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“That should have happened long ago. Your life must be going well, now that you have officially begun living as a family of three. Just ignore your mother-in-law and try to avoid interacting with her. I knew from my first glance of her that she wasn’t a nice person.”

Naya smiled and said nothing. An intellectual and kind-hearted person like her would never speak ill of her mother-in-law behind her back, no matter how horrible the latter was.

After the dessert shop closed for the evening, Arianne and Tiffany took a cab to the hospital. Jackson hadn’t shown up at all today, but they ended up meeting him at the hospital. Mark was there too.

The ward instantly grew lively. Eric sat cross-legged on the bed, happily munching on an apple that Jackson had peeled for him. “How kind of you guys, but this isn’t the first time my problem has acted up. It’s nothing serious, so there’s no need for you guys to stay too long. The girl you introduced me to took really good care of me. I have to give her a raise!”

Tiffany was brimming with pride, speaking animatedly, “But of course! Ari and I handpicked her! I think you’ll be discharged from the hospital in just a few days. From now on, you’ll have to take care of your ‘precious’ body and watch what you eat.”

Eric curled his lips, “Actually, I just need to avoid drinking in the future and make some time for a surgery, then I can continue living as I am without much of a problem.”

Surgery? It was only at this moment did Arianne and Tiffany realize how serious the situation was. All this time, they had thought Eric simply had a weak stomach and needed to be more careful with his diet. They didn't expect it to be so serious that he was required to undergo a surgery.

Jackson patted Eric on his shoulder, "Alright, I'll come by again tomorrow. I'm so exhausted, I'm dying to go back and rest."

"Ari and I are exhausted, so we'll be leaving too. Take care of yourself."

After saying bye calmly, Tiffany dragged Arianne out of the ward.

Jackson quickly caught up with her, "What's the matter with you? Why do you seem like you have a problem with me?"

Tiffany replied angrily, "Where have you been all day today? Are you so busy that you can't even send a text or make time for a short call? If you're that exhausted, go back to the hotel and rest up. I'll stay with Ari tonight."

Jackson's countenance changed slightly as he signaled to Mark frantically with his eyes.

Sighing in resignation, Mark dragged Arianne away. "I'll see you home."

Arianne wanted to refuse, but suddenly realized his intention: he was trying to give Tiffany and Jackson some privacy. Arianne didn't want to be caught up between a lovers' fight either, so it was better for her to leave right now. They needed to solve their problem by themselves.

Outside the hospital, she ignored Tiffany's pleas and got into Mark's car. They drove away quickly, leaving behind Tiffany and her shouts of Arianne 'prioritizing a lover over a friend'.

Arianne was the first to break the awkward silence, "Why have you been driving yourself lately? Where's Brian?"

Mark gave her a glance, "I don't think it's convenient for him to be here. I want to spend some time alone with you."

Arianne looked out of the car window a little uncomfortably. In the past, Mark had always acted nice around the others, but treated her harshly when they were alone. Now that the situation was reversed, she suddenly realized that it was a little unbearable for her. She didn't even know how to keep the conversation going between them. Silence was always stifling, regardless of the situation.

After a while, she started another conversation. "What has Jackson been doing all day? It would be a wonder if Tiffie didn't get mad at him for not being in touch with her for a whole day."

An unknown emotion flashed over Mark's face as he warned her, "I can tell you, but you can't tell Tiffany."

Warning bells rang in Arianne's heart, but she insisted, "Tell me, I won't tell Tiffie."

“A woman that Jackson dated in the past came to find him, a child with her. She claimed that Jackson was the dad. Although Jackson didn’t believe that to be the case, he didn’t want to be too overconfident in himself and his judgment. Since it’s a serious matter, they went to get a DNA test done today. The result will be out in a few days.”

Arianne was shocked, “What! How could this have happened! I knew things wouldn’t go that smoothly between Jackson and Tiffie! Given how much of a playboy Jackson was, a screw up is inevitable! I wonder how things will end up if the child truly turns out to be his! It’s about time that karma hits him, considering all that he’s done in the past!”

Compared to her, Mark didn’t seem to have a care in the world, “The result isn’t out yet, so don’t go jumping to conclusions. I don’t think Jackson’s past is that unsightly. He’s a normal man, what’s wrong with having a richer experience in that area of life? He’s never double-timed anyone either, so there’s nothing shameful about his actions. Besides, he already stopped that kind of lifestyle, so don’t be so indignant.”

Arianne retorted, out of fear for Tiffany, “You are a man, of course you’d think it’s normal for Jackson to have had that type of lifestyle! Both of you basically have the same mindset!”

Mark was a little at getting accusations hurled at him out of the blue, “Don’t lump us together, I’ve never done any of that.”

Arianne retorted out of habit, “Surely, you must have!”

Mark felt a headache brewing in his head. Women were really troublesome when they were being unreasonable.

“Okay fine, I did! Are you happy now? The past couple of decades of my life revolved around you, what makes you think I had that kind of time? Stop spouting nonsense!”

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’Doesn’t Aery Kinsey count?’ — was what Arianne wanted to say but did not in the end. This had always plagued her. She really didn’t want to be reminded that her husband had once dated her own sister.

Mark knew that she was overthinking again when she suddenly gave in. “What are you thinking about? Don’t hold it in, talk to me.”

She curled her lips, “I just think that you’re too cruel. Aery once dated you, after all, but you personally sent her to jail. Her life is pretty much ruined now.”

As she spoke, she inadvertently observed his expression, wanting to see how he would react.

“It’s true that she and I used to date,” Mark replied calmly, “But I can’t tolerate anyone who’s hurt you.”

Arianne wasn’t satisfied with his response. Didn’t he also hurt her, alongside Aery? Now he was washing his hands clean and pretty much admitting that something had happened between him and Aery?

‘It’s true that she and I used to date’ — these words put a sour taste in her mouth. “You’ve both done the same things. You’re not much better than one another. Since you won’t tolerate anyone who’s hurt me, you should remember not to forgive yourself.”

Mark suddenly chuckled, “Heh… I’ve never forgiven myself. Don’t you refuse to forgive me, too?”

