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Arianne returned to the changing room with the medicine. Taking the medication, she took a shower in the public bathroom and changed back to her casual attire, no longer planning to play in the water anymore. After that, she looked for a milk tea shop to lounge around in for the air conditioning. It was too hot outside. She could still feel the heat on her skin from the short duration of exposing herself under the sun just now.

Not too long later, Mark entered the milk tea shop as well and sat down opposite of her. When Arianne saw him, she turned her face away, still visibly angered.

“It’s my fault. I shouldn’t have acted on impulse.”

He didn’t notice when Arianne froze. Since when did this guy know how to own up to his mistake? Her flame of fury had been burning bright in her heart initially, but when he apologized like this, she swayed. Arianne sat herself upright and said faintly, “It’s not your fault. You’re right in everything you do. You’re Mark Tremont. You can do what you want, and who’s to stop you? Who’s to do anything to you?”

Mark inhaled lightly. His gaze was heated and sincere. “I won’t do it again.”

Arianne kept quiet. She did not dare look at him, having a flurry of thoughts in her head, as she had never expected a day where he would be the one to give in first.

Around five in the evening, the four of them went back to the city center. Tiffany suggested that they have dinner outside, so Arianne was not dropped off at home but brought to the hotel that Mark and Jackson were staying at to freshen up.

Arianne had been following Jackson and Tiffany, but the two had been putting on too much public display of affection that it hurt her eyes. It did not seem appropriate for a third wheel like her to be beside them, so she could only brace herself to go to Mark's room for the time being. At least it was quiet in his room.

The first thing that Mark did when he returned to the hotel room was to shower. Although he had taken a shower in the water theme park, his germaphobia had still kicked in.

Arianne scrolled through her phone on the couch out of boredom. When the sound of water running in the bathroom ceased, her attention turned to Mark. It was impossible for her to put down her guard when they were alone in the room. He could suddenly be in the same 'mood' he was in in the car; only now, they were in a hotel. Who knew if he would be in the mood for another round?

The sound of water running stopped, but Mark did not come out. Shortly, the noise of the hairdryer sounded inside. He was blowing dry his hair. In the past, he did not have the habit. Arianne would always have to remind him to dry his hair to prevent him from having a headache…

Recalling the past, Arianne was consumed in her thoughts. Time had passed and people had changed. She was no longer the little girl who went along with all his wishes now, and he seemed to have changed a lot too. They could not go back to how they used to be.

"I'm done."

Mark's voice dragged Arianne back to reality as she nodded. "Call Jackson and ask if they're done. We can head out if they are."

She could call Tiffany too, but she was scared of barging in on their moment. What if the two of them were doing something… Looking at how mushy they were now, having just reconciled from a breakup, it was only expected that they were thoroughly smitten in love.

Mark was not aware of the drama in Arianne's mind as he called Jackson directly. "We're done. You two be fast. We'll meet at the lobby in five minutes."

He hung up after that and they went down to wait after five minutes. Twenty minutes later, Tiffany and Jackson came with the former flushing shyly. All of them knew what happened, but no one stated it explicitly.

Arianne coughed. "Uh… where are we going for dinner?"

Tiffany had done her homework. "Of course, since it's summer, we're going for barbecue and iced beer. That's life."

Arianne looked at Mark. He must be a rare patron at the barbecue place. She could not imagine him having barbecue and beer in the outdoors while shirtless like any normal person. If she had to picture it, it was too much for her mind… He would probably refuse to go, right?

Unexpectedly, Mark agreed. "Let's go."

Tiffany cheered and held Arianne's hand to drag her into the backseat of Mark's car. Arianne checked the seat, feeling nervous. The wet patch from earlier had dried a long time ago and there were already no traces during their trip back to the hotel. In spite of it, she was still on edge. What if they left something? It was awkward if they were found out.

"Ari, what are you looking at?" Tiffany asked curiously.

Arianne frantically shifted her gaze to the window. "No – nothing."

In the driver's seat, the corners of Mark's lips tugged upward; he'd already seen through her thoughts.

When they arrived at the barbecue place, which was teeming with people, Tiffany looked for a table and sat down casually. "Sir, we'll have two cases of beer, iced! Give us the menu please!"

The owner of the business, a middle-aged man who wore only a pair of shorts while baring his upper body, called out in a friendly manner, "Sure, give me a moment!"

The atmosphere here was great. The breeze was soft, chasing away some of the heat, while the aroma of the barbecue that filled the air made one's stomach growl.

When the beer came, Tiffany took some out and gave each person a few bottles. "Mark, you haven't been to a place like this before, have you? You haven't experienced too much, the sights or the tastes. I feel as if someone like you doesn't have much fun in your life. Sure, you're rich, but you may not be happy. This—now, this is what we call life."

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Mark did not deny it. To him, the environment here was horrible, but as long as Arianne was there with him, he could hang around anywhere.

As they ate, Tiffany asked Jackson suddenly, “I heard that men grow fat when they reach their middle age. They get potbellies. Is that true? Will your abs disappear?”

The corners of Jackson’s lips twitched. “If you keep feeding me things like this, maybe. Under normal circumstances, though, it’ll absolutely never happen to me.”

Tiffany cackled. “Once I think about you becoming a bald greasy middle-aged man with a big pot belly, I can’t stand it. What should I do? Hahaha…”

Jackson felt a headache. “You can’t stand it when you’re laughing like this? I’m going to resist the toll that time will take on me. Even when I’ve reached seventy or eighty years old, I’ll never turn into the image that you described. I’ll stay handsome, from infancy to old age, get that? You women, however, will experience irreversible change after you give birth. That’s not something self-disciple can control.”

When the conversation mentioned about giving birth, Arianne lowered her head to drink on her own, without participating in the topic. She used to have a low alcohol tolerance, getting knocked out with one glass, but now, she could maintain a straight face when she had beer. It was all thanks to Tiffany. Her alcohol tolerance was trained together with Tiffany.

