Ruling 531

Chapter 531

Currently, it was the shop's busier hour so Arianne did not even have time to look at Tiffany. "Why are you in the kitchen? You don't know how to make desserts. Help Tanya out with the drinks."

Tiffany was distracted. "I'll prep the ingredients for you. Tanya is not really busy."

It was only then that Arianne looked at her. "What's wrong?"

"I… suddenly feel like breaking up."

This shocked Arianne. "What? Why? Did Jackson do something wrong? Is he still involved with the women he had previously?"

Tiffany's eyes were red. "No, he's fine, he's great. He's perfect and good to me. However, it's also because of these reasons that I feel like I'm not the one for him. Why is he so nice to me? I don't have anything, even… even my body isn't pure. I'd feel a little better if he's just a bit more awful or inconsiderate toward me. Why is he treating me like a treasure? I'm not intelligent, and I'm not skilled. Even if we get married, I'm only a vase. I can't help him with anything." She paused before she continued to say, "Ari, I finally understand how difficult it is for people with different backgrounds to go against the odds and be together. Even if my family didn't go bankrupt, I still don't deserve him. I don't know anything other than enjoying life. He would be flawless if he weren't a womanizer. Even then, he had stopped his womanizing ways because of me. How am I supposed to keep the balance? If his mother knows about what happened to me, I won't even be able to get married into the West family. The truth will come to light sooner or later. I can't keep it a secret. Even if I can, I don't want to be a liar my entire life."

Arianne felt horrible. She did not expect she would be the one to break Tiffany down. Tiffany still could not get over the incident. Even if Jackson did not mind it, it did not mean everything would go smoothly. She thought about it for a long time before she said, “Tiffie… don’t be impulsive. There’s still room for negotiation. It’s not like you wanted it to happen. You’re a victim, and it should’ve been me… Jackson’s mother isn’t someone unreasonable. I believe she’ll understand and accept it. It isn’t your fault! You don’t have to feel insecure because of it and lower yourself! Jackson may be smarter or more capable than you. However, you just lack experience. It doesn’t mean you’re dumb. You can learn. Moreover, if everything goes well, you can also stay home to take care of your children in the future. This is also a kind of balance. Moreover, it’s not always necessary to have balance. Why can’t he be nice to you? How could you feel better if he’s abusive? Tiffie, you need to calm down.”

Tiffany answered shakily, “I’m calm. I’ve had this thought since morning, and I’ve been thinking about it. I shouldn’t have agreed to date him in the first place. I don’t want to waste his time. He deserves better. I feel it even more acutely since I know he sincerely loves me. First, I was selfish and delighted. I’m in love so I didn’t think much about this. However, the anxiety and insecurity soon creep in. Ari, you don’t have to dissuade me.”

Arianne saw Tiffany’s determined expression and heard the lack of hesitation in her words. She knew Tiffany had made up her mind. This only made her feel worse. “I’m still going to ask you to think about it. In life, it’s not easy to meet someone you love and loves you in return. As an outsider, I think you should cherish him even more when he doesn’t mind your past. This is an objective view. As a friend, I understand your feelings, and I understand your choice. You love him so you think you’re holding him back. I know. But the reality is… if you let him go, there won’t be a second Jackson in this world. Are you really willing to do this?”

In the end, Tiffany began to sob. “I’m not willing! But I can’t help it! I just want to live a peaceful average life since I was young. He’s blessed by the heavens since his birth. No matter how hard I work now, I won’t be able to catch up to him. Can’t you see how big a gap there is between us? The problems that’ll come in the future will take a toll on our relationship. Over time, the ardent passion we feel when we’re in love will turn into petty arguments in our marriage. I’ve had him, and I’m ending it during the best time. Isn’t this the right choice?”

Her words rendered Arianne speechless. She was asking Tiffany not to give up on Jackson because she could not be together with her loved one. Asking if she was willing to part with him was also her silent cry. She was reluctant, just like Tiffany.

Arianne did not persuade her further. “Never mind. Think about it again. Just don’t regret it. Before you ask for a breakup, think about the pain you’ll face after. If you don’t think it’ll be so horrible that you want to die when you see Jackson being with other women in the future, if you think you can endure it, then, do what you want.”

Arianne closed the shop early at night, but she did not ask Tiffany out for dinner. She went home directly. Her intention was to provide some alone time for Tiffany and Jackson with the hope that there would be a U-turn. Regardless, Tiffany seemed determined when she spoke. Arianne had a feeling things would not change…

Chapter 532

After dinner, Tiffany and Jackson went shopping. Tiffany was the one who suggested it. She did not have anything she wanted to buy, she just wanted to walk around with Jackson…

When the heat got to them, they went into the mall. A steady flow of patrons flowed into the mall. When they passed by a watch boutique, Jackson was taken by a women’s watch. Without checking the price, he asked the sales assistant to bring it out. “This watch is nice. Do you like it?”

Tiffany looked at the watch. Jackson had a good taste. It was pretty, but it was also not cheap. “I don’t want it.”

A flash of emotion glinted in Jackson’s eyes. “Okay, we don’t want it then.” He knew that she did not want to spend his money.

When Tiffany turned to leave, Jackson softly asked the sales assistant to wrap the watch and swiftly swiped his card before catching up to Tiffany while hiding the gift. She would probably not get mad if he gave it to her as a gift, right?

When it was close to ten at night, the crowd in the mall thinned since it was almost closing time. Tiffany looked reluctant to leave.

After shopping the entire night, Jackson was worn out. “Let’s go back to the hotel? It’s getting late.”

“Is it? Alright…” Tiffany seemed to be in a daze.

Given the green light, Jackson sighed in relief. He finally did not have to continue shopping anymore. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders. “I’ll accompany you and take you on a tour tomorrow. I’ve spoken to Mark. I have the day off.”

