a slight smile and looked at Arianne, who was busy cleaning the counter. “Mr. Tremont would like a cup of Americano and his usual dessert.”

Arianne nodded stiffly. “Oh. Okay.”

An abnormal feeling stirred within her chest — and it started the moment Arianne's eyes met Ellie. She already knew how jaw-dropping gorgeous the secretary was, yet when Ellie so casually mentioned Mark's favorites like that, that odd stir began to flare up.

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Arianne took out Mark's business suit when the dessert was ready. She had wanted to return it to him today, and Ellie was just the perfect deliverywoman.

"Could you kindly help me return this?" she asked.

His underwear had been tucked deep inside the suit before she packed it into a bag. Arianne reasoned that it was safe enough not to reveal itself suddenly, so she did not bother warning Ellie (she was too embarrassed to do that, anyway).

Ellie seemed rather startled by the suit. "Does this… Does this belong to Mr. Tremont?"

Arianne nodded. "Mm-hmm. It's his."

Ellie said nothing more and brought both Mark's takeout and the suit back to the office. Placing the items on his desk, Ellie explained, "Mr. Tremont, your wife asked me to return your clothes to you."

Mark's eyes seemed to have darkened ever so slightly. "Put them aside. Anywhere is fine."

Ellie could see the quiet, dark clouds swirling in his mien and quickly got to work. Unfortunately, her graceless movement allowed Mark's clean underwear to peek out of its hidey-hole, catching her eyes and causing her face to flush in recognition.

Mark was thankfully blind to this little mishap. "Get Dick Smalley here."

Ellie was nonplussed. "Uh, who's that?"

Mark pointed outside and replied, "Someone's bound to answer you if you call."

Ellie was beginning to wonder if she had somehow lost some of her IQ. She had always been rather attentive to her boss's every beck and call before executing all of his wishes to perfection. However, it felt as though a screw in her head had gone loose — Ellie could not believe she would be confused over a no-brainer instruction!

Luckily, she managed to regain her usual composure before she reached the common working space and called out, "Mr. Smalley! You're needed in Mr. Tremont's office!"

The door belonging to the cubicle closest to the public restroom swung open and revealed Dick, who began pacing toward his destination. "I'm coming, man—oh! You're Mr. Tremont's secretary, aren't ya? I've long heard that she's a knockout, but boy, are some things meant to be seen to believe!"

Ellie was so accustomed to these compliments that she reacted with blasé. "Just go."

She watched Dick run and started toward the pantry instead of going back to her desk. She poured herself a cup of water and let it accompany the turning cogs in her head.

Everyone in the office respected her and ingratiated on her because she was Mark's personal assistant, with some even going so far as to believe that the two of them shared some sort of furtive affair. None of these things ever spurred Ellie's thoughts to that direction before, especially when Mark never stepped out of line and him only ever discussing work with her.

He had never brought her along whenever he visited this particular site, either — until now, that is. Now, Ellie was privileged to sit in the same car and step into the office with him. It made her feel special.

No one is immune to the promise of beautiful, fulfilling dreams, and Mark Tremont was not only that, but also an unreachable lone star shimmering brightly beyond everyone's farthest reach. Everyone, except Ellie herself.

The secretary sauntered back to her desk, her usual aplomb returning. Dick had already left, so Ellie slipped into her seat across Mark, took advantage of the barely-notable distance between them, and drank in every detail of him. Observing.

They didn't have things to occupy their minds at the moment, so Ellie seized Mark's current idleness and began, "Say, Mr. Tremont, how are you faring with Mrs. Tremont?"

Of course, Ellie knew a thing or two about what transpired between him and Arianne. It was only the details that eluded her.

Mark did not seem annoyed at the probing; in fact, he appeared to appreciate an outlet for his pent-up frustration. “No headways. Tell me, why is it so hard to make a woman stay by your side willingly? You’re a woman too. Any insights to enlighten me?”

