Ruling 571

Chapter 571

Her eyes suddenly brimmed with tears. The powder in the crystal was Rice Ball's ashes. Perhaps this gift was nothing compared to the price of a branded gift, but it was priceless to her. She never expected for Mark to put in so much effort in this.

She carefully hung the dreamcatcher above her bed, pulled out her phone, and sent Mark a message: 'Thank you.'

It was only two simple words, but it carried hundreds and thousands of sentiments. This was the first time she had ever felt moved by him. This cold and distant man had a gentle side to him after all. This time, he had really and truly showed her that he cared, and it wasn't fleeting.

Mark did not reply to her message but called her straightaway. She did not reject his call and answered it, naturally, "Thank you for your present. I'll be keeping it."

Mark sat on the chair in front of his office desk with a gentle smile on the corners of his lips, "I'm glad that you like it. I actually asked Henry to get it done while I was still there, but I wasn't too satisfied with the outcome when I got back, so I redesigned it myself. Otherwise, you would have received it sooner. On another note, the weather has been getting colder by the day in the capital. How are things on your end?"

It was like a frank conversation between old friends. Arianne was completely at ease, "It's still pretty hot over here. The weather is quite different from the capital. You'd better bundle up since it's cold over there. Don't catch a cold. And remember to dry your hair after you've showered. Anyway, I've got to go to the shop now. Bye."

The call had ended, but the smile on the corners of Mark's lips remained. The new secretary, a man named Davy Humphrey, who had just walked to the office door, became entranced. He had been working at Mark's office for a while and had just been promoted to secretary. This boss had extreme mood swings, and it had been a while since he actually smiled. However, he was in a good mood today. Was this good news or bad news? He simply couldn't tell…

"What is it?" Mark noticed Davy, and the smile on his face faded away, returning to his usual cold demeanor.

Davy gathered his courage and stepped forward, then placed the files in his arms on the desk, "There are a few things here that require your signature…"

Mark has always been cautious and prudent with his affairs. He looked through the documents meticulously before signing them, "If there's nothing else, you may go."

Davy hastily took the documents, turned around, and left. His forehead had broken out into cold sweat. It wasn't easy being a secretary. As the old saying goes, accompanying one's sovereign is like accompanying a tiger. The previous secretary was Ellie Amore, who was a drop-dead gorgeous woman. Her faults were more likely forgiven compared to a man like him. He didn't know what Mark was thinking either, promoting him to secretary. It may look like a promotion and increment on the surface, but in reality, he was constantly walking on eggshells.

At the desserts shop, Arianne was in the kitchen, preparing for work. Today, the first customer, who did not look like a customer at all, walked into the shop, "Where's Arianne?"

Arianne instantly knew who she was when she heard that voice. She walked out of the kitchen, "Nina? What are you doing here?"

Nina looked as feisty as ever; however, she was less flamboyant now. She was no longer decked in eye-catching red, but wore a simple white t-shirt and jeans instead. Her hair was long, straight, and black again. “I’m here to see you. I’ve heard that you and Mark have broken up. Have you gotten a divorce? If you have, I’m going to pounce. I’ve been eyeing the man you’ve discarded for a very long time.”

The more immodest one was with her words, the more open minded she was. Arianne giggled, “We haven’t divorced, but you can pounce on him if you like, as long as he doesn’t mind.”

Nina deliberately acted contrite. She found a table and sat down, “You haven’t gotten a divorce? Then I certainly can’t undermine you. My dad is shipping me off to a company branch outside of the country, afraid that I won’t be able to control myself. It wasn’t easy for me to weasel my way back here. I came to see you at once. Isn’t that sincere of me? You’ve stopped drawing and started a dessert shop! Let me try your pastries. Give me your very best one. Not too much though—I won’t be able to finish it, and I’m also on a diet.”

Arianne chuckled and turned back into the kitchen. Nina’s words had stirred a very bitter corner of her heart. Art was her first love and her greatest passion. She had thrown her passion away because of everything that had happened in the past.

As she personally served the dessert she had made to Nina, the other girl suddenly grabbed her hand and clicked her tongue, “Such pretty hands, the hands of an artist! And you’re using them to make pastries? Don’t you regret it at all? I can tell that you have no plans of becoming a top pastry chef in this small dessert shop. So what’s it for? It’s such a pity to waste your artistic talent. Every time I look at your hands, I’m reminded of Mark’s hands. Do you know how I first fell in love with him? His fingers were long, slender, and well-balanced. They were a very pleasing sight. The sight of him bent down over his artwork and holding his pencil with such focus had me hooked. I haven’t been able to fall for any other man because of that. It’s a sin…”

Arianne wasn't used to having her hand grabbed like that. She wiggled her hand away emotionlessly, "What's there to like about him? He's got plenty of annoying habits. There's nothing special about him, except his good looks and money. He's got a bad temper too. Forget about him. You'll find someone better. Let me give you a piece of advice, as someone who is experienced — he's like a beautiful trap. Once you're completely mesmerized by his looks and have reached the point of no return, you're doomed."