Tiffany hummed half-heartedly as she thought about how to bring up the subject of breaking up.

The moment they entered their room at the hotel, Tiffany mustered all her courage and said, “Jackson, let’s break up.”

Jackson, who was closing the door, froze immediately. “What are you saying?”

“I said, let’s break up.” Tiffany had her back facing him. She did not have the courage to look into his eyes.

“I told you. You can’t simply say things like this.” Jackson’s voice sounded weak when he spoke. His expression had turned grim.

“Yeah… I’m not simply saying it. I’m serious. I’ve booked a flight, it leaves at 1 am. I’ll be leaving for the airport later,” Tiffany said. She feigned indifference and began packing up her things.

Jackson gripped the gift in his hand tightly. The watch in the box felt like a joke. She had given him a shock before he could give her a surprise. She had even booked her flight ticket. There was no room for discussion.

A moment later, Jackson flung the gift on the floor and cussed, “Why? If I was caught fooling around with other women, I’d understand if you want to break up. What did I do wrong!?”

Tiffany wiped her tears away. She said tearily, “It’s not you. You’re amazing. I’m not good enough. Don’t say anymore, I’ve already decided.”

Jackson moved to her and pulled her wrist, stopping her from packing. “Decided? Is breaking up something you can decide alone?! Huh?! Who do you think I am? Getting together and breaking up with me as you wish?! You better explain this!”

Flinging his hand away, Tiffany looked at Jackson with a forced smile as tears brimmed in her eyes. Her vision blurred, she could no longer make out the features on his face. “Explain? This isn’t Jackson’s style, is it? You’ve been dumping people without any reason. There’s no reason for you to pester me for a reason.”

Her reaction thoroughly enraged Jackson. He gripped her shoulders and pulled her to him. “You’re right. I used to dump people. No one has ever dumped me. You won’t be an exception. Since there’s no need to explain it, you don’t have to.”

Jackson then lowered his head to kiss Tiffany. It was as though he was using all his strength to convince her to change her mind.

Tiffany did not struggle, she passively accepted his kisses. This would be the last time…

Jackson’s kisses grew more heated as he left marks on her fair neck. Tiffany’s long dress was wrenched and pulled away violently before he pinned her down on the bed.

At the last moment, Jackson stopped. Even during a time like this, he could not bear to hurt Tiffany with his currently volatile emotions. If he had done so, what difference was there between him and those men? He got up and went to the window to light a cigarette. His voice was shaky. “Leave. Before I change my mind.”

Tiffany picked up her clothes that were scattered on the floor and dressed herself. Taking what belonged to her, she left the hotel without turning back. She did not go to the airport, and there was no booked ticket. It was a lie. She hailed a cab to Arianne’s apartment and was already a sobbing mess when she knocked on the door.

Arianne did not ask any questions when she saw Tiffany's state. She knew what had happened. She poured Tiffany a glass of water. "Cry it out, you'll feel better."

Tiffany took out her phone to order takeout while she cried. She did not order a lot of dishes, but she had ordered a case of alcohol. Arianne did not stop her. One's mind would only quiet down when one got drunk at a time like this. It was going to be a sleepless night tonight.

When the takeout was delivered, Tiffany opened a can of beer and downed it in one go. "I… can't bear it… I feel terrible."

Chapter 533

Arianne drank with her. "I know. You made the decision, and now, you feel terrible. It's still early. We don't know if you'll feel terrible for the rest of your life… When we're young, we think that as long as we love each other and aren't afraid of hardship or obstacles, we'll be able to stay together. However, as we mature and grow older, we have a wider perspective on things. Regardless, Tiffie, I'm the one who owes you. If those things hadn't happened, it might not have been so difficult for you and Jackson."

It was true, but Tiffany truly did not blame Arianne at all. "How is it your fault? If we're going to point fingers, it should be pointed at Aery and Ethan. Moreover, it's fate. Who knows? Maybe if I didn't meet Ethan, things wouldn't turn out like this? When I first got together with Jackson, I thought that everything would turn out well—the future was going to be amazing. When the excitement wore off, various issues began to plague me. If I'd been a tiny bit smarter and considered the future, I wouldn't have agreed to date him, dead or alive, back then. Save myself the heartache. Never having had it and having it before losing it are two different things. The latter is agonizing while the former would only leave me with regrets."

Arianne felt a ripple in her emotions when Aery and Ethan were mentioned. Ethan was nowhere to be found and Aery's whereabouts was clear. One year of jail time was too easy for someone like Aery.

Arianne felt unresigned. She did not want to accept Mark's kindness, but she still had to commend him for being able to send Aery to prison.

She asked, "Then, what do you plan to do next? Return to the capital? Or stay here?"

"I don't know." Tiffany shook her head, completely at a loss.

Arianne frowned and sighed. "Think about it after you feel better. I don't think Jackson's feeling any better now. I wonder how it's like when a womanizer gets his heart broken…"

Tiffany cried even harder when Jackson was mentioned. Jackson was usually nice. He was the bad boy who was inwardly kind. When she brought up breaking up, he had transformed into a different person, so filled with rage. When she recalled this, she felt her heart wrenched. She felt horrible.

When Mark arrived at Jackson's room at the hotel, he furrowed his eyebrows at the sight that greeted him. A cloud of smoke lingered in the room while a few women were playing poker with Jackson. There was no exception, all the women were beautiful with flawless figures. Their scant clothing barely concealed their sensual figures as they arched their bodies, hoping to stay the night. After all, they would be able to make good money.

"Mark, you're here? Want a game together?" Jackson asked carelessly with his arm around one of the women.

"Make them leave." Mark went to the window and opened it to let fresh air in. Although he was a smoker, he still could not stand the thick smell of cigarettes.

Initially, the women were eager to try their luck when they saw Mark. However, when they heard he planned to drive them away, none of them dared to make a move.