Ellie thought for a moment. “I think the best way to make a woman rush back to you is by inducing her jealousy. Put it this way, your eyes are always on no one but Mrs. Tremont, so what happens if your devotion is suddenly directed to someone else one day? I bet she would be rather provoked, wouldn’t she? No woman is immune to feeling envy, Mr. Tremont. It does not matter if something momentous happened before or if the relationship between the couple has gone to hell. Maybe a woman’s jealousy is just unrelated to how much she genuinely likes someone,” Ellie mused. “It’s like my husband and me. We’ve been together for so long that we’re both bored of one another. These days, we hardly talk. I can even tell you that I might be genuinely annoyed at seeing his face, too. However, whenever another woman suddenly tries to get close to him, my instincts will not allow it.”

Mark mulled on her words. “Do you really think this will work in my situation?”

“Definitely. But you wouldn’t know unless you try it, right?” Ellie replied confidently. “You aren’t going to lose anything over trying, anyway. Your wife might have left your side, but both of you had never actually filed a divorce. Plus, you never made any scandalous news, so it’s not like you’ve ever triggered her that way.”

Mark’s eyes snapped to Ellie. Women were all the same, were they not?

He was already half-convinced about giving it a try. “But how do we do it?”

Ellie was quick to volunteer, “You don’t need anyone. I’ll be your co-star in this ploy.”

The evening rolled out, with workers gradually coming out of the building. There, parked right at the entrance, the black Rolls-Royce continued to draw attention.

Arianne had particularly surrendered to it almost instinctively, though it would be more apt to say that her actual focus was Mark. Even by this point, anytime Mark materialized in front of her sight, Arianne would fail to dismiss him.

When she saw Mark and Ellie walking side-by-side, smiles and banters adorning their glowing faces until they disappeared into the back of the car, she suddenly noticed how much sunlight stung. The sun was setting, yet she felt blinded.

Naya had noticed Ellie, too. “Ooh, is that your husband’s secretary? Huh, is a secretary even allowed to be this close with her superior like that?”

Her remark instantly sent shockwaves into Arianne’s previously even-keeled state of mind. Suddenly, she found herself seething, “It’s got nothing to do with me.”

Chapter 519

Naya, recognizing her gaffe, held her tongue.

Mark’s car soon came to a halt right outside the café. Brian disembarked from his driver’s seat and strolled through the entrance, requesting, “Two of the café’s recommended desserts and two Americano.”

Two sets of food for Mark and Ellie.

Arianne cocked an eyebrow. “Gee, who knew he could be so damn miserly that he would buy two sets of stuff for three people, huh?” she jeered under her breath, not recognizing the creeping sulkiness in her tone.

Brian avoided her gaze with a silent and curt nod.

His reaction rubbed Arianne off the wrong way. Brian used to address her as “Madam” or even “Miss” before she was married, yet here he was, putting a wide berth between them. As though she was no one but a stranger.

Fine, perhaps it was technically correct for the Tremont retinues to treat her as a stranger now. But Arianne had not expected the bond they shared to be so… frail. If this was how Brian saw her, then she shuddered at the prospects of seeing Mary and Henry again. Would they also treat her differently?

Yes, Arianne conceded that she was always just an orphan who was adopted into the Tremont family, and leaving them was to sever all of her ties. If a new heiress presided over the family, it was reasonable to demand Arianne abdicate everything the title ever granted her.

Back then, she had tunnel-visioned into the goal of putting as much distance between her and Mark. Now, Arianne realized that giving him up was akin to giving away everything she ever owned in the past, including the people who had truly cared for her.

“I’m not taking orders today,” Arianne snapped coldly, her eyes zeroed in on the car outside the café.

Brian did not stay even a second longer. He quickly turned and marched back to the car, only breaking the news after driving over a few miles, “Um, Madam said no ordering today.”

Ellie turned to Mark. “I’ve asked around prior to this and saw that every order our company made — including yours, Mr. Tremont — had been accepted and prepared by Madam herself. Yet, curiously, she declined our order just now… Told ya’. Look at the time — it’s still a lot of time left before the shop’s closed. In other words, she specifically denied preparing desserts for the two of us.”

Mark nodded slightly. “So, when is it ok to visit her?”

Ellie shook her head promptly. “No, that won’t do! You must hang on and not give in. It would help if you only started on the next step after she began displaying a suitable reaction. Get a hold of yourself, Mr. Tremont!”