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Nina gave her a profound stare as she said, "You're still in love with him, aren't you? That's why you're trying to persuade me against going after him. I was so outwardly provocative, but you didn't seem to be angry at all. You really could've fooled me."

Arianne did not give an outright response, "Alright, if you're here to have fun, have fun. Enjoy your food, I've got work to do."

Nina stopped talking and began sampling her dessert. The first bite left her in complete shock, "This is clearly the standard of a top notch pastry chef! I'm so jealous; you're practically perfect in everything you do! My dad's always criticizing me for my lack of talent. I'm going to have to lock myself away!"

Arianne poked her head out of the kitchen, "Don't exaggerate. How could I possibly make something that good? Mark gave me a recipe from a top class pastry chef. At this stage, there's nothing to be complacent about, as long as I'm able to make this. By the way, you're not really here to see me, are you?"

Nina licked the butter off the corner of her mouth and smiled cheekily, "You could say so. I actually came here to confirm whether you and Mark were truly over. Now, I see that that's not the case, so as your friend, I need to warn you that leaving a man like him aside is very dangerous. There are plenty of women who have their eyes on him. Are you really okay with hiding away in a small place like this?"

“You really should go ahead and pursue him, if you think you can,” Arianne encouraged half-jokingly. “I would thank you if he really does give me a divorce.”

Nina was taken aback, “Are you for real?”

Arianne nodded, “Yup.”

As she paid for the bill and readied to leave, Nina turned towards the kitchen and called out, “I’m leaving! Going to the capital to see Mark. You’d better not regret this…”

She promptly left the dessert shop before Arianne could answer.

Naya couldn’t help finding Nina a strange girl, “Ari, who was that? Why is she so blunt? She seems bold enough to say anything she wants…”

Arianne chuckled nonchalantly, “That’s just how she is. No need to worry. However, it’s true that she’s in love with Mark. They knew each other before even I met Mark. Now that I think of it, I think I was probably the one responsible for cutting off their would-be love story..”

Naya disagreed, “What do you mean by that? It only counts if your husband was in love with her. It doesn’t count when he’s chosen you. You shouldn’t be too open-minded. I can see that she’s really in love with your husband too. Her eyes completely show it whenever she talks about your husband. One’s eyes always light up when talking about the person they love. Like stars.”

They'd light up like stars? Arianne was mildly distracted. Did her eyes light up like that whenever she was with Mark?

Arianne returned home that night and faced her empty room. The only thing she had to pass the time was binge-watching her favorite drama series. It didn't feel all that great to be alone. Not one bit. What freedom was there to speak of? She had left Mark but ended up trapping herself in the end.

Mark suddenly video called her, startling her. What a coincidence; she was just thinking about him, and now he was calling her.

The urgent ringtone lured her out of her thoughts. She returned to her senses and tapped on the receiver. When Mark's face appeared on the phone screen, she felt slightly startled. She turned the camera elsewhere. That way, he wouldn't be able to see her and she could at least stay calm.

Mark objected, "Why did you turn the camera away? I wanted to see you, not your table."

"I… I just had a shower, and I'm going to sleep soon. My hair's a mess," Arianne replied, coming up with a random excuse. "And I'm wearing my pajamas too. It's not convenient."

He furrowed his handsome brow, "I want to see you, no matter how you look like. Let me see you."

Helpless, she had no choice but to turn the camera back towards herself. She instinctively combed her slightly messy hair, "It's not like you've never seen me before… What's there to look at anyway? Why are you calling me in the middle of the night?"

Satisfied, he lifted his lips into a smile, “I just wanted to see you. I don’t think it’s against the rules to see your woman, right? I want to come over and see you in person. I’ll have some free time in two days. Will that be okay?”

Arianne panicked. She wondered how much meaning the words “I want to see you” contained. “I thought we agreed… that you’d give me some time? You’ve only just left…”

Mark brought the camera closer towards him, enlarging his handsome face, “But I want to see you. Don’t worry, I won’t do anything to you. I just want to see you.”