That’s right. Her departure was the biggest blow to him.

Mark stopped the car outside her condominium. Arianne’s emotional state was in a mess. She simply waved at him and left.

Mark called out to her at just the right time, “Aren’t you going to invite me inside?” he asked half-jokingly.

Arianne’s dull tone carried a purposefully placed distance, “Another day. It’s late and inconvenient.”

Mark did not insist, as if he were simply making a joke and didn’t care about the outcome.

He watched her as she walked into her condominium and left once she had completely disappeared from view.

The hotel.

Tiffany was fuming. Ever since they started dating, not a day had gone by where Jackson had failed to contact her. Today was different. She would never have seen him at all if she hadn't gone to visit Eric at the hospital.

Jackson was getting a headache, "Honey, what do I have to do for you to stop being pissed at me? I told you, I've been very busy. You can ask Mark if you don't believe me. I had no time today. I planned on seeing you at night after visiting Eric. You're staying in the hotel with me anyways, so there's plenty of time. Do you have to nitpick over details?"

Tiffany wasn't really that angry, she was only pretending. At least, to let him understand the dire consequences of failing to contact her, "Hmph! You're just bored of me now, aren't you? You don't care about me at all! Let me ask you this — this is a small company, started up in a small city. How is it possible that both you and Mark are buried under a mountain of work? Don't think I don't know that Mark only started this company here just to be close to Arianne. His heart isn't really in this tiny company. You, on the hand, are even more detached. You'd better give me a good explanation!"

Jackson's heart skipped a few beats. He was surprised at how sharp Tiffany could be. This company really didn't require him to make special trips. He was only here to deal with some… "personal matters" because he would never be able to avoid Summer's scrutiny if he handled it in the capital. If Tiffany found out about this, he was finished.

He didn't want to lie to Tiffany, but she had already managed to drag out his past with Lynn. He did not have the nerve to touch on her last nerve. He would never be able to reverse the consequences if that were to happen. They had broken up once already. He was really scared now. "I promise that I won't do it again. Trust me, okay? I'll always contact you, no matter how busy I am from now on. I definitely won't disappear on you like that, alright? Don't be angry."

Tiffany wasn't really angry in the first place. After a bit of coaxing from his end, her tiny bit of resentment disappeared, "Then I'll forgive you, just this once! I'm hungry; order some takeout for me. I'm going to take a shower."

Jackson secretly heaved a sigh of relief, "Sure. You go ahead."

Tiffany walked into the bathroom. Jackson had just unlocked his phone when he saw a message from a strange number: 'I know that you won't give me an appropriate social status. I've only come to you because I simply don't have the money to raise a child. I don't want much — either you take the child back to be raised by the West family, or you give me enough money to raise the kid. I know that you need to verify this, but I'm still uncomfortable. After all, I'm being questioned. Our son looks a lot like you. The result will still be the same, whether you take the test or not.'

His palms broke out into a cold sweat. He couldn't help recalling every moment from his past. He had clearly taken every precaution, so how could this have happened? He was beginning to panic. He wasn't afraid of taking responsibility, but now he had Tiffany to think about. In the past, he would have handled this easily — if the child was his, he would just have to accept it. Even if he didn't marry the woman, he would just shove a bit of money into her arms and end the matter. Now, things were different…

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He steadied his emotions, ordered takeout, then walked out into the hallway and called the stranger's number. The call was soon answered by a melodious female voice, "What do you want, Jackson? Our son is fussing. Can we talk later?"

His frustrations doubled when he heard the child's cries, "I just wanted to say, do not disturb me until the test results are out and don't call me either. Once the results are out and it's proven that the boy is mine, I will settle things with you. If not, stay away from me!"

He ended the call immediately and secretly wiped off the cold sweat from his brow. Tiffany would check his phone from time to time. He shuddered to think of the consequences if she ever saw that message.

After deleting all untoward messages, he went back to the room as if nothing had happened. Tiffany emerged from the bathroom soon after, with only a towel wrapped around her. Water was dripping from her dark hair. Her long, smooth legs were particularly enticing, but today, he wasn't in the mood. He couldn't get into the mood with such a burden on his mind.

Tiffany was not used to this serious side to him. She walked towards him and sat on his lap, "What's wrong? Are you bored of me?"

He wrapped his arms around her waist with a bitter smile on his face, "Of course not… I'm just tired… Go to bed once you're done with supper. I'm going to bed after I've showered."

Tiffany did not think too much of it and believed that he was really tired, "Alright, go wash up and get some sleep. I'll wait for the takeout."

By the time the takeout arrived, Jackson was already asleep. Tiffany munched on her supper as she binge watched her favorite drama series. Just as she was about to finish eating, her phone ran out of battery. She grabbed Jackson's phone, as she usually would, to continue watching the show. Suddenly, a message notification appeared on the screen. She frowned, as it was blocking a whole part of the video. However, as the message lingered for a few seconds, she could tell that it wasn't random spam… Because the first sentence of the message was — 'I'm sorry for troubling you. I'm not doing this for the money…'

The next part of the message wasn't shown, but that was already suspicious enough.

She was just about to tap into the message, when a hand suddenly reached out and snatched the phone away. She turned around; it was Jackson. He had woken up at some point.

“Why aren’t you asleep? Finish your food and go to bed. I’ll see you at the shop tomorrow.”

Jackson turned off his phone and went back to bed. Tiffany entered a momentary daze. Curiosity spurred her into following behind him, “Someone sent you a message with some kind of apology for troubling you. Apparently, it’s not about the money or something… I didn’t manage to see it, don’t you want to read it?”

Jackson took a deep breath. He had woken up because he had heard that message notification. He did not manage to see the message, but based on Tiffany’s description, he could pretty much guess the sender’s identity. Of course he wasn’t going to read it now, especially not in front of Tiffany. He tried his best to respond in his normal nonchalant manner, “Probably just spam. Ignore it. Sleep.”

Tiffany refused to let go. She tried to snatch up his phone, “If you won’t look at it, I will! It’s nothing shady anyway. What’s the big secret?”

