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Arianne lowered her gaze. “What are you trying to say? Since you want to be with him, you should hope for us to be divorced as soon as possible so you wouldn’t have to be his mistress. After all, it’ll only tarnish your reputation. This way, it’ll be a win-win for both of us, right? One more thing, I thought you’re married? Are you divorced?”

At this moment, Ellie was annoyed. She had completely poured herself into her role as Mark’s lover during this period of time. Arianne had brought up her drag of a marriage, making her feel as though Arianne was pointing out her shortcomings. “That’s personal. You’re welcome to talk to me if you’re unhappy about it.”

Arianne smiled. “Not at all.”

Ellie gritted her teeth. “Since you’re not in love with him and have chosen to leave him, don’t leave him hanging. Isn’t it better to make a clean break? Then, you no longer have to waste each other’s time and can live separate lives.”

Arianne paused for a moment before replying, “That’s private as well. It has nothing to do with you.”

Ellie did not answer. Instead, she turned around and left with a sullen look on her face, discarding the desserts.

She regained her composure when she arrived at the office. “It was too crowded, Mr. Tremont. I didn’t manage to get the dessert. I’d have to wait very long for them. Mrs. Tremont has asked me to send a message to you — let’s not waste each other’s time and live our separate lives. No matter what you do,

she's not… coming back to you. She asked you to grant her a divorce as soon as possible and said she's gotten over you a long time ago."

Mark's eyes, hidden behind his glasses, turned cold. The best part of his day was when Ellie went to buy desserts from him. Now, he felt as though he had been splashed with a bucket of cold water that caught him off guard. He did not expect his painstaking efforts would amount to a wild-goose chase. "What did you say?"

Ellie was too afraid to meet his eyes, afraid he would see through her lies. "It's… just as I've said. Mrs. Tremont is well aware that you're merely provoking her, she's seen through your play. I used to think she still had lingering feelings for you, but now, it seems that the result will be the same no matter what you do. She doesn't love you so she won't be coming back. I'm sorry, I can't help you."

Mark rose abruptly to his feet, pushing the chair violently against the wall. A soft thud rang in the air. He forcibly suppressed his rage that was threatening to explode and said, "I'll never divorce her. No f*cking way!"

Ellie made him some black tea and said in a pretentious tone, "Mr. Tremont… Since she's no longer in love with you, there are plenty of fishes in the sea, why must you hold onto that one fish? She's not worth it! You're an outstanding man, you can have any woman you like."

These words sounded strange to Mark. Ellie used to be a highly competent secretary. She had always efficiently completed the tasks given to her and never spoke about personal affairs. Something felt strange about her words. He was not an idiot so he knew Ellie had developed some feelings for him. He gradually calmed down and said, "She's worth it. No one else can hold a candle to her."

Ellie lifted her eyes and looked at him. For that one moment, their eyes locked, and she lowered her head guiltily. "Yes… I'll get back to work…"

After work, Mark did not let Ellie ride with him and told Brian to send him back to the hotel immediately.

Ellie noticed something amiss as well and realized that she had been too hasty. At the same time, she hated herself for getting married so carelessly. The life she wanted was not the life she had now. She felt as though her life was at a standstill thanks to her marriage. She wanted to change that.

Naya would always pay close attention to Mark and Ellie, coming and going from the office together. Today, Ellie left the office on her own. This looked odd to her. “They didn’t leave together today.”

Arianne heard her. She was making dinner in the kitchen and felt particularly relaxed.

Once the shop was closed for the day, she video-called Tiffany on the way home. Only then did Tiffany find out about Mark’s sex scandal. “Heavens, Mark! Back when he moved there for you, I thought he’s completely devoted to you. Looks like he’s just another playboy. I was so hoping both of you would get back together. What a waste!”

Arianne was very calm about it. “Don’t worry about me. You should be more concerned about Jackson. He’s quite a handful.”

Tiffany was all riled up now and could not calm down at all. “Don’t even mention him. He’s probably known this for a long time and kept this from me. How could he keep this from me? I’m so pissed with him! He asked me to come over tonight, but I’m not going to. I’m going to ignore his calls! I was just thinking about starting a dessert shop with you again if you return to the capital with Mark. Looks like that’s not going to happen now.”

Arianne lifted her head and stared at the night sky that barely had any stars. She took a deep breath. “I’m not going back. It’s pretty great here. Mark should be leaving soon as well. When that happens, I’ll be completely at peace. It would have been better if he didn’t come at all. He has made me very unhappy by coming here. I was so close to forgetting him… Heh…” She chuckled with a hint of bitterness.

She walked into the lift of her condominium. The signal was a little weak, but the video call was still ongoing.

She wanted to get home as soon as possible. It was particularly hot today, and she felt as if she were in a boiling pot. For this reason, she did not pay much attention to her surroundings when she exited the lift and ran straight for her door.

Just as she pulled out her key and put them into the keyhole, someone grabbed her, held her wrist, and twisted the key to unlock the door. Then, the person pushed her into the house.

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She was about to scream when she heard the door lock, but a large hand covered her mouth. She dropped her phone on the ground. At this moment, she was frozen in fear. The lights were off so she could not see the man’s face. All she knew was there had been too many stories of break-ins in the news, and none of them ended well. She remembered that she did not have a lot of money on her. She had a few thousand credits on her credit card but did not want to hand it over. Would the intruder fly into a rage and kill her if she refused to give him money?

The man flung her toward the living room couch. She could smell the heavy stench of alcohol on his body. She fearfully clutched the back of the couch to steady herself and seized the opportunity to bite the man’s arm. The pain forced him to release her mouth, and she cried out, “I don’t have any money!

Let me go! I can give you a card number, and I'll borrow some money tomorrow and send the money to you. Don't kill me!"