Mark’s hand held onto hers under the table all of a sudden. She turned to glance at him in surprise and wanted to pry her hand away, but his grip was too tight. To prevent others from noticing the anomaly, she could only pretend that nothing happened and allowed him to keep holding her hand.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Jackson leaned against the chair casually with a cigarette between his fingers and a leg crossed while he chatted with Tiffany. No one could imagine his proper classy look when he sat in the office with his tailored suit and leather shoes. It was as if he had adapted to the current environment. It was obvious that Tiffany was having a great time too. Jackson was subconsciously closing the distance between them.

When two people get together, one of them must yield and make the change first. After all, everyone was a unique individual from when they were born. When there were too many differences, it would be difficult for two people to stay together all the way.

Seeing that Mark had been quiet, not smoking and not really eating, merely drinking a little from time to time, Jackson threw him the half-filled box of cigarettes in disdain. “Stop putting up an act when you’re out for a fun time.”

Mark peeked at Arianne and did not touch the cigarettes offered. “Smoke on your own.”

Arianne pressed her lips together. “You can smoke if you want to.”

Jackson laughed. “Tsk, hen-pecked.”

Arianne glared at Jackson. She looked like she hated it when they joked about her and Mark, but it was undeniable that she did not really, genuinely, hate it. It confused her.

Suddenly, Jackson's phone rang and it blared the siren for Tiffany, "Who is it?"

Jackson fished out his phone and showed it to her helplessly. "Eric. I'll put him on speaker, okay?"

When the call was connected, Eric's voice came. "Where are you having fun at? I don't see you in the hotel. I'm here today for some business. I just got here. Not buying me a meal?"

Looking at the barbecued food on the table, Tiffany was hesitant. Eric had a weak stomach, everyone knew that. He might get ill from eating what they were having…

Jackson did not care as much, hanging up after telling the man their location. Twenty minutes later, Eric arrived and was incredibly offended. The barbecue place posed no difference from a street vendor to him, but since his best friends were here, he did not comment. He looked for a seat and sat himself down with a slight frown. "All of you are here, so I'm bored out of my mind in the capital. I can't even find someone to drink with me."

Mark poured him some beer. "We don't even see you when you get busy usually. Would you have time to drink with us? How's your company been?"

Eric paused and said, "Pretty good. I'm bustling for peanuts though, and it's far from what you guys are making. Everything's hard in the beginning, but I think leaving my family and opening up a business myself was the best decision I made. I moved my office to a bigger place. We have about over a hundred people, and the annual profit is enough for me to play around. Oh yeah, when's sis-in-law coming back to the capital?"

He was, of course, referring to Arianne. The latter grimaced. "Not planning to for the time being."

Catching a slight frown on Mark, Eric changed the subject. “The barbecue looks good and there are lots of people eating here. I’ll have a taste.”

Tiffany’s eyes widened and bulged when she saw Eric eating. When he swallowed, she asked, “You won’t fall sick from this, will you? Can you even eat this?”

Eric was confident. “I’ve been recuperating for such a long time. I don’t think it’s an issue. I’m a man; I can’t be this weak all the while. It’s fine, eat up.”

Truth was, he was overconfident. Before they were done with the barbecue, he was hit with a stomach ache that had him breaking out in cold sweat. Gastritis seemed to be following him everywhere. According to Eric, he had too much fun when he was young and he might have to take care of his diet from now on until his death.

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By the time they had gotten Eric to settle down in the hospital, it was past nine at night. With the drips, Eric’s gastritis did not hurt as much, but he looked like he had withered.

It was not the first time Mark and Jackson had encountered this situation, so they were in the mood to joke. “You weren’t really here to eat with us, were you? You must have come to extort us.”

Eric was pale, looking listless even when he laughed. “I’d love an extortion; are you giving me millions? I’m fine. I probably just need to be hospitalized for a few days. Help me out, get someone to take care of me. I’ll pay for the caretaker; I’m not extorting you guys.”

Arianne and Tiffany thought of someone in unison when they heard that Eric was looking for a caretaker. Exchanging a look, they knew that they were thinking about the same person. Arianne suggested, “I have a hardworking girl in my shop, and she’s experienced in taking care of people. Do you want me to introduce her to you? Just take her as a normal caretaker. Girls are more meticulous too. It won’t be an inconvenience, would it?”

Eric shook his head. “No problem, let her come. It’s not like I’m incapacitated. I just want the convenience so I don’t have to do everything on my own.”

Tiffany had planned to go back after staying two days, but now that there was a change, she was unable to head back. “Okay, Tanya can come to the hospital, and I’ll help out in the shop. Then I can go back to the capital with Jackson.”

With the matters discussed, Arianne called Tanya. The latter was soft spoken when she picked up the call. “Hello? Ari, is something the matter?”

Arianne knew that it was most probably because Tanya’s grandfather was sleeping. Worried about waking up the elder, she subconsciously lowered her voice too. “Nothing much. I have a friend who got admitted to the hospital for gastritis. It’s not very severe; he just needs someone to take care of him. It’s paid work. Do you want to do it? Tiffie will work in your place in the shop, but we’ll pay you as usual.”

Tanya was quiet for a few seconds before she said, “Since I won’t be in the shop, you don’t have to pay me for that… I know that you and Tiffany are nice to me, but it’s not good to accept payment for work that I didn’t do.”

It was true that Arianne and Tiffany had recommended Tanya to help the girl out. They thought about her first whenever they had anything that would make money. Payment or not, Arianne did not want to make a story out of it. “Don’t overthink it. You’re helping us out too. The payment should be yours. That’s it. We know about your situation, so you only have to stay the day in the hospital. You can go back home and take care of your grandfather at night.”

Tanya did not refuse her further and said gratefully, “Okay, thank you. I’ll take good care of your friend.”