Jackson’s reaction was too extreme. He held on tightly to his phone, refusing to let go. Then, he lost control of his tone, “I said, ignore it!”

Tiffany was taken aback after being ‘yelled’ at, “Why are you yelling at me? I figured that it really was nothing to worry about, but based on your reaction, it doesn’t look like ‘nothing’ at all! Do you have some unfinished business with an ex?”

Jackson was well aware that the truth would be out soon. If this went on, he'd go crazy before the results were out. He quickly sat up, put his phone behind him, took a deep breath, and decided to come clean, "I'm not yelling at you… Forget it. I should just tell you. At least, I wouldn't need to be nervous all the time."

Now it was Tiffany's turn to panic. She was afraid that she wouldn't be able to endure whatever he was going to say, "Just, wait a moment… Let me prepare myself." After a short pause, she said, "Okay, go ahead."

Jackson had initially intended on coming clean, but as he gazed at the woman he loved, the words refused to come. Until the results were out, he did not have any concrete way of solving this mess. He didn't have the nerve to reveal this to her so soon, so he made something up, "It's Lynn… She thinks that she shouldn't have revealed my past with her. It was quiet for a while, until she began contacting me over the past two days, just to apologize to me. I was afraid that you might misunderstand, so I didn't tell you… Trust me, I'll deal with it. I won't have anything to do with her from now on."

Tiffany heaved a sigh of relief, "You scared me! I thought that you were actually doing something behind my back. So it's Lynn… Don't worry, I trust you. If you wanted to mend things with Lynn, you would have done it long ago. You wouldn't need to drag it out. You'd better settle this as soon as possible. Don't scare me like that."

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Jackson let out a sigh of relief, but felt guilty at the same time. He never expected for things to turn out so serious when he brought her here. At the time, he simply received a call from that woman, saying that she had something important to tell him. He didn't look too much into it but was afraid that Summer would find out about his past and nag him endlessly. So, he decided to come here, under the pretense that Mark needed his help at the company and set up a meeting with that woman in this city. Then, he brought Tiffany along to have fun with Arianne and cheer her up.

He did not expect for this matter to spiral out of control. His emotional state fell into ruins when he discovered the child. He had just had a meeting with this woman today during the day and had gone to get tested first. He avoided contacting Tiffany because he was afraid that it would seem too obvious and that she would figure it out.

The next day, Tiffany relayed her “discovery” from last night to Arianne when she arrived at the café, “Someone sent a message to Jackson yesterday, in the middle of the night. I thought that it was from one of his old girlfriends, and I told myself that I was going to kill him if he was still in touch with those women. Turns out, it was just an innocent apology from Lynn. He really scared me.”

Arianne had already found out about this through Mark. Of course, she wasn’t going to say anything, as this could only be solved once they had received the results. The best way to deal with this now was to play by ear. However, the sight of Tiffany’s guileless and ignorant expression still made her uncomfortable, so she avoided the subject, “Thank goodness it’s a misunderstanding… Do you and Jackson have any plans today? You’re welcome to go out and have fun if you like, I can take care of things on my own here.”

Tiffany was feeling slightly pleased with herself, “We’re not going on. He’s said that he would keep me company here, but he’s going to be late. He should be here soon, and you can relax a little then.”

Arianne did not answer. Jackson was certainly very good at acting as if nothing had happened. He even had the nerve to come to the café. She wondered how he planned on dealing with the aftermath if the child really did belong to him.

Jackson arrived at the café around ten in the morning. He was dressed casually but still maintained his bad boy image. He had a few sweet moments with Tiffany when he arrived, then walked into the kitchen. When Arianne saw that the kitchen door was closed, she lowered her voice to ask, “How sure are you? What’s going to happen if you really are the father of that child?”

Jackson's mind was buzzing, "Why on earth did Mark tell you such a thing? Are you going to tell Tiffie?"

Arianne glared at him, "Tiffie would have found out about this by now if I wanted to tell her."

Jackson was feeling guilty, "I… I don't know. I was pretty confident at first. I thought that the woman only wanted money, but she refused it when I offered it to her, but I'm not sure if it's because the amount was too little. She did not object to the paternity test when I suggested it, almost as if… she was sure that I was the father. So now, I have zero confidence. My old girlfriends wouldn't last longer than three months, and this kid is almost eight months old. I don't even remember the woman's name…"

The baby was only eight months old. According to calculations, Jackson would have lost contact with the woman for more than two years. Arianne was helpless, "I kind of think that this is karma. You fooled around too much in the past, and now, when you've finally found a woman you truly love, the heavens won't give you peace. Don't give me that cr*p about not knowing what to do. If you're not the father, it would, naturally, be easier to deal away with this. But what if it is? You have to tell me, how are you going to solve this?"

Jackson momentarily fell silent and said, "I agree that it's karma… Even if I am the father, I don't want it and I won't abandon Tiffie either. I won't force her into accepting someone else's child. I'll agree to whatever that woman wants, as long as she disappears, as if she never existed. Of course, it'd be best if I were not the father. I need your help in this; don't let Tiffie find out. Please, just do me this favor…"

This was the first time Jackson had ever made a solemn plea to Arianne. She was shocked, and her heart softened at the same time, "Don't worry, I'm not that nosy. I just don't want Tiffie to get hurt. We've known each other for a while too. I hope I won't be disappointed."

Suddenly, Tiffany pushed the door open, "What are you talking about? Ari, don't forget to turn on the air-conditioning. Don't get a heatstroke just because you want to save some electricity."

“I think you’re more afraid that I’d cause Jackson to get heatstroke, right?” Arianne teased, “Alright, I’ll turn on the air-conditioning.”

Jackson chuckled and stayed silent. His smile was slightly forced. For the first time ever, he was feeling helpless and guilty in the game of love.

In the office building, Mark frustratingly turned the office air-conditioning down to 16°C, the lowest temperature. Summer in this city was much hotter than in the capital, and it was a long season too. He wasn’t very comfortable with this climate.

Ellie was dressed in a rather cooling outfit today. Her deep V neckline was particularly daring, making the blood rush down to the nether regions of each and every man in the office. Her short office skirt only managed to cover her perky buttocks ever so slightly, while outlining her delicate little waist perfectly and flashing her fair and toned thighs at the same time.