Jackson's eyes were deep but dull as though it was covered with a layer of mist. They looked lively, but there was no warmth in them. "Why are you making them leave? It's going to be a long night. It would be boring to be alone!"

Mark paused and said, "There are times when a womanizer will fail as well. It's just Tiffany, but you're acting like this? You weren't like this in the past." As he spoke, he retrieved a stack of cash from his wallet and put it down on the table. "You girls, take the money and leave."

The women's eyes shone when they saw the cash. They looked at Jackson hesitantly. Seeing that he did not say anything, they eagerly took the cash and left. Was there anyone who would not be happy to receive a thick wad of cash for doing nothing?

The room regained its silence, and Jackson grew more morose. "What do you want? Can't even play around now? Go look for your girl if you have nothing to do. Why are you looking after me?"

Mark took a cigarette from the table and lit it. He took a deep puff before asking, "You think I want to take care of you? Why did you two break up?"

Jackson laughed self-deprecatingly. "Don't know. I haven't figured it out. She didn't want to tell me. Who knows if she's still thinking about Ethan. Probably because I'm not her type. Funny, I don't even know why she dumped me in the end. I'm worse than you. At least you know why Arianne doesn't want you."

Mark swatted Jackson's shoulder without any malice when Jackson poked at his sore spot. "Scram. If I were you, I'd at least find out why. Ethan's dead. Even if Tiffany's still thinking about him, so what? You can't beat a dead man. Besides… with what Ethan has done, Tiffany probably doesn't even think about him. The problem is probably something else."

Jackson was frustrated. "What can I do when she doesn't want to tell me? We've already broken up. Do I have to pester her and get to the bottom of it? And what then? If the ending can't be changed, it's futile for me to get worked up over it. It's fine, let me be. When I'm done with work here, I'll return to the capital."

Mark stubbed his cigarette out and no longer said anything.

Chapter 534

Late in the night, Jackson was smoking as he scrolled to Tiffany's number on his phone and stared at it for a long time, not pressing dial. She must have arrived at the capital by now. It was the first time he was losing sleep over a woman.

When he turned away to flick the cigarette ash, his phone suddenly rang. Not expecting someone to call him in the middle of the night, Jackson was nonchalant and even a little annoyed before he saw the incoming caller. He was stunned when he saw it was Tiffany. After breaking out of his trance, he carefully pressed the answer button. Having smoked too much, his voice was hoarse as he said, "Hello? Are you home?"

Tiffany was slurring her words drunkenly on the other end of the line. "Jackson… Where are you? I want to see you…"

Jackson jolted. “Have you been drinking? Aren’t you back in the capital? Where are you?!”

As if not hearing his words, Tiffany began to rant, “Do you know how much it pains me to break up? But what can I do? We don’t have a future… There’s such a big gap between us… and you, you’re such a womanizer. I’m not confident I’ll be able to keep your heart with me for our entire lives. I’m afraid… so afraid that you’ll despise me someday and no longer want me in the future. I can’t give you anything nor can I help you with anything. Other than being like a vase, I’m also a burden. I don’t deserve you…”

Arianne’s voice came from the side. “Stop it. Tiffie, you’ve drunk too much. C’mon, let’s go to bed…”

She was not back in the capital! She was at Arianne’s place! Jackson picked up his room keycard and flew out of the door. He would go to her, regardless of time and place, as long as she said that she wanted to see him!

Jackson was unaware of the force he used as he knocked on Mark’s doors.

When Mark opened the door groggily, his grumpiness vanished when he saw it was Jackson. “You crazy?”

Jackson barged in, looking for Mark’s car key before he turned to leave immediately. “Lend me your car!”

Mark did not even get to ask him where he was going. After the long night, he did not have the heart to ask him as well.

When Jackson arrived at the residential area, Jackson called Tiffany. However, it was picked up by Arianne. “Hello?”

“I’m in your area. Tiffany’s with you, right? I’m coming up now.” He hung up and parked the car. When the security guard saw his car, he let him in directly. There were residents in the area who drove luxury cars but none was driving one as expensive.

When Jackson arrived at Arianna’s unit, Tiffany was still wailing on the couch while Arianne looked visibly exhausted. “About you two… I don’t know what to say either… You heard what Tiffie said when she called you earlier. She broke up with you mostly due to those reasons.”

Jackson nodded and went to Tiffany immediately. “Tiffie? I’m here…”

Tiffany looked at him through her drunken state and ruffled his hair. “Why are you here? I… I should be in the capital now… Does this mean you know I lied to you?”

Jackson was upset. “Are you feeling okay now? Can we talk?”

Tiffany scrambled up and sat down properly. Apart from her slurred words and dazed state, she looked normal. “Talk! I like talking to you!”

Jackson subconsciously looked at Arianne, and the latter said knowingly, “I’ll go out for a walk. You two go ahead and talk…”

Before Jackson could say anything, she opened the door and left.

When Arianne left the house, she did not know where to go. The little alcohol haze that she had in the night had cleared, and she had sobered up from Tiffany's antics. Her apartment was only that big so she had to leave them some personal space. She knew the couple would not be done in a short time so she decided to take a walk downstairs. This was the first time she had walked around the residential area at three in the morning. It was quiet everywhere. The streetlights were the only source of illumination. She could see the moths flying to the light. She felt love was like moths to flames.

Jackson texted Mark. "I'm at their apartment, probably won't be leaving tonight. Arianne went out to give us space. Pick her up."

All drowsiness left Mark as soon as he saw the message. How could he not feel worried about Arianne being alone in the middle of the night? He quickly changed and left.

Driving to the perimeter of the residential area, Mark called Arianne when he could not find her.

Arianne had left the house with her phone. She was surprised when she saw Mark's call, but she did not reject it. "Hello?"