After making the arrangement, the four of them left the hospital. Tiffany was staying in the hotel with Jackson, making Arianne the only one whose destination was out of the way. Tiffany risked her life in asking, “Ari, why don’t you stay with us tonight?”

Arianne glared at her. “Stay with you guys and sleep between you and Jackson?”

Jackson, who sat on the passenger seat, coughed awkwardly before the car gave a violent shake. It was Mark venting his discontent.

Knowing that Arianne was joking, Tiffany said weakly, “If you really want to, it’s not like it can’t be done, but Mark wouldn’t agree anyway…”

Arianne knocked her head. “Shut it! Send me to the residential area before you guys go back to the hotel.”

Mark had been silent the entire ride. He did not send her back to the residential area but drove to the hotel directly.

Arianne did not think much of it. At most, she would hail a cab and go back on her own. After Tiffany and Jackson left, Mark locked the door. “I’ll send you back.”

She thought that he was being extra. He could send her back first, but why must he send her alone?

Since Mark offered to send her home, Arianne could not find it in herself to do more. She had spent the whole afternoon playing and went to the hospital just now. It was tiring.

On the way back to the apartment, she closed her eyes to rest, as she did not want to talk to Mark. Mark suddenly spoke up, “Ari, I hope that you can try and get to know me again and accept me.”

Arianne opened her eyes to look at him. She was seated in the backseat and could only see his side profile. Under the dim light, it was blurry, leaving a perfect outline with a sense of mystery. She did not know how to respond. She knew about his habits and temper in the past, but she had never understood his heart. She did not really know him as a person. What was the use of getting to know him now? It was even more impossible to accept him. Just when she had thought that everything would get better, he gave her a harsh blow that could still be felt even now.

After a long time, she replied faintly, “Mark, when did you become so lowly? Like how I was in front of you last time.”

Her choice of word was inexplicably hurtful, like she was mocking herself, her past self.

“I know what I want,” he said.

“I know what I shouldn’t do too.” Arianne lowered her gaze, her mind filled with her father, who had died wronged. With the news blowing up back then, her father’s corpse was not collected and he did not even have a grave. She was too young back then and could not have done anything. All these years, she could only remember him in her heart.

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Mark slowed down his driving, as if he did not want to send her home so soon. “I told you before, I won’t give up on you.”

Arianne chuckled humorlessly. “Stop kidding around. I told you before too that it’s impossible between us. I’d wanted to escape from you for a very long time, and now when I finally have my wish granted, why would I jump into the fire pit again? I admit that you’ve made me who I am now. Without you, I wouldn’t be who I am today. You’ve given me what others have never had, but you’ve also hurt me the deepest. What makes you think you have the right to say something like that? You caused my dad’s death, pretended to be benevolent in taking me in, and even married me, and for what? A peace of mind? You got it, but what about me? What about my dad! Other than the title of a sinner, my dad has left nothing behind! What do I have to forgive you?”

Various emotions wreaked a storm in Mark’s eyes in the dark. His clear voice was laced with pain forbearance. “Am I that unforgivable in your eyes? Incurable?”

“Yes,” Arianne answered without hesitation.

Mark did not reply and stopped the car at an empty roadside.

After a short bout of silence, Arianne said coldly, “We’ve made ourselves clear. I don’t think there’s anything else left to be discussed between us. Stride on your path of success in the future while I walk on my bridge of freedom.”

She did not know about the storm that was currently brewing within Mark. He was considering taking her back to the capital in the easiest and most brutal way, restraining her by his side eternally, but he contradictorily longed for a quiet peaceful life with her. He could not bear to treat her like that…

Ultimately, his rationality won and Mark calmed down gradually. “I don’t believe that you could be absolutely unshackled. I bet that you still have me in your heart.”

He was confident, for such was the truth.

With what she had hidden in her heart so easily exposed by Mark, Arianne’s emotions ran slightly out of control. She tried to keep her cool and admitted it honestly, “You’re right. I have you in my heart. You’re the one who brought me up after all. I once considered you as the most important person in my life, and I once slowly accepted the reality that I’m your wife and started to even… love you. That’s why I didn’t disclose what you’ve done, although I wouldn’t be able to win against you even if I did. What I want now is just a sanctuary without you. It’s only a sanctuary when you’re not there. Do you understand? I’m not totally unbounded; I can’t even wipe you off entirely till now, but I can at least still be level headed.”

Mark chortled suddenly. “Heh… I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed then. Wherever you go, I’ll go. Until the point where I become your sanctuary.”

He started the engine again to continue the journey after he spoke, as if the conversation just now did not affect him.

Arianne was surprised at how he did not lash out like he used to. What made a superior man like him so nonchalant that he would act so mild now?

Arianne got out of the car without turning back when they arrived at the residence. Mark wound down the car window to tell her, “Good night, see you tomorrow.”

Arianne shuddered and could not help turning back to look at him. It was too dark. She could not make out his expression but his tone was a relaxed and joyful one. What was he thinking? She had made herself so clear, yet she was unable to infuriate him. Instead, he looked like nothing had happened.

When she went upstairs and looked out from the French window, his car finally left in the nightfall.

Arianne felt unsettled, panicking a little. There was also… something she could not lay her finger on inside. It made her want to find out what she was feeling, but she was too scared to take a step forward.

The next day, she headed out punctually at half past eight as usual. The moment she opened the door, she was greeted by a big bouquet of red roses placed on the floor by the door. It was the same one that she had received in the shop, and it made her more certain that the last bouquet was from Mark as well, for he did not hide it this time. There was a card in the bouquet that wrote, “Good morning. Have a happy day.”

It was signed off with Mark Tremont.