Seeing how hot Mark was feeling, she purposely walked towards him and bent down. Then, she softly asked, “Would you like a cold drink? It’s so hot today, and this office building is well exposed to light. Most of the office is exposed to the sunlight during the day. The air-conditioning is already at its lowest too.”

“Get me a cup of iced black tea from the café across the street.”

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Ellie was surprised. Mark had glanced at her meticulous outfit but showed no reaction. She felt mildly disappointed, “Okay… I’ll go right now.”

She crossed the road under the hot sun to the café. Ellie let out a sigh of relief when the cool, refreshing air in the café hit her. She sauntered up to Naya and said, “Two cups of iced black tea, please.”

Naya noticed Ellie’s outfit with a single glance. She was speechless. She had always been more modest, but she could accept dressing in spaghetti straps with hot pants or a mini skirt. However, Ellie’s getup was much more daring than a simple spaghetti strap top…

“O-okay…”

Naya felt slightly embarrassed. She was too embarrassed to stare at her for too long, even though they were both women.

Tiffany, who was behind the counter, heard Ellie’s voice and turned around. She was immediately upset, “Your workwear certainly has personality. You’d fit right in as a stripper in a nightclub. Mark certainly has a special taste. Do all of the women in your office dress like that?”

Ellie flipped her hair confidently, “Only those with a good figure would have the guts to dress like this. Our boss isn’t too concerned, so aren’t you being a little nosy, Miss Lane?”

Tiffany rolled her eyes. She quickly finished making the black tea and placed it on the sales counter, “I can’t be bothered. Good day to you.”

Tiffany stormed angrily into the kitchen after Ellie was gone, “Ari! Mark’s secretary struts around him dressed like a stripper every day. Aren’t you worried?”

Arianne was astonished. Based on her impression of Ellie, she would usually dress in serious workwear at work. She really couldn’t imagine her dressed as a stripper, “A stripper? Are you sure?” she asked curiously.

Tiffany dragged Arianne to the computer screen and showed her the surveillance footage, “Look at this, would you call that office wear? Her outfit looks a lot more like the actress in the movie Cats. Who wouldn’t know that she has a good figure? What’s she trying to show? She’s even told me that only those with a good figure would have the guts to dress like that, and that her own boss doesn’t care, and that I’m being nosy. I’m her lady boss’s best friend. Why shouldn’t I care? This woman is planning something wicked, isn’t she?”

Arianne stared at the image of Ellie in the surveillance footage and believed that Tiffany wasn’t exaggerating. Ellie’s outfit was quite daring, “It is a little revealing… But at a glance, it could still be considered as workwear. Mark doesn’t care, so we really shouldn’t either. Alright, Tiffie. Calm down. Get back to work. It doesn’t matter to me.” Then she went back to the kitchen, leaving Tiffany to fume on her own.

Tiffany turned off the surveillance video, her teeth itching with rage. She regretted not adding an extra ingredient into that black tea. She should have just poisoned them!

Back in the kitchen, Arianne carefully asked Jackson, “How long has Ellie been working for Mark? There was a sex scandal a while ago, right? Was it real?”

Jackson was putty in Arianne’s hands at the moment, so he didn’t dare lie to her. “Ellie has been working for Mark for many years already,” he replied honestly, “But there’s absolutely nothing between them.

You don’t have to worry about that. He only caused that sex scandal with Ellie to irritate you, and see your reaction. Ellie is married. No matter how hardcore Mark is, he would never have an affair with a married woman.”

“Then, in your opinion, what kind of a woman is she?” Arianne asked.

Jackson was extremely afraid of saying the wrong thing. He carefully weighed his words before answering, “I think she’s quite… serious. She only ever talks to Mark about work and never talks about personal matters. She never talks to him after work and usually dresses quite normally. She doesn’t actually flirt. She’s been able to maintain her sense of self despite having such good looks and working as Mark’s secretary while facing such an alluring boss; I’d say it’s pretty rare.”

Arianne curled her lips, “Are you sure? She was just here to buy some drinks. Her office skirt was much shorter than usual and the plunging neckline on her top pretty much reached her stomach. I think her personal style is a little different…”

Jackson looked surprised, “Are you serious? She never seemed that unconstrained to me… Can I see?”

Arianne raised her brow and replied, “I do have the surveillance footage in my shop, are you sure you want to check that out?”

The corners of Jackson’s lips twitched. He immediately realized that he had been tricked, “Nope. I wouldn’t dare! Pretend I never said a thing.”

Back in the office building, Ellie put the iced black tea on Mark's desk but did not immediately leave. Instead, her eyes shone as she asked, "Take a sip and see if the taste is alright. I know that the heat has been bothering you, so I've added extra ice in the tea. But I'm not sure if it would dilute the taste."

Mark picked up the cup and took a sip, not looking at her at all, "It's not that hot in the office, is it? Don't ever come into the office dressed like that again."

Ellie felt slightly embarrassed. She was gripped by an instinct to retreat, but a small voice in her head told her to stand her ground and that she had to take one more step closer. That was the only way for her to achieve her goal. She was no longer a young woman in her early twenties, and her life was reaching its final moments before the point of no return. She couldn't wait any longer. She steadied herself, placed both hands on the edge of the office desk, and bent down in a slightly attractive manner to face Mark. "What? Don't you like this?" she asked in an amorous manner.

Mark's body stiffened. He lifted his cold and distant gaze and stared right at her, "Ellie, do you know why you've been able to work for me for such a long time?"

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Ellie's mind went momentarily blank, followed by a subtle wave of delight. It was probably because she'd performed outstandingly in every aspect, right? She reached up and tucked a lock of her hair behind her ear, and asked bashfully, "Why?"

"Because in the past, you would put all of your focus into your job and would never try to seduce me."

Ellie's expression immediately changed. She promptly straightened up, "I-I'm sorry…"

Mark refused to give her a chance, “You may collect your pay from the financial department. Consider yourself fired. You’ll even receive a pretty good severance package.”