Mark said bluntly, "I'm at the entrance of your residential area. Come out. Jackson probably won't be leaving tonight."

Arianne understood what he meant. She hoped that Tiffany and Jackson would not break up as well. After a slight hesitation, she agreed. After all, she did not want to sit at the bench outside the entire night. There were a lot of insects now that it was summer, and she was only dressed in her nightgown. Her legs were already bitten by the mosquitoes.

When Mark saw her coming out, clad in just a nightgown, he could not help frowning. His car was parked at the roadside, and he had brought spare keys. “Come in.”

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After entering the car, Arianne said, “Take me to the hotel for a room. I only have my phone with me. I don’t have my ID on me…”

Mark nodded slightly and drove back to the hotel. When they passed the counter in the lobby, Arianne halted her steps, only to be reminded by Mark, “You can’t get a room without an ID. Go to my room. I’ll sleep on the couch.”

Naturally, she knew she could not get a room without her ID. However, Mark had nodded in the car so she had assumed he had his way to get a room. She did not expect him to come up with this solution. However, since she was already here, it was not like she could just turn around and leave now. It was almost four in the morning, and she was exhausted. Moreover, she had work tomorrow.

She knew the room that Mark frequently stayed in was a VIP suite. There were couches in the living room, and it was separated from the bedroom. There was no door to divide them, but it was not like a studio. For this reason, she reluctantly agreed.

When Arianne saw the unmade bed, she guessed he had been woken up from his sleep to look for her. He had just slept in the bed… Feeling awkward, she said, “I’ll sleep on the couch. It’s just a night. I can bear with it. It’s too late. I’m going to sleep now.”

As she made her way to the couch, Mark grabbed her wrist. “Sleep on the bed. Otherwise, we can sleep together. Your choice.”

She flung his hand away and went to the bedroom. Once she lay down, she was engulfed in his smell. She would be crazy if she could fall asleep like that. It made no difference from sleeping with him… She might even have a nightmare!

Seeing Mark lying down on the couch, Arianne did not dare to suggest that they switch places. After some time, she finally dozed off.

In the apartment, Jackson was having a tough time.

Tiffany finally quieted down after throwing up several times, but she refused to sleep. It was unrealistic to have a normal conversation at this time. However, there was something Jackson wanted to know. “Tiffany, look at me,”

Tiffany grinned foolishly as she splayed on the couch. Her gaze was bold as she teased him with a lisp. “Look at you… Why? I won’t drool… unless you show me your abs…”

The corners of Jackson’s mouth twitched. It seemed like he did not show off his abs in vain. Tiffany was embarrassed when she saw his abs in bed previously, but now that she was intoxicated, she was emboldened.

“I’ll show you later. I have something to ask you now. Answer me honestly. Do you like me?”

Without thinking, Tiffany shook her head. “No.”

Jackson nearly exploded in rage. He felt his head throbbing. “Why did you call me in the middle of the night if you don’t like me? Let me have a good sleep with the pretty ladies, isn’t that better? Hmm?”

Once Tiffany heard the words ‘pretty ladies’, she jumped and roughly clawed at his face. “Who did you sleep with?! Did you sleep with someone behind my back!? You jerk!”

Jackson’s face was red from her attack. After a while, he finally caught her hands. “You were the one who asked for a breakup and said you don’t like me. However, I can’t be with anyone else? What kind of logic is this?!”

Tiffany looked at him and angrily enunciated each of her words, “Like is only a game for kids. I love you. I have loved you for a long time, I don’t like you. You’re right, we’ve broken up, I can’t hit you if you have someone else… but, you’re fooling around as soon as we break up, are you still a man!?” She struggled to claw at him again as she spoke but failed to free her hands from his grip.

Jackson could not stop the smile that blossomed on his face. “What did you say? Say it again, and I’ll let you go.”

“Are you still a man?!” Tiffany snapped.

Speechless, Jackson tried again. “Not this… The first sentence…” He knew it was difficult to talk to a drunk woman, but he was patient. Even when he did not know what he was doing, he was clear about his goal. As long as he could ascertain that Tiffany did not break up with him because she did not love him, he would never let her go!

Tiffany tilted her head and thought about it for a while. “I forgot… I want to sleep now… You can’t leave. You can’t sleep with other women. Sleep with me!”

Her words struck a chord in Jackson. He suppressed his primitive urge and carried her into the bedroom. “Alright, I’ll keep you company here. Sleep. I’m not going anywhere.”

Tiffany grasped his hand in a steel grip, afraid that he would leave. She woke up with a start a few times through the time, falling asleep again after making sure he was still there.

When Arianne woke up, it was past eleven, nearing noon. She jumped up in shock. The curtains of the room were drawn shut, and the sunlight was blocked out. This was why she had slept so deeply. After all, a dark environment was conducive to sleep.

She was leaving in a hurry when Mark’s voice rang from the living room. “I called your employees. No one’s working today. Take the day off.”

She sighed in relief, smoothing her messy long hair before tying them up. “Why didn’t you wake me up?”

Chapter 536

Mark sat on the couch and fiddled with his laptop. After a few seconds, he spoke up, “You were sound asleep. In fact, you were snoring as well. How was I supposed to wake you?”

She was snoring? Arianne was embarrassed. She had no idea that she snored, and he had listened to that the entire night? She cleared her throat before she said, “Thank you for last night. I won’t bother you any longer. Please excuse me.”

She was left with no choice last night so she had come to the hotel. She would look like an ingrate if she was cold and distant toward him now.

“Have a bite before you leave. I’ve ordered takeout. It’ll be here soon,” Mark replied simply.

“No need. I’ll have something to eat when I get home.” Arianne instinctively rejected him.

“Jackson hasn’t called yet,” Mark said as he closed his laptop. He rose to his feet and looked at her.