Arianne had no idea what he was trying to play at. Perhaps he thought that this could make her forget about the plane crash, pretend like nothing happened, and go back to him? If he did think so, that would be too childish. A few bouquets of flowers would never wipe the horrible past away. He must not be thinking about it like that though. It was most probably one of his tactics to get her back…

She considered dumping the flowers into the trash bin, but her thrifty instinct cancelled the thought. She had never had the habit of being extravagant and wasteful since she was young. Since the bouquet was delivered, it would be a good idea to bring it to the shop as décor. She would place a small vase on each table with a few stalks of roses in it. That seemed to make a nice ambience, and she got right to completely utilizing them.

Tiffany had just come in looking sleepy when Arianne arrived at the shop with the bouquet. “Ari, you’re early.”

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Arianne seemed to be in a good mood as she tended to the roses in her hands. “It’s not early anymore. You’re just a little late. Go do what you have to. Tanya’s probably already in the hospital.”

Since the bouquet was taken apart, Tiffany did not notice that it used to be a bouquet. She thought that Arianne had specifically bought the flowers to decorate the shop. “I know… You’re a thoughtful one, aren’t you? The flowers look pretty. But with a few of them on each table, they’ll wilt in three days maximum. That’s a high cost. You don’t mind it?”

Arianne smiled without saying anything. She did not have to spend anything for these flowers anyway. Most of the roses that were left after distributing them on the tables were placed in the vase at the counter.

She suddenly recalled Mark's "See you tomorrow" last night. How would he make his appearance today? Would he really be making an appearance?

A swiftly moving figure at the door reeled Arianne back to reality. It was Naya's mother-in-law. Naya, who was cleaning, looked slightly appalled as she went up hurriedly to whisper, "Why are you here?"

Naya's mother-in-law spoke loudly, "I'm here to ask your boss how much she is paying you a month right in front of you. You don't care about the family or your kid and you don't give us allowance. What do you want us to eat? Are you taking me as a free babysitter? And I have to pay for your food and accommodation, but you only care about yourself?"

Naya flushed, either from her anger or something else. "Let's talk back home. There's no need to talk about this in the shop."

Her mother-in-law refused. She came to the counter, and glaring at Arianne, she asked, "You can tell me how much Naya's monthly salary is now, can't you?"

"I'm only in charge of hiring, not the payment," Arianne answered flatly.

The old woman was haughty. "Wow, are all desserts shop owners so snobby? Those who don't know would've thought that you're one of the top 500 richest in the world! I'm here today to ask your judgement as a boss too. You must pay considerably high when your employee works long hours every day. If that's the case, why is Naya not giving us so much as a dime? She's being unfilial, taking us as outsiders when she's gotten married into our family. And selfish too. You'd hire someone like this?"

The old lady's overbearing and mean front dismayed everyone. Everyone in the shop knew what type of person Naya was, and they knew for certain that she was not the type of person who disregarded her family, contrary to what her mother-in-law said.

Naya's forbearance was at her limit. "Mom, we'll solve this at home when I finish work. Don't make a scene in my workplace, will you? It's time I talk to you guys too!"

The old woman chuckled dryly. "What do you mean? You mean you want to settle the score with me? No matter how you calculate it, you owe our family! When you took care of your daughter a few years back, my son was the only breadwinner. Now that you're making money, you still think about spending my son's money. I wonder what you're up to when you save all that money of yours up!"

There were no customers in the shop, but it had still wounded Naya's pride. When someone was forced to a corner, one would no longer care much. Naya, who was usually docile, fumed. "What do I owe you? Have you taken care of my kid properly for even a day? I'm married to your son, I'm not a slave. We're building a family. Under the circumstance of me giving birth and taking care of the baby without any source of income, shouldn't he be taking care of the family financially?

"All the money I've earned has gone to the family, and I have to buy the dishes every day when I come home. What in the house do I not spend on? Even Lulu's expenditure is on me. What's left from your son's salary after repaying the house and car loans? Ever since I married into your family, both of you elders have done nothing but wait for me to serve you. Even when I was resting after giving birth, the whole family was still waiting for me to make dinner. Just what do I owe you all? How do I owe you? You say that I don't care about my daughter, but I'm the one who drops Lulu off and picks her up most of the time. What have you ever done?"

The old woman was disdainful regarding Naya's claims. "Did I beg you to marry my son? Your own mother doesn't even care that you gave birth and are taking care of the baby, so why should I? You wanted it yourself, so who are you blaming now?"

Her words shocked those watching, and even Arianne, who was usually mild-tempered, was angry. “Please refrain from fighting regardless of the location. This is not your house! I’ll chase you out if you keep this up!”

Tiffany was a firecracker. “You think Naya is unworthy, huh? So did she ask to suffer because she wanted so much to marry into your family? Good for her that she has to become a housekeeper, give birth, take care of the baby in your house, and still to be despised? And if she doesn’t do what you say, you’ll yap, yap and yap? What even are you?!”

No matter how eloquent the old woman was, she could not argue against a few people simultaneously. She seethed in ager. “You outsiders can shut up about our family affairs! Every dollar and every cent that she earns belongs to our household. It shouldn’t be in her hands!”

Arianne picked it up then. “Sure, sure, I know now. You’re arguing now because Naya didn’t give you her salary, aren’t you? Since you’ve never taken Naya as your daughter or your daughter-in-law, why should she let you be in control of her finances? She’s building a family with your son. Should elders even intervene with their earnings? Are you the queen? Why are you bothered with so many things? Even if she’s earning $10,000 a month, it’s only a kind gesture if she gives you some allowance, but there’s no fault if she gives you nothing. If you were a good mother-in-law, she’d know what to do. The reality is that you don’t deserve it!”

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The old woman was furious, accusing all of them of the same fault. “Birds of a feather flock together, you’re all nasty people!”

Tiffany cursed while glaring at her, “Who are you scolding? Are you asking for a beating, you old hag! If it weren’t for Naya, I’d have given you a big slap!”

Naya broke out in tears from her rage. With red-rimmed eyes, she got her phone out to make a call, sounding like she was calling her husband. “Where are you? Your mother’s causing a scene in the shop I work at. Are you settling this? Don’t tell me that you’re busy and can’t leave. If you don’t come today, we can end this marriage right here, right now. I can’t take this anymore!”