Ellie couldn’t believe this. She had more to say, but she shut her mouth when she stared into Mark’s icy glare. Reality had finally struck her. She had managed to maintain this great job for many years because of her own professional capabilities, not her good looks. Giving in to devious intentions had not only caused her to lose her chance in achieving her goals, but she had also completely lost out on a larger reward!

She knew Mark very well. After working so many years for him, she knew that he had always been a decisive man. When she walked out of the office building, she threw all of the personal belongings that she had brought out with her into the trash can. Then, she marched into the café.

Tiffany thought that she had arrived to buy more things for Mark. “What do you want this time?” she asked irritably.

“I need to speak to Arianne,” Ellie replied with an emotionless look on her face, “I’ll leave once I’m done.”

Tiffany rolled her eyes, knocked on the kitchen door, and said, “Ari, Ellie’s here for you. She says that she has something to say to you.”

Arianne opened the door and walked out. Before she could speak, Ellie spoke up first, “Could we talk elsewhere? It’s inconvenient here. I need to speak to you in private.”

Arianne stared out at the sweltering heat outside and chose the quiet staff lounge, “Come with me into the lounge.”

In the staff lounge, Ellie went straight into the topic, “I’ve been dismissed because I tried to seduce Mr. Tremont.”

Arianne’s surprise left as quickly as it arrived, “And?” she calmly asked.

Ellie forced a smile on her pretty lips, “I just wanted to give you a few words of warning. He’s willingly stooped to this — abandoned the capital and moved all the way to this rotten place, all for your sake. You should be grateful. Don’t wait until he’s lost his patience before running back to him.”

Arianne found this hilarious, “That’s between me and him. It’s not your business to get involved. Seeing as you’re no longer his secretary, I wish you good luck in your job hunt. May you have a bright future. I’ve got work to do now, so please excuse me.”

Ellie was enraged by Arianne’s indifference, “Don’t look so self-assured. What right do you have to make an outstanding man like him bend over for you? You’re not worth his time!”

This wasn’t the first time Arianne had been challenged. Dealing with this was child’s play, “Oh? Can’t I? It’s because I have his love that I’m so self-assured. Isn’t that right? He’s the only one who can conclude if it was worth it.”

In the end, Ellie left in a huff. Tiffany’s gossipy ears perked up, “Ari, what were you talking about?”

Arianne was in no mood to bring up the horrid matter, “Nothing. I’m very busy. I don’t have time to chat.”

Suddenly, Jackson rushed out of the kitchen and ran outside the café, holding his phone. Tiffany felt suspicious, “Why is he so anxious about that call? I’m going to ask him. It’d better not be from some hoe eyeing my man…”

Arianne instinctively stopped her, “Can’t you give him some space? He’ll tell you if he wants to. There’s no use in questioning him if he’s not willing to tell. He has legs, what can you hope to achieve by watching him so closely? He’d run away if he really wanted to. You won’t be able to chase him away if he insists on staying.”

Tiffany was puzzled by Arianne’s advice, “What do you mean? Are you giving me relationship advice? Is that how you've trained Mark? Fine, I won’t ask then. I’ll wait for him to give me an honest explanation.”

Jackson soon finished with his call. He pulled Arianne aside when he walked back in, “I’ve got to leave for a while.”

Arianne knew that this was connected to the matter concerning his possible secret child, “Go, and come back soon. Don’t do anything to cross the line. It’s probably not my place to say this, but I need to remind you to control your little soldier down there. Otherwise, I’ll be the first to neuter you.”

“What do you think this is? How could you possibly still have the mind to think about these kinds of things?” Jackson exclaimed helplessly, “That’s completely impossible. I’ve got to go; please distract Tiffany for me!”

Tiffany exploded when he left, “What is the meaning of this? Where’s he gone off to? Why won’t he tell you? What was he whispering to you about?”

Arianne gathered her courage and explained, “Something’s happened to Eric. Tanya can’t deal with it, so he had to rush over. His best friend is in trouble, why wouldn’t he panic? Eric is still in the hospital; no one wants anything to happen to him. Alright, we’ve got a lot of work to do. You should focus on churning out those beverages. You haven’t even started on the lemonade for table eight. Hurry up!”

Tiffany may be feeling unnerved, but she calmed down when she heard that something had happened to Eric.

After he left the café, Jackson went straight away to see Mark in the office building. He took his car keys and left. He had just collected the car when the woman called him again, sobbing, “Please, hurry! Do it for our son. Please hurry over, okay? I don’t know anyone here, and he’s sick. I don’t know what to do. I have no choice but to turn to you…”

Chapter 557

Jackson furrowed his brow, “I’m on the way over. I just collected the car. Quit rushing me. Until the results arrive, I won’t ignore you. And don’t get all weepy!”

He rushed all the way to the woman’s hotel then quickly scooped the baby into his arms and rushed to the hospital. As Jackson held the chubby little thing in his arms, he felt a strange kind of feeling — fear, absolute fear. There wasn’t a hint of sympathy at all. If he was the father of this child, he was dead!

In the hospital hallway, Jackson sat silently on a long bench. His former bedmate stared at him with tears in her eyes, “Thank you for not ignoring us…”

He refused to look at the woman and icily replied, “I’m not that inhumane. Since we’re here, let me tell you this — I want nothing to do with the child, even if it is mine. What do I have to do to make you disappear?”

An almost indiscernible sense of mechanization flashed across the woman’s pretty face, “I understand. You’re with someone now, and I don’t think you plan on breaking up with her. She’s not going to be an ex like me, right? I can understand how you feel, but this is your son. Why wouldn’t you want him? He’ll never live a good life with a single mother like me. It’d be different if you, his father, take him in. He’d be a son of the West family. He could have whatever he wanted. As his mother, I want him to have the best life, even though I can’t bear to leave the son whom I’ve raised on my own…”

Jackson lost his temper, “Chantelle Scintillae! Stop trying to take advantage! You decided on your own to have the child; I never even knew that you were pregnant! Why did you bring him into the world behind my back? Wasn’t it for the sake of money? I don’t think I’ve dated you for longer than three months. Are you implying that it was all for the sake of love?”