Arianne hesitated. If Jackson had not called, it meant they had not left the condominium. It would be inappropriate for her to go home now. “Alright, then. Sorry for the inconvenience.”

Although Mark was annoyed at how she spoke to him like they were strangers, he kept his mouth shut.

Soon after, the takeout arrived.

Arianne felt uneasy about the free meal so she took the initiative to open the packaging and distribute the cutleries. The meals were obviously from Jackson's restaurant. They smelled, looked, and tasted great. It was very appetizing.

Mark put a lot of the dishes he had ordered on her plate. He said in a surprisingly gentle tone, "You've lost weight."

Arianne tightened her grip around her cutleries, too afraid to lift her head to look into his eyes. Had he ever concerned himself with her weight over the years? She had been longing for his kindness for more than ten years. Now that she managed to receive it, she discovered it no longer felt like how she thought it would feel.

…

Back in the condominium.

Tiffany was awakened by the delicious smell of food. She thought that Arianne was cooking so she leaped out of bed with her messy bed hair and walked into the kitchen,

"Ari, something smells good! What is... Oh…" She was completely caught off guard. It was not Arianne, but Jackson who was in the kitchen! Her expression stiffened. She could not remember why or how he came to be here.

Jackson turned around and glanced at her. “Go wash up! It’s time to eat.”

She felt uneasy and was at loss for words. She obediently went to the bathroom to wash up. The only thing she remembered from last night was getting drunk. She could not remember what happened after that. When did Jackson get here? Things did not end well when they broke up last night, but he looked normal now. Did she not ask for a breakup? Was it all in her imagination? Her brain was feeling fuzzy.

Just as she slowly sat herself down on the toilet bowl, Jackson suddenly pushed the bathroom door open, “Can you hurry up? Aren’t you hungry after sleeping all day?”

She blushed as she picked a soap dish up and hurled it at him.

Jackson swiftly shut the door. “Alright, hurry up!”

By the time she emerged from the bathroom, Jackson was already seated at the dining table. She asked, “What’s going on? Didn’t we break up?”

Jackson had been prepared for this. He pulled his phone out and played the recorded phone conversation. The recording, without a doubt, showed her begging to see him, saying things like she did not want a breakup. The more she listened to it, the more she wanted to find a crack on the floor and bury herself. The colors on her face turned from green to white. “I… I had too much to drink… That was all gibberish. How can you believe that?”

Jackson cocked an eyebrow as he stared at her. “In vino veritas — in wine, there’s truth. I’m going with this.”

It was not easy for her to take that step, and it was all spoiled because of alcohol. “You’re lying! I was drunk!”

He suddenly looked stern. “Tiffany Lane, don’t think I’m unaware of what goes on in your mind. I don’t think you’re a burden, and I’ll always be faithful to you. I certainly won’t abandon you. I’ve always known that you’re naive and have no special talents. But I love you, just the way you are. If my goal is to find an appropriate match, why would I choose you? You don’t have to fret about my future. You’re not ‘nothing’. You make me happy, you make me want to get married. This is something that no one can ever achieve. Do you understand me?”

Tiffany’s eyes were brimming with tears. She was silent and simply focused on her food. Once the familiar taste of his cooking had left her taste buds, tears finally streamed down her face. “Stop talking about marriage all the time. It’s not like we’re playing house. This is a lifetime commitment. You might be able to promise me this now, but everything changes with time. It’s not that I’m afraid that you don’t love me, but that you might one day stop loving me. I’m a normal person. You’re Jackson West. What gives me the right to hope?”

“Because I am willing. Because you’re the only one I’ll ever want,” Jackson replied, enunciating every word clearly.

She bit her lips, forcing back her sobs. Tears dripped down onto her plate. He had slowly smashed through her defenses and hard-earned resolve.

Jackson took a piece of tissue paper and wiped away her tears. “Alright, don’t cry. Next time, don’t ever ask for a break up so willfully again. If you didn’t get drunk and call me, things might have really ended between us. I think I’m still kind of traumatized.”

Chapter 537

Tiffany looked like a reprimanded child. She nodded carefully and began stuffing the food into her mouth. She had a lot to drink last night and had puked everything out. She had slept all the way until noon and was already starving.

She finally remembered Arianne when she finished eating, “Where’s Ari? Were you here the whole night? Where did she go?”

Jackson gave a crooked smile, “I asked Mark to come take her. She’s probably still at the hotel.”

Tiffany’s mind was still muddled, “Ari agreed to that?”

Jackson shrugged, “I think she did. You tormented her until three in the morning. She was exhausted. Would sleeping in a hotel have been better, or in a small condo with mosquitoes all around? She’s not an idiot. She and Mark are probably awake now. Oh, I saw a water park nearby, and it’s hot. Wanna go? This city is nowhere near the sea, so a water park sounds pretty good. I think it’s pretty large, and the facilities are great too.”

Eating, drinking and merry-making was very alluring to Tiffany. She had just experienced a break up and got back together with Jackson again; she needed a time out to let loose and release all of the stress she felt, “Okay! I’ll call Ari. Doesn’t Mark have a car here? Let’s use his. Of course, it would be best if he could come along, so that he can spend time with Ari.”

Arianne had just finished her meal and packed up when she received Tiffany’s call. After hearing Tiffany’s invitation to come to the water park, which had been extended to Mark as well, she glanced at the man next to her and asked, “Water park. Do you want to come?”

Mark had never gone to these kinds of places. He frowned and casually replied, “You want to go?”

She nodded, “The café isn’t open today anyway. It could be my day off to relax. Besides, it’s too hot.”

He picked up his car keys, “I’ll drive then.”

What he really meant to say was that he only intended to be their chauffeur. He wasn’t interested in water parks.