Strangely, the man did not move nor did he reply to her. She thought that, perhaps, he was reconsidering and calmed down. "A woman my age lives from paycheck to paycheck. How can I possibly have any money? If you're planning a robbery, you've got the wrong person… And I'm not that pretty either so taking advantage of me really isn't worth it. Please let me go…"

Still no answer. Her mind was racing with ways to break free from his evil clutches. She had dropped her phone on the ground when she was pushed in and was not sure if the video call was still ongoing since the phone was connected to her headset, and she could not hear anything. The door was right behind the man. He had been drinking so he might not be completely sober. All she needed to do was distract him before running to the door to scream for help. She was not certain if it would work, but she had to try…

At the moment she was about to put her plan into action, the man suddenly pressed himself against her body and said in a deep voice, "Do I really look like a thief? Or a robber?"

She stiffened and caught a whiff of Mark's faint cologne mixed with the stench of alcohol. She had been panicking and did not notice this. She had been completely mistaken!

She returned to her senses and angrily pushed him away. She wanted to switch on the light. The switch was located near the door so she rose to her feet. As soon as she took two steps forward, he pulled her back to him and pushed her down onto the couch.

He planted his lips on her mouth before she could even protest. The hot and humid air suffocated her, and she frantically tried to push him away.

At that moment, her entire mouth was filled with the taste of him. The heady smell of alcohol made her head spin.

Based on the force he had used, he was drunk, very, very drunk. She simply could not fight him off.

With the woman he had been longing for pressed underneath him, how could the drunken Mark possibly stop now? All he wanted to do was indulge in his own desires, hold her, and never let her go…

Meanwhile, Tiffany, who was still on the video call, was panicking. She did not get a response from Arianne and was just about to call the police when she heard a strange but faintly discernible noise. The camera was pointed toward the ground so she could not see what was happening. However, she knew what those noises were. Was… was that Mark's voice?

She was now beginning to wonder if she should end the call. What if she ended up overhearing something that she should not have? That would be weird and completely awkward…

"Ari? I'm hanging up, okay? I'm hanging up…" she said, simply as a form of courtesy.

Of course, no one would answer her. She calmly ended the call.

The line was finally clear so Jackson finally managed to get through to her phone. She rejected his call, turned off her phone, and went to sleep.

Completely muddled by alcohol, Mark left Arianne no chance for retaliation. He let out a satisfied sigh once he finally had his way with her again.

Arianne was furious. Unfortunately, she was stuck underneath him and could not move at all. She had no choice but to let him do as he pleased. She did not even get to turn the air conditioning on when she was pushed in and was already annoyed by the heat. Her body was drenched in sweat and made her long hair stick to her face. She did not have the strength to push them away from her face.

His sweat dripped on her body. It would drip on her cheeks and breasts from time to time.

This was an insult to her. He had been so affectionate with another woman just a while ago, but now that he was drunk beyond comprehension, he ran all the way here to take advantage of her! What was the meaning of this?

Suddenly, his impassioned thrusts became even more aggressive.

She panicked. “Not inside!”

He seemed to have a sliver of sobriety left in him and had not completely lost his senses. He compliantly withdrew himself at the very last moment, just before his release.

She heaved a sigh of relief. Just as he was still in the throes of ecstasy, she kicked him away, got up, and ran into the bedroom before she locked the door behind her.

She switched the bedroom lights on and stared at her reflection in the mirror. Her hair was messy, and her body was riddled with hickeys. She was unnerved. Why did this happen? She had already decided on severing ties with him. She could not let him do as he pleased ever again!

After a shower, she wrapped herself in a towel before poking her head out to check on him. He was lying on the couch, motionless. He seemed to have fallen asleep.

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She was certainly not going to spend the night with an unreasonable drunk. Who knew if he would try something again! After mulling over it for a moment, she called Brian. “Pick him up right now, or I’ll throw him out on the streets. If anyone gets a picture of that, the Tremonts will be humiliated.”

Then, she ended the call immediately and crept closer to check on Mark. At least, he was wearing underwear. That way, Brian would not feel awkward or embarrassed when he arrived.

Soon after, she heard a knock on her door. She glared at Brian who was standing at the doorway and grimly said, “Next time, don’t let him out of your sight when he’s drunk.”

Brian looked slightly embarrassed. He lowered his head and explained, “It’s not like I can control where Mr. Tremont goes…”

He was right. Arianne did not trouble Brian too much and stood at the door, waiting for him to carry the unconscious Mark away. She waited until they had walked away before closing the door.

She returned to her room and lay on her bed. She let out a long sigh. It felt like a bad dream. The gloominess in her mind plagued her, refusing to release her.

Worst of all, her phone screen was smashed. There were now two large cracks on her phone. Luckily, it did not affect its functions. However, the sight of it frustrated her.

The next day, Mark woke up in his hotel suite and frowned from the headache caused by his hangover. “Brian…”

Brian, who had been watching over him from the couch, quickly rushed toward him. “You’re awake, Mr. Tremont?”

Mark sat up and shook his head. “Water, please. By the way, how much did I drink last night? I didn’t do anything inappropriate, right?”

Brian’s mouth twitched, the words hung on the tip of his tongue as he poured a glass of water for Mark. He hesitated to speak.

Mark finished his water and asked impatiently, “I asked you a question. Didn’t you hear me?”

Brian mustered up his courage and replied, “You don’t remember what you did? I… can’t really say…”

Mark was taken aback. “What do you mean? What did I do?”

“Y-you… You in-insisted on seeing Mrs. Tremont. She called me when you were done and asked me to send you home, threatening to throw you out on the streets if I don’t…” Brian stammered.

Brian’s revelation was like a bolt of lightning on a sunny day to Mark. He could not remember how he found his way to Arianne and certainly could not remember what happened after he saw her. If Brian was speaking the truth, there was only one thing on his mind — he felt utterly embarrassed.