The woman maintained her calm composure and softly corrected him, “It’s not Chantelle Scintillae, it’s Georgina Scintillae. Let’s put love aside. The child is here now, and I hope that he will have a good life. That’s all.”

Jackson laughed in spite of his rage, “Heh… I don’t even remember your name. What are you planning? If you want money, just say so. Stop coming up with ways to push the kid on me. We don’t even know if he’s mine!”

Georgina sat down next to him, “I’ve asked about the results. They’ll be out in two days. I know that you’re frustrated. Let’s calm down and have a civilized conversation, since the baby is still undergoing check ups. Okay?”

Jackson gritted his teeth and pushed down his raging anger, “Fine, how would you like to start? I’ve already made my intentions very clear. You may state your opinion.”

Georgina paused thoughtfully, “I’m fine with raising the child alone. You’re well aware that I used to be a model. I’ve stopped working ever since I got pregnant. I’ve been too afraid to go home after I gave birth to our baby. My savings have long been depleted after such a long time. I’m at the end of the line now, which is why I’ve come to you. My initial plan was to give the child to you. That would have been best for both me and the child. It’s fine if you don’t want me. I’ll find a man who will treat me right someday. It’s true that I can’t bear to leave the child. Since you won’t agree to that, I’ll raise the child on my own. However, my entire life will be wasted away. How much money would it take to cover up for the absence of a father in his life and my completely ruined future? You can blame me for it. After all, it was not your decision to have the child. I made the decision all on my own. I don’t know what I was thinking either; I just felt sympathy for the child so I decided to bring it into the world. Every time I look at his face, I’m reminded of you. I myself wonder how a relationship that lasted less than three months could have put me under such an obsessive spell. The facts prove it, I love you. More than I could have ever imagined.”

Her words were like a wooden stick, striking against Jackson’s heart, causing a dull, maddening pain.

“Enough small talk. How much do you need?”

“$150 million. You Wests should be able to afford that. Just give me the cash, and I’ll leave with the kid at once. You won’t even have to wait for the paternity test results.”

Jackson sneered as he looked at Georgina from the side, “$150 million? You persisted through a ten month pregnancy just to get $150 million? Your belly is certainly worth a lot of money. Your calculations are pretty great too. It’s true that $150 million isn’t much to us Wests; however, it also depends on what that amount of money is for. Since you’ve made your demands, I’ll tell you this as well — I’ll agree to

your $150 million as long as the child is mine; I will pay you the full amount. If not, the next half of your life will be worse than you can ever imagine!”

The look in Jackson’s eyes frightened Georgina. Truthfully, she wasn’t sure if the child belonged to him either. She simply wanted to take a risk, a risk that simply involved money. She did not expect to end up falling into the deep end as well. She had found out about Jackson’s new relationship long ago and learned that they had been dating for more than three months. She was sure that he was serious about that woman, so she used the paternity test to compel him and intended on running away before the results were out. She was prepared for psychological warfare but did not expect him to drive her into a corner…

Chapter 558

At this point, she no longer dared to make a mistake. She feigned a calm outlook and wept pretentiously, “Do you really think that I want to stay here and suffer your humiliation? If you think that I like money that much, then just give it to me. I’ll leave at once. Like you, I don’t want to wait any longer either! Our son isn’t used to this place, and he’s sick. I’m hurting more than anyone else. If that’s how it’s going to be, I might as well speak to your girlfriend myself!”

Before Jackson could retort, the emergency room doctor walked out, “I’m looking for this baby’s parents?”

Georgina wiped off her tears and walked up to the doctor, “I’m his mother. How is my son? Is he alright?”

“He’s suffering from acute gastroenteritis. It’s not too severe, but he’ll have to stay in the hospital for observation over the next two days. Pay close attention to his food intake and avoid solid food. Try to give him milk for now, no more solids,” the doctor explained to her in a formal manner.

Stay for observation? Georgina did not want to wait for the paternity test results. What if Jackson wasn't the father? Not only would she end up with nothing, but she would suffer too. She made a decision, "This is my baby's first time here, and the weather is hot. He must not be used to the weather. I think it's best to take care of him at home. I'll transfer him to a different hospital when his condition is more stable. Thank you, doctor."

The doctor did not stop her. Babies were more susceptible to external conditions, "That's fine. You can leave once he's done with his IV. Remember to get to a hospital as soon as possible; you must not delay."

Once the doctor had left, Georgina burst into the ward. A nurse was holding her son as he received his IV transfusion. Babies had smaller veins, so the needle had to be inserted into his forehead. It was a pitiful sight. He looked like he had cried himself to sleep and would whimper softly from time to time. Georgina burst into tears upon taking her son back into her arms again. This time, her tears were real.

Regardless of how ruthless Jackson was, his heart softened at the sight of the child in this manner. He paid for the medical fees and transferred some money over to Georgina, "When are you leaving? I'll get your flight tickets."

Georgina stared pitifully at him, "I shouldn't have brought our son here. I shouldn't have dragged him into this suffering… I'm sorry… Just give me the money, consider me a gold-digger, and I'll leave, okay? Don't drive me into a corner. I'd stoop to anything when I'm desperate…"

Jackson softened his voice, "I've just transferred some money to you. Take the baby and go home for now. We'll talk once the paternity test results are out. If I really am the father, I'll pay you $150 million in full."

Even the Wests would need some time to cough up $150 million. It's not like he could just transfer the amount at will. After all, it was not a small amount. He wouldn't be able to keep this from Summer if he had to give her $150 million. Summer would certainly question him over such a large amount of cash.

Georgina felt guilty and began to regret demanding such an exorbitant amount, "What if I reduce the amount of money? $15 million would be fine too. Just give me the money and I'll leave!"

$15 million wouldn't do either. He needed Summer's approval for that amount. Jackson rubbed the space between his brow, "That's enough. As I've mentioned, you'll have to wait for the paternity test results!"

Georgina placed her sleeping baby on the sick bed and slowly said, "I can't wait. I'm pretty sure that you don't want your girlfriend to find out about us, either."