After picking Tiffany and Jackson up, the group drove to the suburbs. Large water parks were usually located in the suburbs due to their large geographical area. Tiffany excitedly pulled her swimsuit out of her bag, “I’ve brought you a swimsuit, Ari. Look, I’ve bought two of these in the same style. We’ll wear one each. I’m sure it’ll look good on you!”

The bikini top was quite similar to a regular bra and the bottom had a small skirt. They were both black in color. Arianne had never worn such revealing swimwear before. She blushed, “Why didn’t you bring my old one along?”

Tiffany smiled wickedly, “Your old one is too modest. I threw it away on my way out. This one is so much better. It’s going to be crowded in that water park, with many hot girls. You have to outshine them! That way, your man’s eyes won’t wander around!”

Arianne couldn’t listen to any more of this, “Fine, fine! Then you wear yours for Jackson!”

Jackson burst into laughter, “Haha… By the way, thanks for last night, Arianne.”

Arianne tucked a lock of hair behind her ear, “It’s nothing, as long as you and Tiffie are fine now. It doesn’t really matter, even if I end up cutting away half of my life.”

Tiffany was extremely moved, “You’re the best, Ari! If only you and Mark could make up. I’m willing to give my whole life for that!”

The entire car went silent when she said these words. Everyone knew how difficult it was to cross the proverbial chasm between Mark and Arianne.

Tiffany realized that she had gone overboard with her joke. She stuck her tongue out and shut her mouth. In order to ease the tension, Arianne took a deep breath and said, “Alright. Just mind your own business. Have fun, and when you’re done, get your butt back to the capital with your man so that my ears can have some peace. I won’t have to worry about you tormenting me in the middle of the night anymore.”

Tiffany giggled, “Got it. I’m sure that deep down, you don’t want me to leave.”

They had finally arrived at the water park. All four of them went to the changing room to change into their swimsuits after parking the car. At first, Mark wasn’t in the mood for any of this. However, he simply couldn’t get over Jackson’s succinct points, “If you don’t come with us, what’s going to happen if someone hits on your lady? Arianne will be in a bikini. Aren’t you aware of how sexy she’ll look?”

Arianne was completely uncomfortable after changing into her swimsuit. She wasn't used to having her stomach, back and thighs all on display, "Tiffie… Maybe I should get something more modest? I'm not used to this…"

Tiffany was very enthusiastic about wearing matching bikinis with her best friend, "No need. This looks great, really. I'm not lying! Everyone's wearing this. There's no need to feel shy!"

When they met up with Jackson and Mark, Arianne refused to lift her head. She could feel Mark's eyes roaming over her body. She awkwardly tugged on her short skirt. Tiffany was much bolder. She stared at two men dressed in swimming shorts and praised them uninhibitedly, "And I used to think that Jackson had a great body. You're not so bad either, Mark. You may look a little thin with clothes on, but you do have some muscle with your clothes off!"

Jackson couldn't bear listening to his girlfriend's praises towards other men. He wrapped his arm around her and marched her towards a nearby man-made beach, "Don't be greedy. Keep your eyes on me. Let's go."

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Mark didn't say a word. He followed suit and headed towards the beach as well. Arianned heaved a sigh of relief and slowly followed from behind. She would lift her gaze and glance at Mark from time to time. She could only see his back, but it was clear that he had a really good figure — well-proportioned, firm muscles, and fair skin. Those long, muscular legs were really… attractive.

Mark slowed down, probably because he sensed her staring at him. He turned around and looked at her, "Walk faster."

She fearfully turned away, “Got it…”

The sun was just as hot as ever today, so hot that it was enough to fry a man into a crisp. Tiffany pulled out a tube of sunscreen and tossed it to Jackson when they arrived underneath a beach umbrella. Then, she lay down on a deck chair, “Put that on for me. Spread it out evenly. I’ll look ugly if I get sunburned.”

Jackson, of course, was willing to bear the burden. He applied it meticulously on her. Tiffany noticed that Arianne was still standing in the same spot and urged, “Ask Mark to put some sunscreen on you too. We can go for a swim when we’re done. You’ll never get your complexion back if you get too tanned. Besides, your skin will peel. It’s scary!”

Arianne tensed. This wasn’t the first time she felt like punching Tiffany. The woman’s mouth didn’t have a proper filter. It’s not like she wasn’t aware of the tensions between her and Mark. Was she doing this on purpose?

In the midst of her agitated state, Mark emotionlessly took the sunscreen lotion and said, “Lie down.”

He wasn’t kicking up a fuss about it, and she couldn’t seem to find an excuse to kick up a fuss. It seemed fine to let him help her put on sunscreen. She thanked him and lay down on a deck chair, “Just help me out with my back. I can handle the rest on my own.”

“Mm,” Mark replied. His eyes gravitated across her fair skin. If he remembered correctly, there were barely any moles on her body, let alone a birthmark. The only flaw was the scar from the time she took a knife for him… It really would be a pity if such beautiful complexion were to be spoiled by sunburn.

His application process was even more meticulous than Jackson's. His fingers caressed her skin very gently. In that moment, his mind was distracted, and his breathing gradually became heavier. Luckily, he soon finished. He put down the sunscreen lotion and walked into the pool, then headed straight for the deep end. He had always been a good swimmer and was an expert in swimming from a young age.

Arianne was puzzled. She couldn't understand why he had left all of a sudden. He should have at least said something after finishing. The man was just as cold and distant as ever.

Tiffany, who was next to her, had finished applying sunscreen and went into the water as well. Arianne glanced at Jackson. "Aren't you putting on sunscreen?" she asked with curiosity in her voice.

Jackson tensed, "N-nah… It's too girly."

He felt guilty because Tiffany was on his side, which meant that she was on Mark's side too. Both of them hoped that Arianne would come around. After all, he had taken her best friend away from her. Of course, he felt guilty.