Seeing that Naya was complaining to her son, the old woman stepped forward to grab her phone. “How dare you complain to him right in front of me? Your mother didn’t teach you well, did she? You uncivilized brat!”

During the grappling, Naya’s phone fell to the floor and was stepped on, shattering the device’s screen.

Arianne, Tiffany, and another employee went up to pull them apart. When they succeeded, Tiffany pressed the old woman on the chair, “Don’t you move. I’ve never seen an old woman as annoying and as pompous as you in my entire life!”

Naya was unable to say anything from how hard she was crying on the side. Due to the unforeseen situation, Arianne could only stop the business for the time being. Fortunately, Naya’s husband came in time. Judging by appearance, Naya’s husband was just like her. She had an intellectual grace while her husband was tall and lean with a pair of eyeglasses, looking like a gentleman.

He first apologized when he saw the atmosphere in the shop. “I’m sorry. We’ve caused all of you trouble. I apologize.”

After the apology, he comforted Naya with his gaze and went to the old woman helplessly. “Mom! How could you do this? You have no sense of priority. Won’t it be disruptive to me when I have to apply for a leave and hail a cab here? Life is already giving us a lot of pressure, can you stop being unreasonable? Is

it because of her salary again? I told you clearly before, Naya and I will take care of our finances when we get married. You don't have to poke your nose in."

"I know that my salary was given to you before I got married, but it's different now that I am married. I have my own family, and I'm not a baby that needs to be fed anymore. You can't go on being so selfish! What's the point of wanting to master the household's finance? We're all grownups. We can decide on things ourselves. If you keep this up, it'd be best if we just stay separately. We'll move out and leave the house to you and dad. Is that enough?"

The old woman glared at Naya. "The mother can't say anything when the son's grown up. You've forgotten all about me when you have your wife. You side with Naya after getting married. Am I not your mother? I'm doing this for your good! You didn't have any savings during these years of marriage; isn't she the one who squandered it all?"

Naya's husband heaved from the anger. It was obvious that he was tired of these pettinesses of life too. "What do you mean she squandered it all? I'm only earning that little each month. There are house mortgages and car loans to pay for and the whole family to feed. How am I supposed to have anything left? Teach me, how? Now that Naya's gotten a job, things are slightly better. Stop making things up, will you? Stop disrupting their business here. That's all. If you continue to argue, I can only move out. I'm busy working every day. I don't have time to tend to your unreasonable fits and I can't make my wife and child suffer for it."

Arianne had thought that Naya's husband was the type to stay away from the fights, but it did not look like that now. He was not unconcerned, nor were his values distorted. He honestly did not have the time to care for it. Nonetheless, he was a man who loved his wife and kid. He was still a man.

The old woman was less harsh on her son. Seeing that things were not on her side, she was unable to remain scornful. "Humph… Unappreciated kindness… Money aside, your wife's going out early in the morning and coming back late at night, not attending to anything in the house. I'm old now; am I not tired? Don't threaten me with moving out. I'm not being unreasonable either. She's spoiled by you, turning so lazy that she's just waiting for me to feed her!"

Naya's husband breathed in deeply, trying to sound gentle as he talked sense into the old woman who was his mother, "Mom, that's pushing it. You and dad aren't that old, and you both are healthy and not working. You can't ask Naya to serve you when she's tired from working the entire day. Everyone's got to do their part living in the house for a comfortable life. No one can bear all the responsibilities, or it'll kill them. If Naya and I move out with our daughter, it won't tire us out as much. I didn't already do it because I want to take care of you and dad. Naya's my wife. She's not an outsider. I know very well whether she's nice to you two or not. That's enough. Go home. Do what you should. I'm going back to the office too."

Finally, the old woman was persuaded away. Although Naya had not talked to her husband personally all the while, not even striking up a conversation, the outcome was on her side.

"I'm sorry for the embarrassment."

Naya was apologetic. It was one of the things that marriage would do to you, turning you from a graceful intellectual lady to a begrudging woman.

Chapter 547

Tiffany removed the 'Closed' sign hanging at the door. "Don't say that. We're friends, and friends never feel that way. Your husband is still a reasonable person, but that old lady is really something else. If she wants to monopolize her son, then she shouldn't have let him get married. Seeing how badly you've been bullied just beats me down! You should really discuss with your husband about moving out along with your child. The two elderly ones still look healthy, so you don't have to worry until they are too old to move around."

Naya heaved a sigh of relief, as if a burden had just been lifted from her. "If this incident hadn't happened, I might not have made up my mind to do it for fear that my husband would be put on the

spot. It's good that the old woman made a fuss today. At least, now I can justify my reason for moving out. To be honest, my marriage has been great. I'm just physically and mentally exhausted by my toxic parents-in-law."

When Naya went off to pick up her kid in the afternoon, Tiffany went into the kitchen out of the blue and asked Arianne in concern, "Do you think I'll have a problem with Jackson's mother if I really get married to him in the future? Seeing Naya going through that just freaks me out."

Arianne thought for a moment then shook her head, "I don't think Jackson's mother is that kind of person. Besides, you won't be sharing the same roof in the future since Jackson's living in White Water Bay Villa right? His mother won't be able to interfere with your affairs so much and I don't think their family will fight over money either. Your concerns aren't on the same level as Naya's. Relatively speaking, I think you would have it much easier than her. At least, after you give birth, Jackson will be able to hire a caretaker to take good care of you and he'll also be able to personally cook for you. With a caretaker to clean the house, I don't think there's anything else to fight about. Even if there is, it's not going to be the same as Naya's family. You're just being a worrywart."

Even with Tiffany's IQ, she absolutely couldn't foresee any other scenarios so she nodded in agreement. "You're right, I'm just being a worrywart. Everyone has a different situation; I shouldn't have worried. By the way, you wanna join us at the bar tonight?"