Seeing the emotional upheaval on Mark’s face, Brian hurriedly tried to wash himself clean from blame. “It’s not that I didn’t try to stop you, I just couldn’t! You can ask Mr. West and Mr. Nathaniel if you don’t believe me! No one can stop you when you’re drunk and unreasonable. Unless… Unless we knock you out!”

Mark closed his eyes. “Next time… Just knock me out. I… didn’t do anything to her, right?”

Brian tried to recall the situation from last night when he collected Mark from Arianne’s home. It was a blur to him. “Well… I’m not sure, you didn’t have your clothes on when I arrived. You were sleeping on the couch, dead to the world. Mrs. Tremont didn’t look too happy… Like she wanted to flay the skin off your body. I can’t confirm what really happened.”

No clothes? Anything could have happened then! He was feeling apprehensive. He simply could not remember a thing. He could not even remember if they kissed. Was it even worth the humiliation?

…

Naya was perplexed. She did not see Mark's car in its usual spot in front of the office building. She said "Ari, a certain someone seems to be absent from work. I don't see his car at all."

Arianne looked sullen at the very mention of Mark. "He probably had too much to drink last night. Couldn't wake up, I guess."

Naya caught the peculiar tone in her reply. "How did you know he had too much to drink? Did he pay you a visit?"

Arianne recalled all the disgraceful things that Mark had done last night and gritted her teeth resentfully. "I don't want to talk about him."

Naya immediately shut her mouth. Something had obviously happened. Anyone who was not blind could see that…

Mark was absent from work today so Ellie did not visit the shop. Everyone was relieved.

At around 8 PM, the number of customers in the shop gradually dropped. Arianne had thought of closing early for the night. After all, they should relax once in a while. Just then, she received a message from Helen. "I'm arriving at your shop in twenty minutes. I need to speak to you. Do you have some time?"

She frowned as she stared at the message. Then, she said to Naya and the others, "You can clock out. Put up the 'closed' sign. We won't be taking any more customers today. You can all go home early."

She did not want anyone to find out about her relationship with Helen and did not want anyone to know that she had a mother. Even if everyone else knew, she would instinctively avoid the topic. This was her instinct.

Helen was always punctual. She arrived at the shop twenty minutes later.

At this moment, Arianne was the only one left.

Helen sat down in front of a table. “Any drink will do. I won’t be eating.”

Arianne stared at her before making her way to the back of the counter. She made her a cup of coffee before sitting across her. “What is it?”

Chapter 524

Helen still had the appearance of a high-flying career woman. She was always suitably dressed for any occasion. She looked capable from head to toe and maintained her composure very well. There were no visible cracks on her facade, and it was tough to read her emotions. For this reason, people did not dare to underestimate her. She crossed her hands on the table and paused for a moment before she said, “I’m very sorry for everything Aery and Jean have done to you. I don’t think I handled it very well…”

“It doesn’t matter,” Arianne calmly replied, “They haven’t been bothering me for a while anyway. It’s been quite peaceful lately, but if I ever get the chance, I’ll make them pay. Is that why you’re here?”

Helen's eyes darted around briefly before she said, "They're in jail now. One is sentenced to five years, and the other to one year. I just found out not too long ago. Mark did this. I'm sure you're unaware?"

Arianne was shocked, but she did not show it. At the same time, she was growing suspicious of Helen's reason for visiting today. Since Helen had brought up Aery and Jean's jail sentence, it was obvious she was not here to make idle conversation. She had figured out the next part of the conversation at this point. "So? I wasn't aware that they're in jail. Now I do. What are you trying to say?"

Helen paused for a moment before continuing, "I know that they deserve it but try to see it from my point of view. I'd save them if I could. I know that it's inappropriate to ask you, but I have no choice. Mark did this because of you. Jean has confessed to most of his crimes so I can't save him, but I want to save Aery."

Helen's blunt and guiltless display of magnanimity left a bad taste in Arianne's mouth. How could Helen sound so magnanimous? Arianne was the victim here! "You should talk to whoever sent them to jail. There's no use asking me. Do you really think I'd talk to Mark just to save Aery? I've left the Tremonts. It's not like you're unaware of that. Please don't wave your selfishness in front of me. Aery is your daughter. I won't stop you from helping her, but it has nothing to do with me! One more thing, I don't think Aery's going to let me off the hook once she's out so why should I help her? I've told you I'll make her pay when I get the chance. Do you know why I hate you, Helen? Because you do such disgusting things, and yet, you pretend to be blameless and magnanimous. How do you do it? Or are you under the impression that a bit of money and a house can make up for everything you've done to me? Does that mean we're even?"

A faintly indiscernible glint of emotion flashed across Helen's eyes in the midst of Arianne's barrage of questions. "I covered up for Aery during your miscarriage. She'll sell me out if I don't do this…"

Arianne thought it sounded like a joke. "So you came to see me to save yourself or your daughter? You even have the nerve to bring up the horrible things you've done. I would have forgotten about it if you didn't mention it. Since you've confessed to covering up for her, what makes you think I'd help you? I should let life run its course with all of you. Please leave. I need to lock up for the night."

Helen was not a blatantly shameless person and stopped pursuing the matter after Arianne asked her to leave.

Arianne washed her exhaustion away when she arrived home. Once she felt fresh and clean, she sat down on the couch as usual and enjoyed her limited free time.

Being all alone at night was boring, and her thoughts were liable to wander as well. This was especially true when she sat on the couch. Mark's face immediately appeared in her mind, and his drunken passion…

She frowned as she got up and checked the couch. How could that preposterous affair not leave any trace? She blushed as she pulled off the couch covers and threw them into the washing machine, cursing at him a few times before her anger was appeased. However, when she remembered how he had put Jean and Aery into jail, she felt very strange. Why did he do it? She had been racking her brains, thinking of ways to distance herself from him, but he was always watching over her. Nevertheless, she was still not going to forgive him.