Mark sank into silence, utterly oblivious to Ellie’s lingering, all-too-enduring gaze on his face.

Then, out of nowhere, Ellie reached out to right his tie. “Say, Mr. Tremont, would you like to have dinner with me? The media’s been reporting your every movement quite religiously these days, so I bet we’re being tailed already. Methinks we should create news scandalous enough that your wife can’t escape from seeing it.”

Mark furrowed his brows at her characteristically-deviant behavior. Still, he said nothing and agreed to her scheme.

Just as expected, news of his dinner with Ellie hit the papers on the very next day. Its text suggested, as subtly as possible, that warning bells were tolling for Mark's marriage, Arianne Tremont had left the Capital for so long that they might have divorced, and that the famed CEO now shared an unspecified relationship with his secretary.

Arianne was far from the only one who read the news — so did Jackson. Soon, the man was calling Mark under the guise of "concern". "Okay, what the hell? Are you pulling off some interesting maneuver, or is this all for real?"

"What do you think?" Mark retorted.

The man needed not to pause to think. "It's a goddamned ruse, isn't it? You're trying to probe Arianne into action. Honestly, I would actually be genuinely concerned if you'd have fallen in love with someone else and given up on her, man. Besides, Ellie's been by your side since forever. You would have already slept with her if that was ever something you wanted."

Mark confirmed Jackson's deduction with his silence.

"Now, this is some surprising sh*t — you turned out to be somewhat acceptably-good in playing the relationship game, after all! And here I thought the only thing you're wanting is intelligence in the art of love, which used to be so lacking that it's an insult to your general intellect. Who knew that we would see the day when you finally achieved enlightenment, eh? Honestly, this is some pro-gamer move. If I were Arianne, I would be so damn pissed by now."

"You… You really think she'll react that way?" Mark echoed, uncertain.

“F**k yea she will! That’s just how women act, man — zero exception! Unless she’s actually not a woman…” Jackson said, his tone bursting with confidence accumulated from years of experience. “To be frank, I came up with this idea a while ago, but I was worried you might not wanna cooperate, so I didn’t mention it. But now? Well, looks like it’s already done, and I didn’t even have to break a sweat.”

“Take that 20/20 hindsight crap somewhere else, Jackson. Alright, don’t you have some actual business to attend to? As for me, I’ll ponder on what to do next myself.”

Mark hung up the phone, contemplating. Had Arianne seen the news yet? What was her reaction?

In the café, Arianne watched the news from the palm-sized screen in her hand with an unreadable expression.

The reporters’ pictures gave no room for vagueness: Ellie’s smile was as radiant as the sun with a strong coquettish undertone, while Mark’s attention was trained on the menu in his hand, his expression noncommittal.

Nevertheless, the gap between them was so close to none that they must share a very loaded relationship.

Had Mark never looked for her after she left, Arianne would have felt largely at peace with the news. But that bastard had come to her just two days ago, personally begging her to return to him while undergirding his plea with little bits of threat. And now! Now, the same bastard was acting all lovey-dovey with some other woman! This must be intentional; this was done to rev her up!

Humans have the peculiar disposition to turn into something they could not have conceivably become had it not been the bizarre circumstances befalling them. Right now, Arianne was at the butt of it. She was broiling, goddamned livid —

This stupid news was a disgusting affront to her eyes!

Chapter 520

Naya saw the news as well. It made the headlines after all, anyone would have seen it. “Ari… I’m not being a busybody but… everyone has seen it. Is there anything on your mind?”

Arianne turned off her phone indifferently. “No. I don’t care. My marriage with him has been an empty shell anyway.”

Did not care? Naya did not expose Arianne, but she had ‘I care very much’ written on her face!

A strange atmosphere loomed over the dessert shop the whole morning. No one dared to joke with Arianne like usual. Even when she tried hard to feign indifference, everyone knew she was pretending. After all, she was the best at keeping calm even if the sky was falling.

A pretty woman suddenly entered the shop in the afternoon and Tanya’s first reaction was to step forward and nervously say, “Our desserts have sold out! No more!”