Arianne stared at the sparkling pool water and smiled, "If you ever drag Tiffany along into your wicked schemes, I'll make you pay."

Deep down, Jackson was b*tching incessantly, "I did not… I would never. But seriously, Mark isn't as bad as you think. After all, he's the closest thing to you in the world, aside from your mother. If you're capable of letting go, just like that… you're way too cruel. You'll regret it if you find out that this matter isn't as simple as you think."

Arianne noticed that something was off, based on his words, “What do you mean? Is it not what I think it is? If so, then what is it?”

Jackson had promised Mark to keep his mouth shut, so his lips were sealed, “Maybe you’ll find out some day, but it won’t be from me. If you want a clear answer, ask Mark. Only he can decide whether to tell you or not. This probably isn’t the first time you’ve considered leaving him. Does the truth really matter if you’ve made up your mind? If you ask him, that means that you want to understand the situation and bury the hatchet with him.”

Arianne didn’t answer. Jackson knew that she would not confront Mark.

After all, there wasn’t much concern surrounding that airplane crash any more.

Arianne stayed in the shallow part of the water, as she couldn’t swim. Her height only allowed her to stay in parts of the pool that reached her chest. In this climate and season, the amount of people in the water park was equivalent to the crowds in air-conditioned shopping malls. Beautiful girls in bikinis were everywhere. As a result, Jackson was too afraid of looking anywhere. His face was already scratched; he certainly didn’t want to be permanently disfigured.

Tiffany wanted to play in the deep end, where there was a wave machine, a program that was part of the attractions in the waterpark that would release one meter high water waves continuously. It was very exciting, but of course, she didn’t want to leave Arianne alone in the shallow end of the pool. Hence, she dragged Arianne, who simply couldn’t swim, into the deep end.

Arianne was extremely frightened. Her feet couldn’t touch the ground and she felt panicked. She held onto Tiffany’s hand and used a float to balance herself.

There were many people around them, and Mark was nowhere to be found. Suddenly, a huge wave was released from the sluice. “Hold your breath; you don’t want to choke on water!” Tiffany reminded her.

Before Arianne could react, she was thoroughly soaked by the wave and naturally choked on water. She coughed until her nose went red, and she was nearly washed away by the wave. She wiped the water from her face, “I can’t. I have to get back on land. I can’t swim. I’m scared…”

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How could Tiffany possibly let her off? She pushed her into Jackson’s arms, “You hold on to her so that she doesn’t get washed away. Hold on tight; the wave is coming again. You’ll enjoy it once you get used to it. It’s fun! I’ve heard Jackson mention that Mark is a pretty good swimmer. Why are you such a landlubber? You’re no different from someone who can’t swim at all.”

Arianne and Jackson both felt awkward. Why was Tiffany so open-minded? Jackson was dressed in swim shorts, and Arianne was dressed in a skimpy bikini. Wasn’t it inappropriate for them to be hugging each other like that? Jackson did not dare say a word and was too afraid to reach out and hold her. Only Arianne awkwardly held onto his shoulders, “Tiffie! What are you doing? Why can’t I hold onto you?”

Tiffany could see their embarrassment and giggled, “I think it’s fine. I can swim, you can’t. It’s not like you’ll lose a few pieces of yourselves by holding each other. Don’t worry, I trust you!”

Jackson was crying internally. Tiffany might have a lot of trust in Arianne, but he couldn’t trust himself. Boners were well beyond his control!

In his desperation, Jackson searched every corner and finally spotted Mark on shore, sipping on a drink leisurely. He glared madly at Mark, hinting at him to come over. Finally, Mark noticed his stare. Jackson

lifted his arms and made a provocative gesture, indicating that he was about to wrap his arms around Arianne. Mark promptly put his drink down, got into the water, and walked over.

Soon, the wave rose again. In the midst of the chaos as the wave crashed over everyone's heads, Arianne accidentally released her hold on Jackson's shoulders. She thrashed around in panic. Suddenly, someone grabbed her from behind and steadied her. By the time she regained her senses, she tried her best to open her eyes and realized that she had been washed two meters away from Tiffany and Jackson. Then… Who was holding on to her?

She turned around and looked straight into Mark's cold eyes. She instinctively struggled away from him, then sunk into the water. She reflexively wrapped her arms around his neck, "Take me to shore!"

"No," Mark denied, surprisingly.

She was annoyed, "You…"

Not only did Mark refuse to bring her to shore, but he also brought her further into the deep end and said, "Let go, if you dare."

He was playing dirty! He knew that she would be forced to hold onto him. She should have brought a swim ring along with her in the first place!

"I'll call a lifeguard if you don't take me to shore!" She glared at him angrily.

“Go ahead.” He lowered his head and stared at her, the corners of his lips curling up subtly.

Just as she was about to issue another retort, he caught her mouth with his lips.

This time, Arianne did not end up choking on water. By the time the wave had passed, he ended the kiss. However, she could feel it. His breathing had grown rapid.

Naturally, under these circumstances, their bodies were now very close, as they had their arms wrapped around each other. However, she was too embarrassed, so Arianne gave in, “I… I’m thirsty… I need a drink…”

Mark complied. He bought her a drink when they arrived on shore, “Drink.”

She was still irritated by what he had done to her in the pool. She refused to thank him for the drink. She took two sips and her teeth felt cold. She no longer wanted to get into the pool now. She found a beach chair and sat down. The chair next to her was already occupied, so Mark was forced to go somewhere else. There were three people in between them. This was good news to Arianne. At least, she wouldn’t need to feel awkward.

Not too long after, three bikini-clad women in thick makeup approached Mark. Their objective was made clear once they asked, “Well hello handsome, what’s your number?”

Mark glanced over at Arianne and saw no reaction from her at all. His eyes darkened, “You might want to ask my woman for permission.”