Her father's face was now a blur in her memories, but she could still remember how her father had single-handedly raised her. He would never neglect her and always ensured that she had food on the table, no matter the season. Her father was always afraid that she would end up different from other children, probably because Helen had abandoned her too early in life, so he had tried his best to be a good father to her. She remembered it all, but she could no longer remember her father's face…

He was such a good father, but his life was suddenly taken away in an airplane crash. Most importantly, he was turned into a scapegoat. As it turned out, the culprit was the other man who had raised her and had become her husband. How could she possibly live the rest of her life in peace with the man who killed her father? She was feeling extremely guilty about falling in love with Mark. She should not be in love with him, he killed her father...

This favor from him made her uneasy. She was no longer a sheep who would let everyone take advantage of her nor was she afraid of Aery and Jean causing trouble for her anymore. So Mark's actions only made her uncomfortable. She wanted things to be even between them and did not want to receive favors from him anymore.

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After some thought, she pulled out her phone and sent a message to Mark. "Helen came to see me. I know you sent Aery and Jean to jail. There was no need to do that. I don't want to owe you anything. From now on, my issues are none of your business.

A reply soon followed. "For as long as you're mine, your issues will always be my business. You have the nerve to send me a message instead of telling it to my face?"

She turned her phone off and went straight to bed. She refused to reply to his message, and she did not have the courage to face him. She did not send him that message to tell him to let Aery and Jean off the hook. She simply wanted him to stop concerning himself with her issues. Would she ever have a clean break with him?

The capital.

Tiffany had been running into walls continuously after she applied for jobs in different companies. She was getting worried. She had just stepped into the house and felt the cooling air from the air conditioner. It felt so refreshing that she quickly kicked off her heels and made her way to the couch.

However, before she could even sit down, Lillian stopped her. “Stay away from the couch. Shower first. I just bought the couch, it’s really expensive. Don’t you dare lie on it with your sweaty body. You’ve been out the entire day… Did you find anything?”

Tiffany felt slightly reluctant but did not sit on the couch in the end. She was quite particular about these things as well. Moreover, she would have to wash it if she dirtied it. “No. I don’t have much job experience since I graduated. I only had a short stint working in Jackson’s company and didn’t contribute to any major achievements there. Every time I tell the interviewers that I used to work in Jackson’s company, their eyes would light up. They’d look at the rest of my details, ask a few questions, and I’d blurt everything out. I know what I’m capable of. Even if Jackson’s company is gilded with gold, it can’t hide the fact that I suck. I’m close to becoming a dishwasher at this point. Please don’t ask, mom.”

Lillian did not complain. She looked around and asked, “Has Jackson spoken to you about this at all?”

Tiffany instinctively defended him. “He has asked me to work for him, but I refused. I want to rely on my abilities, I don’t want him to take care of me! Don’t worry about me. Relax, I’ll make sure there’s food on the table.”

Lillian did not ask any further questions and continued binge-watching her show.

Tiffany’s shoulders drooped as she walked into the bathroom after taking her pajamas out. Her phone rang before she could take off her clothes. She had a habit of playing songs on her phone during shower so she had brought her phone with her. When she saw Jackson’s name on the screen, her exhaustion vanished immediately. However, her tone sounded annoyed as she said, “Hello… Why aren’t you asleep?”

Jackson sounded extremely resentful on the other end of the line, “Do you think I can sleep? Did you come across some kind of bullshit how-to guide on love on the internet again? Is that why you’ve been

deliberately ignoring me? I can't stand being alone at night. At this rate, I'm going to find someone else if you don't see me!"

She chuckled innocently. "No. I haven't been reading any guide. I've been job hunting. I was out the whole day, and I'm exhausted. I just got home, and I'm about to jump into the shower. I can't even get a job. How am I supposed to deal with you? Keep sleeping alone at night, I'll shower you with love when I have the time."

Jackson's resentment grew when he heard about her job-hunting experience. "You were doing well in my company, why won't you come back? Why must you insist on blindly tormenting yourself? Was the salary not enough for you? By the way, I'm going over to Mark's tomorrow. Wanna come? You can visit Arianne while you're there."

"Sure." Tiffany agreed without a second thought. "I've been missing Ari. I'll be able to spend some time with her this way. What time are we leaving tomorrow? Have you bought the tickets? Send me the flight number, I'll book the same flight."

Jackson checked the flight number on his computer. "Tomorrow morning. Send me your identification number, I'll buy your ticket along with mine and pick you up tomorrow."

Tiffany did not refuse. "Sure. Do it now. I'll transfer the money for the tickets to you later. I need a shower. I'll talk to you later." She felt extremely hot. After all, there was no air conditioner in the bathroom. Any longer, she might as well be cooked in a pot.

Jackson stared blankly at his phone for a few seconds. What did she mean by transferring money to him? This was his first time meeting a woman who had drawn such a clear line between him and her. His ex-girlfriends were only too eager to empty his wallet, and yet, Tiffany did not even want him to pay for her flight tickets? He felt slightly unhappy about this. He really felt as though there was some distance

between them, like there was really a line between them. This was a very strange feeling to him. He had never felt this way, as though someone had reached into his chest and squeezed his heart. Nothing felt right, and it was depressing.

The next day, he went directly to the airport without picking Tiffany up. He wanted to see if she would sulk since he was not considerate of her. Most women liked corny romanticism, and he hoped she was just like them. Otherwise, he would feel as though he was thrown off balance and helpless.

Tiffany was very punctual. She did not bring a lot of luggage. Instead, she held a small bag and was dressed in a white dress with comfortable sandals on her feet. She looked very refreshing and seemed to be in a good mood. She did not complain about his lack of consideration for not picking her up. She smiled and waved her hand. “I’m here!”