The tables would be turned with Tiffany involved. Jackson was afraid of forcing Georgina into desperation. The situation had reached a dire stage at this point, and he was at the end of his patience, "Are you threatening me? I refuse to give a single cent for no good reason. I've said it before; I will pay you the full amount, $150 million, once the results are out."

Georgina was now truly threatened by his resolution. She had lost this psychological warfare, "I don't want $150 million. I don't even want $10 million. I want $7 million. That's my final offer. I'm sure you can spend that much whenever you want!"

At this point, she had reduced the amount of money she wanted from $150 million to $7 million. Jackson was no fool, "You're right. I can easily hand out $7 million, if I wanted to. However, I'm not giving you a single cent. If you plan on confronting my girlfriend, go right ahead. If I'm unhappy, everyone else will be unhappy too. This baby is your life support, but he can also be your doom. You'd better think through this carefully. I've just transferred $30,000 into your bank account. That should be

enough money for the average person. You can choose to stay or leave. It's up to you. I, on the other hand, am leaving."

Georgina heaved a long sigh of relief as she watched Jackson leave. She had nearly lost her nerve. If she left now, she would only receive $30,000. If Jackson really turned out to be the father of her child, that $150 million would immediately belong to her. If he wasn't the father, she would be finished. The allure of $150 million was great, but at the same time, she might end up losing her life. She hesitated.

She tried giving the DNA lab a call, "I previously asked for a paternity test… Would it be possible to tweak the results for me? I'm willing to pay $15 million for my desired results."

"The results will be accurate to the test itself. We do not have the right to change the results of the test. Please be patient, Miss Scintillae," the person on the other end coldly replied.

Then, the person promptly ended the call. In her rage, Georgina smashed her phone. She should have realized it sooner. Jackson would never entrust the paternity test to just any DNA Lab. She would never be able to bribe them. After some consideration, she decided to take another gamble before the paternity test results were released. She was going to confront Tiffany! Nothing mattered as long as she could break Jackson into giving her the money in order to send her away.

Chapter 559

She waited for her son's IV transfusion to complete, then carried him off, hailed a cab, and made her way to Arianne's dessert shop. She had done her research long beforehand. As the ancient Chinese General Sun Tzu would say, know yourself and know your enemy, and you will never be defeated.

She recognized Tiffany straight away from the moment she walked into the café. Women had accurate intuitions. In fact, her intuition was so accurate that she could pinpoint Jackson's current girlfriend, simply based on intuition. She did not kick up a fuss all at once. Instead, she carried her child, found a

table, and sat down. The baby was not feeling well, so he bawled the entire time. Naya had experience in child rearing, so she approached her and asked, “Need some help?”

Georgina deliberately put on a weak and fragile expression on her face. She curled her lips in a frail manner, “I… It’s too hot outside… I just wanted to come inside to have a seat. My baby is sick, he’s so upset. I’m not here to freeload off the air-conditioning. Just give me a glass of iced tea. Anything will do.”

Naya automatically scooped the child up into her arms, “It’s alright. I’ll have someone get you a drink. I’ll hold your child for a moment so you can rest. It’s not easy being a young mother. Where is the father?”

Georgina glanced over at Tiffany, “His father… doesn’t want us anymore.”

Naya did not expect this answer at all. She did not probe and even felt a little guilty, “I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t have asked.”

The baby was wailing his lungs out. Even Jackson and Arianne, who were inside the kitchen, could hear his cries. At this point, hearing the cries of a child was enough to drive Jackson over the edge. Arianne curiously poked her head out to take a look. Her heart thumped when she saw Georgina. When she observed that Georgina was staring fixedly at Tiffany, her suspicions were further confirmed.

She ducked back into the kitchen and tugged on the corners of Jackson’s shirt, “You’d better go out and have a look. I think there’s a woman with a baby looking for you…”

Jackson stiffened, “Stop kidding around… I can’t afford another heart attack.”

Arianne was more afraid than he was, “Do you really think that I’m just trying to scare you? My intuition is never wrong. Although, I’ve never met that woman… You’d better go out and have a look. If it really is her, Tiffie will find out if she kicks up a fuss. You should know what’ll happen next!”

After a bout of hesitation, Jackson pulled off his apron and walked out. He scanned the room and fixed his gaze onto Georgina. Anger bubbled deep within him. This woman certainly had some nerve, coming all the way here like this!

Georgina had noticed him as well. She looked indifferent. She did not show any signs of starting a scene, but nor did she show any intentions of leaving either.

Jackson was too afraid to approach her. Tiffany wasn’t an idiot; he wouldn’t be able to keep this from her once he walked up to Georgina. He turned around and walked back into the kitchen. Then, he called Mark, “That woman has wormed her way into the café. I’m going crazy. You’ve gotta help me.”

Mark had zero experience in dealing with these sorts of things. He did not agree immediately and paused thoughtfully instead, “How am I supposed to help you? Get someone to whisk that woman away? Is it possible that you, the great Jackson West, can’t even deal with this nonsense?”

Jackson was breaking out into cold sweat in panic, “Enough with the sarcasm. Eric’s in the hospital, so now you’re my only hope. I don’t care how you do it, as long as you get that woman out of here. I can’t let her catch Tiffany’s attention, and I certainly can’t let her cause a scene. Consider this a plea from your best friend. I’m begging you, seriously, for the first time in my life. Help me!”

Of course, he had to help him. Mark sighed, “Fine. I’ll take care of it immediately. You’d better not give yourself away.”

Jackson glanced outside after the call, then tugged on Arianne’s arm pleadingly, “Sister, my dear, sweet, sister-in-law, don’t sell me out! Mark will be here very soon. I’m dying out here…”

Ariane glared at him resentfully, “I won’t rat on you. You’re on your own. It’s come to this now. If you really are the father of this baby, forget about Tiffie, I’ll beat you up myself. Are you that addicted to sex? Would it kill you to live without women? You should have thought of these kinds of issues sooner.”

Jackson had been regretting his actions long ago, “I swear, from now on, Tiffie will be the only woman for me! Should I ever break this promise, I will suffer a horrible death. Will that do?”