The beach chairs were not too far apart from each other. Arianne could hear every word. She nearly fell off her chair.

The three women couldn't see any woman beside Mark, so they didn't believe him, "You mean your girlfriend? Where is she?"

Mark lifted his chin towards Arianne, put on his sunglasses, and refused to say anything more.

The three women widened their eyes. Mark's swim shorts were still wet, and the fabric stuck to his body. To them, he might as well be naked. His tantalizing figure and flawlessly handsome features cemented their courage. One woman boldly approached Arianne, "We'd like to get to know your boyfriend."

This the first time Arianne had ever seen anyone so bold. He had already made it clear that he wasn't single, but they remained shameless all the same. She felt strangely annoyed, "Minor correction, he's not my boyfriend but my husband. As in my legal husband. You can give up now."

Her confident and unhurried response made all three women very embarrassed. They grumbled incoherently and walked away.

Mark had overheard every word she said and smiled.

Arianne still wasn't used to her new swimsuit. She wanted to go back to the car and see if Tiffany had brought UV-protection wear. At least, she'd be able to cover up a little with it. She walked towards Mark and reached out her hand, "Hand me the car keys."

He got up and stared at her through his sunglasses, "In the changing room cupboard. I'll go with you."

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Arianne nodded and led the way.

The pair went back to the car after collecting the keys. Arianne knelt in the back seat as she focused on her search, completely unaware that Mark had gotten into the car as well and locked it. She thought that he had only gotten in to enjoy the air-conditioning.

In the end, she couldn't find the UV-protection wear. She felt slightly disappointed, "Forget it, I can't find it. Let's go find Tiffie and Jackson."

Mark stared intently at the perfect curves of her body. The thought of so many people staring at her in her bikini filled him with jealousy. Back in the pool, she clung onto him, and their bodies were pressed firmly against each other. It had been a while since he had felt this, and his urges crept up to him like vines, slowly spreading its stems and leaves… Until it filled him with need.

He reached out and forcefully pulled her into his arms, and she landed onto his lap. Shocked, she frantically tried to struggle away, "What are you doing? We're wet. You'll dirty the car!"

He cupped the back of her neck and silenced her blabbering lips. Then, he placed her on the passenger's seat. His movements were swift and done in a single breath.

Arianne's mind was blank. She stiffened, "Are you crazy?"

He knew what she was afraid of. "There's no one here now, this car park is completely full," he whispered huskily into her ear, tickling her with his hot breath.

Arianne never dared to think that Mark would be bold enough to do such things in a place like this. She was certain that he had gone mad! The intimate position between them made her feel both conflicted and angry. Soon, she began gasping along with his every move, her mind slowly getting lost in a haze. She pressed against the back of the seat with one hand and pushed him away with the other, "Get off… Not here! I'm begging you…"

She knew that he was more amenable to gentle reasoning; angry screams were less effective than soft pleas at a time like this.

He lifted himself up slightly and stared at her fair, clean face. He looked into her watery eyes and couldn't resist planting a kiss on the tip of her nose, "Are you saying that we can do it, as long as it's not here?"

She glared at him angrily but to no avail. Her gaze did not seem menacing at this point in time. Instead, she looked particularly seductive.

His movements grew even more forceful after receiving no reply. She bit his shoulder in shock, "You b*stard! Not here!"

He nuzzled her neck, “I’ll ask you again, can we do it, as long it’s not anywhere else?”

She knew that he was doing this on purpose. He was laying a trap for her. If she said “yes”, he would be even more out of control than before. If she said “no”, he would never release her. Furthermore, it was daytime, and it was extremely likely for someone to catch them in the act. He knew she couldn’t deal with that. As long as she kept from answering, he would slowly wear her down, until he had completely smashed through all of her defenses.

In the end, she conceded, “Yes! Now get off!”

She gnashed her teeth hatefully. She took advantage of his cross over to the finish line to push him away. Then, she got up and straightened out her clothes, “You a*shole!”

Her cheeks were flaming red, “You’re shameless! What’ll happen if I get pregnant?”

His expression stiffened. That never crossed his mind. Only now did he realize that this was no small matter. If she conceived, she would suffer. She could never give birth. She would never forgive him if she lost another child! He slowly returned to his senses and calmed down, “It will be fine. I’ll drive and get a pill. It won’t hurt to take it once in a while.”

Arianne ignored him. She angrily got down from the car. It took awhile for her to calm down. She shouldn’t have let him have his way with her when he was drunk that night. Giving in to sex with him once meant that there be many more to follow! She clearly wanted a clean break, yet it turned out like this instead. Hadn’t she moved all the way here, just to get away from him? Why were they still in each other’s lives?

Back at the artificial beach, Tiffany and Jackson had gotten back onto the shore. The pair were lying on a beach chair, whispering sweet nothings in a lovey-dovey manner. Tiffany smiled and approached Arianne when she noticed her skulking over with a sullen look on her face, “What’s with you? Where’s Mark?”

“How should I know?” Arianne replied irritably.

Tiffany was taken aback, “Did you have another fight? You were just fine a while ago. You really are like cats and dogs. Alright. Come on, I’ll take you somewhere exciting.”

Tiffany’s definition of “exciting” was sitting on an inflatable raft and sliding down a track from a towering height. The mere sight of it terrified Arianne. She truly wasn’t in the mood to play, “I’m not going! You and Jackson can go ahead. I’m scared of heights.”

Seeing Arianne’s reluctance, Tiffany did not insist and dragged Jackson along with her, “Then you can rest here. I’ll see you later.”

Mark finally returned after half an hour. The plastic bag in his hand was stamped with the name of some big, branded pharmacy. It was obvious that he had purposefully taken a trip back to the city to get the contraceptive. He was even thoughtful enough to buy a bottle of room temperature mineral water for her. However, this did nothing to pacify Arianne’s sullen mood.