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Jackson stood in his spot for a moment. He stared at her and did not respond to her at all. He put on a pair of sunglasses.

Unfortunately, Tiffany was completely oblivious to his strange behavior. She walked to him and held his arm. “I’ve sent the money to you. Did you receive it? How many days do you plan on staying? I won’t be able to stay with you if you’re planning to stay for a long time. I can only for two days before I have to return for work.”

Jackson pursed his lips and said coldly, “Don’t wait for me then.” After he finished speaking, he went to the ticketing booth.

At this moment, Tiffany finally realized something was not right. She jogged up to him. “What’s up with you? You seem unhappy.”

He paused for a moment before saying, “Does it matter if I’m happy? It doesn’t really matter as long as you’re happy.”

Alarm bells immediately rang in Tiffany’s mind. “Wait a minute! What do you mean? Why does it sound like I’ve angered you? You’re a guy. Do you have to sulk like a girl? Just tell me what’s wrong, and we can fix it.”

Jackson really was not in the mood to talk about what’s wrong in a crowded airport. Moreover, he was not a quarrelsome person. He did not want to fight with her and only wanted to calm down before he spoke to her. It would be difficult for him to control his emotions when he was angry. The final result might not be his desired outcome. Therefore, he said, “It’s nothing.”

Tiffany did not pursue the matter. However, her face turned slightly pale, uncertain of what had happened. They were fine on the phone last night. What changed?

The pair sat next to each other on the plane but barely spoke. Jackson closed his eyes and napped. He did not even look at Tiffany.

Tiffany tugged on the corners of her dress uneasily. She could not figure out what he was thinking and did not know what to say. She felt as though ants were crawling and nibbling on her heart, it was torturous and uncomfortable.

Two hours later, the plane finally landed. Jackson disembarked from the plane, and Tiffany trailed behind him.

At this moment, her eyes were red, and tears were threatening to spill. She would have burst into tears if there were not so many people around. She held them back until they left the airport.

When they called for a cab, she gathered her courage and stepped forward, putting roughly one meter between them. “Did I do something wrong?” She softly mumbled, “Or… Are you tired of me? It’s okay. I can always say that I asked to break it off. I won’t bring any trouble to you, and it won’t affect your relationship with Mark and Ari…”

Jackson could hear the grief and caution in her voice so he turned around and stared at her from the side. When he saw the tears in her eyes, he panicked for a second. “Why are you crying?”

In the end, she could no longer hold back her tears. She quickly wiped them away as they rolled down her face. She forced a smile on her face as she said, “I’m not crying… We know each other quite well. Can’t we just talk it out? Don’t do this, it makes things very difficult for me…”

Jackson frowned. His emotions were a wreck. He simply could not figure out what she was crying about and did not know why she had said such silly things. This was the first time he had ever felt confused in front of a woman. “What are you talking about? There’s nothing to talk about. I’m not trying to change anything. Just let me settle down, give me some time, okay?”

At this moment, a cab stopped in front of them. Jackson took her bag and opened the back door. “Let’s talk at the hotel. Don’t cry.”

Both Jackson and Tiffany’s emotions were unstable in the car. They did not speak at all.

From Tiffany's point of view, Jackson was the one who had initiated things with her. He was always hot for her and would probably stick to her every second of the day if he could. Now, he had suddenly become cold and distant. For this reason, the first thought that came to her mind was that he had lost interest. He probably realized he had been too hasty in pursuing her. There was a possibility that he was tired of her, like his ex-girlfriends. Those promises and sweet words were probably nothing more than a means he used to trick women…

After all, thanks to her horrible past, marriage would only be seen as her way of social climbing. Nevertheless, she did not resent him at all and would tell everyone that she had asked for the breakup and that it was a mutual decision. It was not easy for her to speak out, and yet, he did not provide her with a clear answer. At this point, she really could not figure out what he was thinking.

When they arrived at the hotel, Jackson helped her with her bag after they got down from the car and walked ahead of her. She jogged after him, and when they arrived at the front desk, she automatically pulled out her identification card, fumbling just a little.

After the registration, they walked into the elevator. There were people around them so Tiffany kept her mouth shut. When they arrived in their room, she finally lost control and blurted out, "Can we talk now? You don't need to be apprehensive. Just say what's on your mind."

Jackson silently adjusted the air-conditioning in order to conceal his frustration. Then, he sat down on the couch and replied, "Let's put aside the amount of time we've known each other, and start counting from the time we started dating. It's been a few months now, hasn't it? Am I not important to you? Is it that hard to love me?"

Tiffany could not understand him and felt even more aggrieved. "What do you mean? Why are you saying this?"

Chapter 527

Jackson took a deep breath. “Would you like to split the hotel bill evenly with me too? I don’t need you to save money for me, why are you calculating the flight tickets with me? I have more than enough time to pick you up from your house, but I didn’t, and you’re not mad at me either. You didn’t even ask me about it. In my opinion, these things show that you don’t care at all.” He had always been the apathetic one in a relationship, it was what he was familiar with. Now that the roles were reversed, he did not know what to do. He was panicking.

Tiffany’s slow-moving brain finally sped up. She finally realized he was not acting out because he was tired of her or regretted dating her. She sighed in relief. “It’s not that… I don’t care. I just don’t want to spend your money before we take things further in our relationship. I’m afraid your mother might think that I agreed to date you for your money… I know this small amount of money doesn’t matter to you, but this is my dignity. I assumed you didn’t pick me up because you had something important to attend to. Why should I sulk because of that? It’s not that I don’t care, I’m just trying to understand you! You… Are you angry at me because of that?”