The office building was right across the road from the dessert shop. Mark arrived very quickly, as he had decided to handle this personally. His cold and distant eyes locked onto Georgina from the moment he entered the room. He strode towards Naya and snatched the baby away from her, “Come with me.”

Georgina was stupefied. She had never met Mark before, but she had seen him many times on the news. After all, she had “been around” too. Now, she was able to distinguish the fact that he was standing before her. However, she was unable to reject such an incomparably outstanding man who had suddenly appeared before her and asked her to leave with him. She instinctively rose to her feet, “M-Mr. Tremont? Is there something you need?”

Mark didn’t answer. He carried the baby and marched out of the café. Of course, Georgina had to tag along. He was holding her son!

Mark finally gave the baby back to her, while they were walking to his office, “You’ve got some nerve, popping up at the café to see Jackson like that.”

Only then did Georgina understand Mark’s intentions. He was doing it all for Jackson. She was a smart woman. The shock and awe from when she first laid eyes on Mark promptly disappeared. She calmly sat down on a chair next to her, “So you’re here to help Jackson. I was driven into desperation too. My baby is sick; I need to leave this city immediately and send him to the hospital. However, I need basic insurance before I leave. I can’t wait for the paternity test results.”

Chapter 560

Mark smirked, “Heh… You’re afraid that you might not get a single cent once the results are out, aren’t you?”

A wave of panic flashed across Georgina’s eyes. She put on a calm facade and said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I never intended on making Jackson take responsibility, but reality has dealt me with a heavy blow. I’m a single mother, raising a child with no income. I have nowhere to go. I don’t want to disrupt his life either. He has refused to marry me and accept me and my baby, so money is the only thing I can get. I know that you’re both very powerful men, but you don’t have to push a weak woman like me around, right?”

A thoughtful glint flashed across Mark’s eyes, “We don’t have to, and we won’t. Knowing Jackson, he would have been very generous with the child’s medical fees. You can leave with your son. Once the paternity results are released, you will be compensated appropriately, with not a single cent less. A word of advice — don’t ever show your face in front of him again.”

Georgina giggled, “Hehe… I can practically taste the threat in your words… He’s given me $30,000 for my son’s medical fees. All of you are asking me to leave. It’s obvious that you’re just trying to chase me away, then avoid paying up. I’m not an idiot. If he doesn’t solve this today, I’ll be left with no choice but to confront his girlfriend. His girlfriend should be more decisive and generous than he is, for the sake of their future.”

This was a difficult woman — this was Mark's first impression. He could sense this woman pressing on at every stage, trying to solve the matter before the paternity results were released. It would not be easy to drag it out.

After a bout of deliberation, he pulled out a black cheque and threw it at Georgina, "Jackson will have to go through his mother for this. I don't. I'll pay for him. Fill in however much you need."

Georgina picked up a pen without a second thought, ready to write down the sum. The source was all the same to her, as long as she received the money. She would hide herself away once she had received the money, regardless of whether Jackson was the father or not. It did not matter to her.

Just as she was about to write on the cheque, Mark issued a reminder, "Let me make one thing very clear first. Once I give you the money, I'll have my people send you away. Until the paternity results are released, you will not leave my sight. If the child isn't Jackson's, you're going to have to pay back every cent."

Georgina stiffened. She looked up at Mark, and her heart was gripped with fear. This man was terrifying. He was too good at scheming. She had no way of escape at all…

She was only a model. What could she possibly have to contend against Mark Tremont? She couldn't drive herself into a dead end before everything spiraled out of control. Finally, she put down her pen, "Let me be honest with you then. I don't know if Jackson's the father either. But it's true that I'm at the end of the line. Just consider me an annoying stain, and send me away however you wish, okay? Jackson isn't going to benefit if you drive me to a cliff. Don't you agree?"

Mark stared at her emotionlessly, “There’s no need for suspicion. Jackson can’t possibly be the father. You’ll know, once you’ve considered the details. There must be a reason behind your insecurity, right? You should have just told us that you were simply here to cause trouble. Why must you waste everyone’s time by resorting to such troublesome tactics? I’ll send a message to Jackson and ask him to transfer some money over to you by tonight. Consider it his payment for whatever happened between you in the past.”

Regardless of how displeased Georgina was, she had no choice but to agree. She picked up her baby and rose to her feet. “Fine,” she replied through gritted teeth, “I’ll accept this outcome. I’ll stay far, far away once I’ve received the money and I hope that we’ll never trouble each other again.”

Mark raised his hand, indicating for her to leave. Unbeknownst to him, at this very moment, everyone in the dessert shop was in a frenzy.

Tiffany, with her own eyes, had seen Mark carrying the baby out of the café, with Georgina in tow. Based on her impression, her first thought was that the child belonged to Mark. “Ari, it was my mistake. I shouldn’t have tried to set you up you with that b*stard Mark. He’s even had a child. This is too disgusting! Jackson, you should stop hanging out with Mark from now on!”

Arianne and Jackson turned towards each other and stared at each other in dismay. They made a silent pact to sell Mark out.

Tiffany was even more enraged when she saw how calm they were, “Say something! Jackson, I’m sure you’ve long been aware of Mark’s secret child. Why didn’t you say something? Why do men always act this way? How could you keep something like this? And you, Ari. Are you really alright with this? If you’re angry or upset, show it!”

Arianne quickly shook her head, “I’m not upset or angry, it’s alright… We don’t completely understand the situation just yet. I’ll question him later, okay?”

Tiffany placed her hands on her hips, “What’s there to ask? I’m sure he’s acquainted with that woman. Otherwise, why would he have taken her baby, just like that? That woman’s even followed him back to the office building across the road. What more can you say? I’m not as magnanimous as you are. I’m going to stand up for you, even if it’s the last thing I do!” She began to storm off angrily as she spoke.

Jackson hurriedly stopped her when he saw this, “Sweetie, you shouldn’t cause any more trouble. I was not aware of this. Maybe there really is another story behind all of this. If Mark really does have a secret child, I’d be the first to know. Calm down, don’t fuss…”