"Will Mark be there?" Arianne asked.

"The more the merrier. Are you gonna tell me that you won't go if he's coming? Since when did you become this cowardly? Don't let me down now. Even if he's an ex, you should stand tall. Besides, he's not actually an ex yet," Tiffany chuckled.

Arianne didn’t reply directly to Tiffany’s question. “I’ll join the meal, but I’ll skip the bar. I have to open up the shop tomorrow. Just go ahead with them if you want to.”

Tiffany thought about it for a moment and changed her idea. “Fine, we’ll close up early later then have dinner together. I’ll call Naya and ask her to go home directly after picking up her daughter. Since we’re closing up early, there’s no point in her coming back.”

Arianne wasn’t stupid and could see through Tiffany’s schemes. Her main objectives weren’t going to the bar or dinner, but to create an opportunity for her to spend some time with Mark. Since Tiffany was her best friend, she couldn’t possibly keep a distance from her because of Mark.

She suddenly realized that if Tiffany were to marry Jackson, she and Mark would never be able to remain strangers for the rest of her life. They’d still occasionally have to meet, dine, and hang out together. She was starting to wonder if she should try to befriend Mark, though she didn’t seem to be qualified to be friends with someone like him… After all, she wasn’t some rich and important figure like Jackson and Eric.

Dinner was going to be at Jackson’s restaurant in the private room, which was relatively quieter without any other outsiders around.

Unsurprisingly, Mark showed up too in his formal wear as usual. His platinum-rimmed glasses seemed to have become his favourite accessory nowadays. Except for that one time where he changed into sunglasses at the water park, he always wore his glasses.

Mark very naturally settled himself down beside Arianne, who acquiesced in his decision. Since they couldn’t remain strangers, she might as well befriend him because she couldn’t really treat him as an enemy. After all, hating someone you love was too difficult.

Tiffany was somewhat gleeful to see the both of them sitting together. “Here, order up! There are new items on the menu!”

Arianne handed the menu to Mark, “You order.”

Mark was a little surprised because this was the first time she initiated a conversation with him in so long. He obediently accepted the menu and ordered a few dishes. They were all Arianne’s favourites, which she noticed too and felt a little strange in her heart. Since when did he understand her taste bud so much?

Dinner went smoothly. After they came out of the restaurant, Tiffany dragged Jackson away, leaving Arianne and Mark behind.

“Do you want to go shopping?” Mark suggested.

Arriane refused neutrally, “No thanks, I would like to go home and rest early.”

He didn’t try to push it. Truth be told, he wasn’t adept in dating and had never shopped with a woman. Her refusal left him with no confidence to insist on doing something that he wasn’t prepared for. “Alright then, I’ll take you home.”

It wasn’t a question but a statement, so Arianne walked to his car very naturally. “Thank you then.”

Arianne's 'unusual behavior' led to Mark wondering if she had gotten over the things and was perhaps… considering reconciling with him. But of course, he certainly didn't believe that it took only two bouquets to pacify her.

Chapter 548

When he got in the car, he realized that Arianne had chosen to sit in the passenger seat this time. He didn't set off in a hurry and just turned the air-conditioning to the max, then tried to start a conversation. Perhaps even he himself didn't even notice how cautiously he was acting. "Can you fall asleep this early?"

Arianne gave him a small smile. "I'll be tired enough to sleep after cleaning up the house and taking a bath. Truth be told, I'm already sleepy now. I'm pretty much exhausted every day. You're using your brain to make money, but I'm doing physical labor."

Mark paused for a moment. "Actually, you can use your brain too…"

Arianne tried to joke with him. "Use my brain to be a Mrs. Tremont and rely on you to support me? Surely you jest. You know that I don't like relying on someone else's support. Mark, I've thought about it. Jackson and Tiffie may get married. Given your close relationship with him, I'm sure we'll be running into each other quite often. I can't hate you to the point where we can't coexist on this planet, but I can't bring myself to be Mrs. Tremont either. So… Do you want to consider a divorce? It wouldn't be a bad thing to just remain friends."

At this moment, Mark finally understood what she was scheming. Be friends with him? Not just anyone is worthy of being his friend. The word 'friend' was meant to draw a clear line between them—he could only look at her but not touch her in the future. Could he accept that?

“Ari, when did you learn how to joke? That’s a lame one. If you’re talking about friends with benefits, then I can consider it. If it’s normal friends, then forget it.”

Arianne finally couldn’t hold herself back anymore. “Mark Tremont!”

Mark’s lips curled into a smile. “You were the one who started it. Let me tell you now, I’m not after just your body, but your entire being. You were the one who promised that you wouldn’t mention a divorce. As long as we are not divorced, you’ll remain as Mrs. Tremont.”

Arianne blocked him out in her anger. It was evident that their conversation had gone south. “Send me home now or let me out, I’ll go back by myself!”

Mark started his car. “Of course, I’ll send you home. It’s only right for me to send my lady home.”

Pissed, she pulled her seatbelt hard to vent her anger. He didn’t have to keep reminding her of her identity!

For some unknown reason, Mark thought that she was extremely cute when she was angry so he wasn’t bothered by her behavior. “Pull it as hard as you want. That thing isn’t worth any money.”

When they arrived at the residence, Arianne didn’t show any mercy as she got out of the car. She vented her anger by slamming the door so hard that the noise it produced even made her heart ache. This was Mark’s most favorite car that he also used the most frequently. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have driven it to this city.

Mark frowned but said nothing. Just when he was about to get out of the car too, his phone suddenly rang. The screen showed that it was a call from Butler Henry, so he decided to answer the call first. “Hello, what is it?”

Henry’s voice was grim on the other end of the line. “Sir, Rice Ball is gone. It rained heavily last night, and it somehow ran away in the middle of the night. We couldn’t find it for a few hours. Early this morning, we discovered it in a bush about a kilometer away. The vet said that… it died of old age. Rice Ball was actually a very old cat. Since it had been a stray in the past, it was quite weak… At least, it lived a decent life in the Tremont Estate in its twilight years.”