Jackson’s rage was greatly reduced after hearing her explanation. It quickly transformed into guilt. He had always thought that living a happy life together was good enough so he really did not think too much about it. He did not consider her worries. Furthermore, he did not expect her to be so concerned about his mother’s opinion of her. She had even tried to understand his lack of consideration and thought he was simply too busy. She seemed very thoughtful, no matter how he looked at it.

If that were the case, then there was no need for this discussion. However, he could see a hint of inferiority in her eyes. How could a cheerful girl like her possibly feel inferior? Why did she have to lower herself to this extent? She was entirely welcomed to throw a tantrum at him. In fact, she had the right to do so.

“Are you…” He really wanted to ask if she felt ashamed and inferior because of her past. However, he was afraid to bring up such a touchy subject. He swallowed the words on the tip of his tongue and said, “Are you an idiot? No matter how busy I am, I’d always clear my schedule to see you. Even if I’m on the other side of the world, I’d fly over to you as soon as possible. I intentionally didn’t pick you up because I wanted to see if you’d get angry. My mom certainly isn’t going to care about how much money I spend

on you. I earn my own salary, and I'll spend it on whoever I want. Why should she care? If you ever do this again, I'm going to be very angry."

Tiffany lowered her head and bit her lips before she mumbled, "I understand… I won't be calculative over anything below 150 dollars. We'll split if it's more than that. If we do get married in the future, I won't be modest with you even if it's 15 million dollars, let alone a flight ticket. No haggling. It's decided. I'm dying from this heat. I'm going to take a shower before I have fun with Ari. You should get to work. Call me when you have the time." Before Jackson could reply, she walked into the bathroom. She really did not need a shower, but she wanted some time to calm down.

Indeed, Jackson really was not here for leisure. He glanced at his watch before he rose to his feet and knocked on the bathroom door. "I've got to go to the office. I'll call you later."

"Mm," Tiffany replied. When she heard the door close, she relaxed and turned on the shower. The ice-cold water soon became warm. She lifted her head and held her breath as the water fell on her. At this moment, many different thoughts flooded her mind. She had always thought that a marriage with Jackson was out of reach. To be honest, she did not really think about marrying him. They were fine the way they were now, they were fine…

…

Tiffany did not tell anyone about her arrival so when she entered the dessert shop, Naya was very surprised. "Tiffany! What are you doing here?"

Tiffany giggled, then, easily found her way into the kitchen. "I'm here on vacation for two days. Get back to work!"

Arianne whirled around when she heard Tiffany's voice. "Tiffie? When did you get here?"

Tiffany smiled. "What? Aren't you happy to see me? I've been missing you every single day. Don't be so mean."

Business was not too busy in the shop today so Arianne dropped what she was doing and walked out. "Let's talk outside. It's hot in the kitchen. I'm not mean. I'm so happy you're here. We'll close the shop early today. How about we all go out for dinner tonight?"

"By 'all', do you mean Mark too?" Tiffany asked meaningfully.

Arianne glared at her, feigning anger. "Stop it! I know what's going on. You're here to annoy me! You didn't come alone, did you? Where's Jackson?"

Tiffany lowered her gaze at the mention of Jackson's name. "He's probably in the office building across the road. He has got some work to do."

Arianne had learned to observe words and gestures from a young age, mainly to look out for Mark's mood swings. Therefore, it was not difficult for her to discover the changes in Tiffany's expression. "Have you been fighting?"

Chapter 528

Tiffany paused and said, "It wasn't really a fight, it's just… Both of us don't see eye to eye in certain areas… Our principles are different. For example, I don't want to spend too much of his money while

we're dating, and I don't sulk because he can't pick me up. He thinks it's because I don't care about him and that I don't love him. However, I think it's good for us to split things evenly in case we break up so neither of us will owe the other. Why should I sulk just because he can't pick me up? Wouldn't that be unreasonable of me if he was busy? That's why it turned out this way… It's such a small issue, but it's a mess. It's pretty exhausting."

This 'mess' was nothing to Arianne. "When two people are together, the most important thing is that they're happy. One of you will have to compromise. If you want him to be happy, you should adapt to his ways. If he cares more for you, he'll pander to you. It's not a big deal. Don't worry. Let's have some fun. We've been making our lunch in the shop recently. Wanna eat with us? Or are you going out for lunch with Jackson?"

Tiffany paused thoughtfully and felt that she was probably expected to have lunch with Jackson. However, she did not want to leave Arianne alone. "I think we're supposed to have lunch, but I want to eat with you. Why don't you come with us? Don't give me that crap about being a third wheel. You'll never be a third wheel… Alright, that's settled. We'll buy lunch for Naya and the rest another time."

Her best friend was here. Naturally, Arianne wanted to spend time with her. For this reason, she easily agreed to it.

During lunch, Jackson called Tiffany and asked her to meet him at his restaurant. He would be late, and he would meet her there.

Tiffany pulled Arianne with her and hailed a cab.

They sat at their table and waited for twenty minutes before Jackson finally arrived. However, he was not alone. Mark was with him as well!

Arianne's breath caught in her throat when she met Mark's cold eyes. Her body stiffened, and she quickly looked away. It was not entirely surprising that Jackson would bring Mark along. Since they were already here, she should try and relax. She was here to keep Tiffany company. She would just ignore Mark.

Jackson acted completely nonchalant. He sat down and asked Tiffany to order the food.

Tiffany, out of habit, passed the menu to Arianne. "You should order, Ari. You can have anything you want."

Arianne perfunctorily picked two dishes and passed it back to Tiffany. "I'm done. You can go ahead."

After ordering their meals, Tiffany mustered her courage to start a conversation. The atmosphere was too stifling. "Mark, have you seen Ari since you arrived?"

Mark kept his eyes on Arianne the entire time and replied calmly, "Mm." Not only did he see her, but he had also… slept with her.