Ellie glanced at the kitchen. “Most of your desserts are made in-house on the spot. There are still so many customers here, why are they sold out as soon as I came? Are you guys not selling it to me?”

Tanya was awful at lying. She panicked, not knowing how to respond.

Naya was much more experienced. There were many customers in the shop now, saying that there were no more desserts to be sold would more or less affect their business. “Sorry, she doesn’t know. What would you like to order?”

Ellie ignored Tanya and stepped to the counter with her high heels and swaying hips. “Two Infatuated Strawberries and two Americano.”

Naya wore a professional smile on her face. “Sorry, we don’t have Infatuated Strawberries anymore.”

Ellie raised her brow. “You can do it now. I can wait even if it takes time. Mr. Tremont would like to have it.”

Naya’s smile faltered. “Hold on, I’ll ask our boss.” She went into the kitchen after that. “Ari, Ellie’s here to buy desserts. She wants… Infatuated Strawberries, says that Mr. Tremont would like to have it.”

Arianne froze for a beat. “Tell her that I’ll make them now. Accept her business when she comes to buy desserts next time. Don’t say that we run out of this and that. It’s fine.”

Naya nodded and sighed. “Alright… It’s been hard on you.”

Arianne did not reply, focusing on making the desserts. When she was done, she asked Tanya to pack them.

Ellie took the desserts and left without batting an eyelid after paying, looking triumphant.

It made someone as innocent as Tanya feel as though her blood was boiling. “She’s horrible! She’s mocking us!”

Naya was gloomy as well. “My husband doesn’t keep up with what’s happening at home, but at least, he won’t do something like this. She’s unbelievable! I don’t know how Ari endures it.”

Amidst their heated discussion, Arianne stepped out from the kitchen. “What are you girls fuming over? I’m not even mad. It’s okay.”

Naya looked skeptical when she saw Arianne’s expression. “You wouldn’t have… added stuff in the dessert, right?”

Arianne shrugged. “No. My hands shook, and I added a little too much of some ingredients. They might not taste very good.”

In the tower opposite, Mark’s gaze darkened when he saw Ellie coming back with the desserts. Logically, Arianne not selling the desserts to them would be the normal reaction…

Ellie was unfazed as she unpacked the desserts and placed them on the table for him. “Try it.”

Mark was not in the mood. “No.”

A hint of disappointment flashed across Ellie’s eyes. “Why not? Madam made these herself. She must think it’s not nice to keep refusing to sell us desserts, and she made them even when she’s mad. Try it.”

Feeling vexed, Mark picked up the small spoon and took a bite. In just an instant, he felt as though his taste buds were going to explode. He suddenly recalled the time when he had to go for drips in the hospital after trying out Arianne’s desserts in the Tremont Estate. They tasted similar! However, the appearance did not look different from the normal ones. Why was the taste so…

When he figured out what it was all about, he swallowed the dessert in his mouth, and his mood inexplicably brightened up. It seemed that Arianne did care. She was obviously taking revenge and expressing her discontent!

Ellie was puzzled when she saw the changes in Mark’s expression. She could not help tasting the other serving, but she spat it out once she put it into her mouth. “It’s awful!”

The corners of Mark’s lips curled up slightly. “You’re not allowed to leave even a bit behind.”

Ellie blanched. “Oh… okay…”

After that, Mark asked Ellie to buy desserts from Arianne's shop every afternoon.

Arianne sold it to them but the taste was bizarre and changed each time. In spite of it, Mark left not even a morsel behind every time.

Ellie had to suffer alongside, and she finally could not take it. The next time she went to purchase some desserts, she asked Arianne, "Can you stop adding extra ingredients? I've lost a few pounds recently, and my gastritis is going to flare up…"

Naya could not help the chuckle that escaped, but she quickly suppressed it.

Arianne feigned innocence. "Do they taste that bad? Why didn't you say so earlier? I thought they tasted great. After all, Mark's picky with his food. He didn't tell me, how am I supposed to know? I'll take note of it, please have a nice day."

Since the beginning, Arianne had not mentioned the scandal.

Ellie could not help asking, "You saw the news, right? That's why you're doing this?"