Mark had a headache. He slammed his fist into the steering wheel angrily. “How hard is it to look after a cat! It was still alive and kicking when Arianne handed it to me. How am I going to tell her now that it’s dead? If all of you had watched it well last night, it wouldn’t have died so soon! Rice Ball died outside. Do you think she will believe me if I told her that it died of natural causes?”

Butler Henry remained silent as he waited to be lectured, but Mark slightly calmed down after a while. “Alright, I’ll hang up now if there’s nothing else. I’ll take care of the rest.” He ended the call, then took a deep breath before getting out of the car.

He knocked on the door, but instead of opening the door, Arianne spoke behind the closed door. “What business do you have?”

He didn’t have any before, but now he did. “Serious business. Open the door.”

His tone didn’t sound like he was joking, so Arianne cracked open the door skeptically. The grim look on his face alarmed her. “W-What’s… wrong?”

Mark pushed open the door and walked in. He sat down on the sofa and lit a cigarette. “Rice Ball is gone.”

Arianne stiffened, and her face turned pale. “What’s going on? It was fine before you came here, right? When did it happen?”

He roughly narrated the situation, and as expected, Arianne didn’t believe that Rice Ball died of natural causes. She shouted emotionally at him, “How could it die of old age? Normal cats can live for more than ten years! It’s not even that old in the first place! It must have died because you neglected to inform someone to take care of it! I should have taken it away with me… instead of letting it stay with you!”

Mark didn’t argue. He never liked small animals, especially those with fur. He loathed Rice Ball when he first saw him around his house. It was only for Arianne’s sake that he slowly tried to accept it and ended up truly liking the little fella. He was even upset at himself for not bringing Rice Ball here along with him; at least, Arianne could have been with it at its last breath. Although he wasn’t really at fault, he didn’t have the confidence to emphasize his innocence in this matter.

He knew that Rice Ball wasn’t only a pet to Arianne, but her spiritual sustenance. Hence, he could understand her reaction.

Chapter 549

His silence prompted Arianne to question him with her red-rimmed eyes. “Why aren’t you speaking? Are you lying? You’re lying! How did Rice Ball die? It’s gone already, so can’t you just tell me the truth?”

Mark snuffed out the cigarette then lifted his gaze. “I didn’t lie to you. Henry called me after you got out of the car. You can call him yourself if you don’t believe me. I have no reason to deceive you. I admit that I’m at fault for not taking care of it more meticulously.”

Arianne stood leaning against the wall as tears tumbled down her cheeks, looking like a little girl who had just lost something beloved to her. Only crying could ease her emotions. “You never liked it from the beginning; you loathed it! It was your fault for not allowing me to take it away! Why do you have to deprive me of everything I like? It was only a cat! It may be a nasty cat in your eyes, but it was very important to me!”

She didn’t notice that Mark, who hadn’t smoked in front of her for a long time, lit a cigarette as soon as he came in. She had always thought that Mark never liked Rice Ball, so naturally she wouldn’t notice that he was lighting a cigarette to ease the pain and irritation in his heart.

Mark lowered his gaze and remained silent, until Arianne came forward and hurled a pillow on the sofa at his chest. “I hate you so much!”

He didn’t move. He just allowed her to vent until she was done and broke down in tears. “I’m sorry,” he reached out and tried to comfort her.

Arianne flung his hand away. She sat in one corner with a pillow and sobbed. “I don’t want to listen to you. Shut up!”

Mark closed his mouth obediently and offered her a tissue. She took it and cried even harder. “I’m never going to keep another cat, and I don’t want to see you again!”

Mark much rather preferred that she cry and make noises than just keep quiet. Ever since he learned that Rice Ball was gone, he was prepared for the worst. He was afraid that she wouldn't throw a tantrum and would hate him from the bottom of her heart.

After crying for a while, Arianne stretched her hand out toward him while sobbing, "You have videos of Rice Ball on your phone, right? Let me see them."

He obediently handed it to her and allowed her to go through the gallery on his phone. He didn't have a hobby of taking selfies, and there were no shameful secrets in his phone. There were only a few videos of Rice Ball in his gallery and nothing else. Arianne just watched the videos repeatedly then cried. After crying, she watched them again. The cycle repeated until she fell asleep on the sofa.

After making sure that she was sound asleep, Mark carefully carried her back into her bedroom. It was getting late, so there was no point in driving back to the hotel. Besides, he wanted to be by her side at a time like this too, so he stayed but slept on the sofa.

Early next morning at eight, he left for the company punctually. Arianne was still asleep, so he called a breakfast delivery for her and ordered another bouquet of flowers. By the time the deliveries arrived, she'd be up.

When he arrived at the company, Ellie had prepared a cup of black tea for him. "Mr. Tremont," she greeted.

Mark hummed in acknowledgement coldly, then sat down at his desk without even looking at her. He wasn't that busy here and was mostly sorting out the matters at the headquarters. Mark didn't even care about a small company like this; he was only here for Arianne.

Ellie had been staying here for a while and was rather downhearted. Of course, this place wasn't as nice as the capital because it wasn't as busy as the headquarters. Hence, Mark didn't need her most of the time, which was also the reason why she was discouraged. She thought for a moment before pensively asking, "Mr. Tremont, when do you plan to return to the capital?"

Mark looked at the file in his hand then replied half-heartedly to her question, "Not sure yet. Do you wish to return? You can just return then; Brian alone is actually enough here."

Ellie's countenance changed slightly. She did think that going back was nice, but not alone. "Brian is only a driver. What else can he assist you in other than driving for you? It was only a casual question. Such a company isn't worth your attention. I'm only worried that there will be a problem at the headquarters in the long run. By then, it'll be too late."