The look in his eyes made Arianne feel very uneasy. She felt her face burning. She quickly changed the topic. "How long will you be staying, Tiffie? When will you be going home?"

Tiffany answered honestly, "I'll be staying for two days. I haven't been able to get a job yet. I'm not sure how long Jackson will be here."

“You can always come back to the shop if you can’t get a job,” Arianne interjected before Jackson could reply.

Jackson promptly swallowed his words. He had planned on steering the topic to Arianne and Mark, but Arianne had seen right through him. Was she threatening him? What if Tiffany really did decide to come back to the shop? It would be a disaster. It was not easy for him to persuade her to return to the capital with him.

Tiffany was oblivious to the subtle exchange. She thought Arianne was only joking. “That’s a great idea, I kind of agree. I don’t really want to leave you anyway.”

Mark lowered his eyes. He picked up the glass of water in front of him and took a sip, looking effortlessly elegant with such a simple movement.

This drew the attention of everyone in the room, and they began whispering among themselves.

When he tapped his glass with his forefinger, a young woman at the next table accidentally spilled her drink. The woman’s date’s expression was really dark. “If you plan on staring, you’d better have your fill today! Can’t you look somewhere else? Do you want me to ask for his number for you?”

The woman blushed. She lowered her head, feeling extremely embarrassed. The man simply shot Mark an unfriendly glare. Even Jackson received a taste of his wrath!

Tiffany giggled. “You two really do shine wherever you go. You even caused a lover’s quarrel just by having a simple meal together.”

A bitter expression appeared on Jackson’s face, and he remained silent.

If the four of them — two men and two women, sat between each other, they would look like they were on a double date and would not have attracted any attention. However, he was now sitting next to Mark. It was no surprise that they ended up attracting stares. He wanted to object but was too afraid to do so. If Arianne were to ask Tiffany to come back to the shop, Tiffany would agree without hesitation. He certainly did not want to sleep on a lonely bed every night.

Mark was completely unaffected by everything that was happening around him. He even seemed a little disgusted.

The dishes were soon served. Tiffany was the only one who would talk to Arianne from time to time during the meal.

Mark remained quiet, and Jackson was too afraid to speak.

After the meal, Arianne spoke up first, “I’ve got to return to the shop. I’ll see you later.”

Jackson gritted his teeth and determinedly dragged Tiffany toward the door, “Then, Tiffie and I will take a cab back to the hotel. It’s too hot, Mark can drive you back!”

Chapter 529

Mark did not give an immediate response. He slowly rose to his feet.

Arianne's mind was in a mess, she dearly wished that she could drag Jackson back and punch him in the face. She composed herself and calmly said, "No need. Goodbye."

Mark reached out and grabbed her wrist, "I'll drive you."

She frowned. "No need."

"I said, I'll drive you," he insisted.

Arianne surrendered in the end. She got into Mark's car but sat in the backseat.

The cold air in the car was a world away from the scorching heat outside. Arianne stared out the window at the buildings passing by. Her mind was blank. She could not understand why she did not hold her ground. Why did she get into his car? If she did not decide to keep Tiffany company, she would not have to eat with him.

Suddenly, Mark broke the silence and said, "About that night. I'm sorry. I had too much to drink." His tone was apathetic, and it was difficult to hear any form of sincerity from his voice. However, it was an apology at least.

Arianne did not want to think about that insufferable night. She replied in an equally indifferent tone, “I know you had too much to drink. It’s alright, but don’t let it happen again.”

He paused before he said, “Next time, I won’t visit you when I’m drunk.”

Was he saying he was going to see her when he was sober?

Unable to help herself, Arianne quickly said, “I hope you won’t come looking for me when you’re sober either. Don’t come looking for me unless it’s to talk about divorce. Understand?”

The car stopped when they reached a traffic light. As she watched the countdown clock on the traffic light, Arianne was seized by an urge to get down from the car and walk back on her own. Unfortunately, the car doors were locked, and she did not want to make a scene.

After ten seconds, Mark finally spoke up, “I can accept starting over, but I won’t accept a divorce. You can use whatever way you want to vent your frustrations but don’t draw a line between us.”

He sounded like he was begging her. Was she mistaken? This was not like him… She was able to adapt to whatever nastiness he threw at her, but she was not used to this at all.

At the end of the ninety-second mark on the traffic light, the car was on the road again.

She finally calmed down, “Why won’t you let me go?”

“Would you let me go?” he asked

She gritted her teeth. “Then, why didn’t you spare my father? He had worked for your family for so many years. Were you unaware that he was a single father with an only daughter? I was only eight… You took my only family away from me. How dare you ask me to let you off the hook? I don’t want to talk about the past, and I can’t forgive you either. It’s over.”

Mark tightened his grip on the steering wheel. He was suddenly filled with regret. Why did he not stop his mother? If only it did not happen. Regardless, his mother had done everything for him. He could not bring himself to blame the woman who had put him first.

“What if I told you that it wasn’t me?” There were many times he wished he could say these words, but he forced it back down. This time, it was the same. He could not bring himself to be so selfish, to drag his mother into this just to clear his name.

The car soon arrived in front of the dessert shop. Mark did not unlock the car when he stopped, and Arianne was not in a hurry to get off either. They simply sat in silence.

A few seconds later, Mark unlocked the car. “It’s not over. I won’t stop until you come back to me.”

Arianne did not reply. Instead, she concentrated on getting down from the car.

“Your husband drove you back? Is everything… okay between you now?” Naya asked in surprise when Arianne entered the shop.

Arianne’s mind was in a mess. “No. I’m tired. I need a break. Just have someone watch over the shop.”

The first guest in the shop was not a customer, but a flower delivery man. He was carrying a large bouquet of fresh red roses. It looked extremely glamorous. “I’m looking for a Miss Arianne Wynn?”

Tanya, who was manning the sales counter, was confused. “She’s here… Are these for her? Who are they from?”

The delivery man smiled politely. “I’m not sure. There’s no name. Can you please call Miss Wynn for me if she’s here? I have to personally deliver this to her.”

Tanya rubbed her eyes as she walked into the staff lounge. “Ari, someone’s here to see you.”

Arianne was still awake. Her mind was still filled with thoughts of Mark. When she walked out, she instantly saw the exaggeratedly huge bouquet of roses. The exquisite black wrapping around the red roses made them even more stunning. One look at the roses and the wrapping paper was enough to know that they were very expensive. “For me? Who are they from?”

The floral delivery man smiled again. “The other young lady asked the very same question. I’m not sure who sent this. I only know the name of the recipient. Please sign here if you’re Arianne Wynn. I have to file a report when I return. Thank you.”

Arianne signed her name on the delivery receipt. She stared at the bouquet of roses. The more she thought about it, the more she believed they were from Mark. Although this was not like him, it was not the first time he had acted out of character. Naturally, she was not going to call him. There was no point returning it to him either, he would probably throw the bouquet of roses away. It would be a waste of perfectly good flowers. All women loved flowers, and Arianne was no exception.

Chapter 530

She cleaned out a few cheap and simple vases and arranged the flowers in them. She needed four vases to hold all the roses. It gave the shop a touch of glamor.

Tanya was green with envy. “Who’s it from? They’re so pretty, and there are so many of them. They must be expensive. Just a small bouquet would cost at least $15. These flowers are from the biggest flower shop in the city, and it’s a franchise too. It must have been expensive.”

Arianne was in a much better mood, thanks to the flowers. She sniffed. “Who cares?”

Back at the hotel.

Tiffany was lying on the bed, fast asleep. Jackson was next to her, fiddling his phone. He would glare at her resentfully from time to time. She had complained about needing a nap when they returned from lunch and actually went to sleep. They had not seen each other for days, and when they finally did, they had a quarrel. Was this not the best time to cultivate their relationship? How could she go to sleep at a time like this?

He was losing interest in his phone so he lay down and tried to pull her into his arms. Unfortunately, her sleeping position was not suitable for him to hold her. He tried a few times but gave up in the end.

However, he still placed his hand on her waist. He did not dare to put too much pressure for fear of making her uncomfortable so his touch was incomparably gentle.

Every time he touched her, he would feel an all-consuming itch and would soon instinctively begin indulging in his desire.

Tiffany was not a sound sleeper. She turned her body and put her leg on his body. He stiffened. Her actions lifted her skirt, putting her fair and smooth thighs on display. This was too enticing for him. He was at his prime, and he would not be a man if he could resist this temptation! However, she was still sleeping so he could only suppress his impulses, making him feel a little empty. He never used to care if his female companion was sleeping or not.

Tiffany slowly began to wake up when she turned around in bed. However, she was still bleary from sleep. When she felt his hands roaming around her body, she instinctively chose to act as though she was still sleeping. They just had a fight this morning. Although they had talked about it, she still had not gotten over it. There were still things weighing her down so she was at a loss…

Suddenly, Jackson's hand accidentally brushed against her waist. She was ticklish so she instinctively tried to avoid him. She moved too fast, completely unlike someone who was sleeping.

Jackson stiffened. Then, he cautiously asked in a husky voice, "Are you up?"

She could no longer keep up her pretense. She moved her leg off him. "Mm… I'm going to nap for a little while longer…"

He was already going stir-crazy from waiting for her to get up. Why would he let her continue napping? “Stop sleeping or you won’t be able to sleep tonight…” Then, he moved on top of her. Just as he was about to kiss her on the lips, she turned her face away.

He frowned, reaching out to grab her chin, and forcing her to look at him. “What’s this? You won’t let me touch you now? I was wrong, okay?”

She could not explain. She just was not in the mood, “No… I… I just don’t feel…”

Jackson could not be bothered to overanalyze at this point. He buried his head into her neck before he nibbled on her delicate ears.

She abruptly pushed him away and began to ramble, “What time is it? It must be extremely busy at the shop right now. Moreover, I’m supposed to have dinner with Ari tonight. I’m going to help her!”

Jackson felt as though a bucket of cold water had been poured on him. He squashed his frustrations from being interrupted and tried to coax her, “Can’t you go a little later? I’ll come with you.”

Tiffany was adamant. “No way. It wasn’t easy for me to get two days off. I don’t want to waste my time in bed…” She did not meet his eyes when she spoke.

Jackson was slightly confused now. If she were still upset over whatever happened this morning, she would not have reacted this way. It looked like she simply did not want him touching her. He swallowed his temper and asked, “Are you still angry over what happened this morning? It was my fault. I didn’t consider your opinion or your feelings. I concede, I respect you, okay? Don’t be angry. We haven’t seen each other for days. Don’t you want to do ‘it’ at all?”

She shook her head. “I’m not angry, I’m just not in the mood…”

He fell silent for a few seconds and asked, “You just don’t feel like doing it, right? Is this temporary?”

She stared at him and nodded in confirmation. “Mm.”

He heaved a sigh of relief, reached out, and stroked her hair. “Okay, okay. Get ready and I’ll come with you to the shop.”

Tiffany instinctively refused. “There’s no need for that. I’ll go on my own. You must be very busy, don’t waste your time at the shop. The kitchen is extremely hot. You won’t be able to stand it. We’ll have dinner tonight. I’ll call you.”

Jackson did not insist. It was true he had some work to do this afternoon.

When Tiffany arrived, there were quite a few customers in the shop. She put on her apron and entered the kitchen immediately. To be honest, the air conditioner was usually turned on in the kitchen because the desserts had to be stored at a certain temperature once they were done. If it were not for this, Arianne probably would not be able to bear using the air conditioner in the kitchen.