Mark had always disliked someone objecting to his plans. "I have my own plans, and I am well aware of the situation. I didn't come here for this small company in the first place," he frowned.

Yes, it was for Arianne Wynn. Ellie didn't speak any more. She just got up and went into the pantry with a gloomy face.

"Ellie, why are you in a bad mood? Who's blind enough to piss you off?" Dick tried to worm his way into being friends with her as usual.

Ellie had seen all sorts of bosses and pampered sons from wealthy families after being around Mark for so long. Hence, people like Dick Smalley were totally not worth her attention. Her heart was filled with contempt for him. "What can you possibly do if I told you about it? Mr. Smalley, please mind your own business and refrain from doing meaningless things."

Dick shrank and looked embarrassed. “I was only asking out of concern for you. I heard our Mr. Tremont came here because of his wife, but it seems like he hasn’t been making any progress. Turns out that even the most capable man can’t escape from this either, tsk tsk.”

Ellie rolled her eyes at him. “Arianne Wynn is just being ignorant. Mr. Tremont has done so much and she’s still being stubborn. I have no idea what’s going on in her head. She’s not even that special compared to ordinary people. When Mr. Tremont loses his patience one day, she will be made into the laughing stock instead.”

Chapter 550

Dick never knew Ellie had such an opinion of Arianne. He didn’t dare to make any remarks too, however, since this was the boss’ private matter.

Ellie looked down on Dick even more for being too timid to even speak his mind and just left with a glass of water.

In the office, Mark gave Butler Henry a call and told him how to deal with Rice Ball’s funeral. He didn’t want this matter to create more trouble between him and Arianne, so he’d try his best to do whatever he could.

In the apartment, Arianne heard a knock on the door as soon as she was woken up by the alarm clock. Her memory was fuzzy, and she couldn’t even remember how she went back to bed. When she passed by the living room, she noticed a neatly folded thin blanket on the sofa. Although it showed no signs of being used, she had a hunch that Mark didn’t leave last night.

She opened the door, only to be greeted by a bouquet so huge that it nearly hid half of the delivery guy's body behind it. The fragrance of flowers immediately wafted into her nose. It took her a second to recover from her shock. What was Mark trying to do? Why was he sending flowers to her everyday?

"Miss, a bouquet for you. Please sign this if there's no problem."

The young man from the flower shop was struggling quite a bit. He wasn't that tall and big, so the bouquet was a little too 'heavy' for him. Most importantly, it was blocking his line of sight and he had to make sure to handle it carefully.

Arianne could empathize with his struggles, so she quickly signed off the delivery and took the bouquet back into the house. Before she could even put the flower down, there was another knock on her door. Thinking that the young man from the flower shop had forgotten something, she set down the bouquet and opened the door again, only to realize that this time it was a food delivery guy. "Here's your breakfast, enjoy your meal!"

She accepted the takeaway and was a little dazed. Did Mark do all of this? When did he become that considerate? Even last night, he didn't take advantage of the situation and just stayed behind quietly. Before she even got up today, he had left quietly and arranged all of this for her...

Arianne once made up her mind to not accept any kindness from him, but now it seemed like things wouldn't develop according to her expectation. For now, she had no intention of feeding the flowers and breakfast to her trash can. However, she would never accept any expensive jewellery or other gifts from him. Women somehow always had a weakness for flowers as well as food, and she never had the habit of letting things go to waste either.

While eating breakfast, she kept wondering if she should say something to Mark. Giving him the silent treatment might be a little harsh. She did feel a bit guilty for fighting with him because of Rice Ball last

night. Mark at least took care of Rice Ball properly back then. When it passed away, Mark wasn't even at the Tremont Estate. She shouldn't have blamed him just because she lost control of her emotions. At the very least, she should apologize to him.

Thinking up to this point, she took out her phone and sent him a message. 'Thank you for the flowers and breakfast. There's no need to send me flowers in the future, as it's really a waste of money. And… I'm sorry about last night. I shouldn't have blamed you for Rice Ball's death. I lost control of my own emotions due to grief.'

Arianne watched as the message got sent on the screen and breathed a sigh of relief. From time to time, she'd check if he responded to her text. However, by the time she had to leave for the shop, Mark still hadn't replied.

When she arrived at the dessert shop, she saw that everyone else had arrived too. Tiffany noticed her puffy eyes and bombarded her with questions, "You cried? Your eyes are all swollen like walnuts! What's going on? Did Mark bully you?"

The thought of Rice Ball was still unbearable to her. "No… It's just that Rice Ball is gone," she said dejectedly.

Tiffany was a little shocked. "Really? Wasn't it still alive and kicking before this? Why was it suddenly gone? Aww, don't be too sad. Those little animals have short lifespans. They'll have to leave sooner or later. Cheer up a little."

Arianne said with a dull voice, "Alright, no need to comfort me. I'll be fine in a few days; just let me grieve over it. I'll get back to my work, and so should you. Oh by the way, let's go visit Eric together if you're free tonight."

Tiffany didn't dare to say anything else for fear that she would push Arianne's button. "Sure, let's go together after work."

After a busy morning, Arianne finally had the time to check her phone when everyone else was having lunch together. Mark had responded to her message more than an hour ago with only two words: 'It's alright.'

She set her phone aside without replying, then just ate slowly since she didn't have much appetite.

Naya suddenly spoke up, "Ari, I discussed with my husband. We've decided to move out of my in-laws' with Lulu for now until they are too old to take care of themselves or if they've fallen ill. I suddenly feel so much more relaxed."

Arianne smiled, "Congratulations. Things will get better soon! I can tell that your husband treats you really well."

Naya lowered her head shyly. "To be honest, he's quite a dull guy. He doesn't know much about romance and rarely cares about home. At least, he manages to make the right judgement at critical moments. Our marriage only managed to last this long because he treats both me and Lulu very well. For this reason, no matter how mean my in-laws are, I can still look the other way."