I miss you…

These three words echoed in Arianne’s mind. She suddenly stared at his image on the phone screen, transfixed. She wanted to see if there were stars in his eyes, like Naya had described. Of course, there weren’t. The lighting was bad through the phone screen, so she couldn’t see anything.

Realizing how foolish her actions were, she felt an impulse to slap herself across the face. She shouldn’t be paying attention to these things, “Well… That’s up to you then. You’re going to come anyway, regardless of what I tell you. I’m tired now, so I’m going to bed.” He had always been swift and decisive. When had he ever let her make any decisions? He may look like he was seeking her opinion, but in reality, she had no choice in the matter.

Chapter 573

Mark did not insist and waved his hand towards the camera, “Good night.”

Arianne clutched her chest as the call ended. She could feel her heart beating wildly against her chest. She had initially thought that she wasn't boy-crazy in any way and would not be bowled over by his magnetic voice or that face that she had been staring at for more than ten years. Had she gone mad?

In Mark's opinion, every time they spoke, they had grown a step closer to one another. It assured him too. Just as he was about to go to bed, his phone rang again — it was a call from Charles Moran.

This man who had a good relationship with his father would never contact him for no good reason. The first time they met up after his return to the country was for Charles ask him if he was aware of his father's b*stard… He frowned and picked up the call, "Hello? Uncle Moran."

Charles answered him, "Mark, I've heard that things between you and Arianne are a little delicate now. I was momentarily distracted and lost sight of Nia. I'm sure she'll be visiting you soon… Please excuse her. You know how she feels about you… I know that it's impossible between you two, so please send her back. She's out of control."

Mark felt a headache coming on. Did everyone know about his separation with Arianne? Nina certainly knew when to pick a time. He wasn't in the right mindset to deal with her right now. He paused for a moment and said, "Got it. Don't worry, Uncle Moran."

Charles did not end the call. Instead, he fell momentarily silent before carefully asking, "Ethan… Do you know where he's gone off to?"

Everyone had unspoken knowledge of the situation. All there was left was to piece through the last proverbial paper window. At the end of the day, Charles Moran would always be on his father's side. Did he plan on protecting Ethan? It was too late.

Mark's tone grew colder, "Uncle Moran, my father only sent you a letter informing you of his ba*tard. There's no need for you to concern yourself with that. Ethan… has disappeared from the face of this earth. Do you understand me? This is an affair concerning the Tremont family. Can't you stay out of it?"

Charles stayed silent for a moment, then spoke, "Since that's the case, I should keep my opinions to myself… You're aware of my relationship with your father. I'll have to fulfill my promise to complete the task that he's given me somehow. I'm not on Ethan's side, please don't hate me… I'm sorry for disturbing you at this hour. I've nothing more to say now. Goodbye."

After ending the call, Charles tried to call Nina, all the while trembling. Unsurprisingly, her phone was still off. His blood pressure spiked again. He typed out a message and sent it to her: 'Nia, you'd better come back. You cannot manage a man like Mark. He's very dangerous. Don't go anywhere near him. Why won't you listen to me?'

Of course, he would not receive a response. It made a half-a-century old man like him worry incessantly. He sent instructions to his assistant to book plane tickets back to the country. He had to bring Nina back to him personally. Mark was a terrible and ruthless being in his eyes. He was also afraid that Mark might hold a grudge against him and rain terror upon him. It was never a good idea to cross a Tremont.

The next morning, as Mark walked downstairs, he heard Nina's voice calling out to him from the dining room, which should have been cold and empty, "Mark, come downstairs and have breakfast."

He paused. Nina moved faster than he had expected, "What are you doing here? Didn't your dad call you? He contacted me last night and asked me to bring you home."

Nina was unperturbed, “He doesn’t want me to see you, but I don’t plan on answering his calls either. You don’t seem too happy to see me at all. I’m so disappointed…”

Mark walked towards the dining table and sat down, carrying a calm expression on his face, “Sometimes… it's better to listen to our elders. I’m going away on business for the next few days. I won’t have time for you. Go home.”

Nina narrowed her eyes, “You couldn’t be going over to see Arianne, could you? To be honest, I just arrived from visiting her. She said that she doesn’t mind if I pursue you. It’d be best if I could make you relent and divorce her. She said that. What do I have to worry about?”

Mark frowned and replied with a poker face, “She and I will never divorce. She will return to Tremont Estate within a year, at most. She is the only one who can ever be the mistress of Tremont Estate. Have I made myself clear?”

Nina still seemed nonchalant and focused on her breakfast, “Nope. Not at all.”

Mark did not bother to say anything more. He went back to his room after breakfast to change his clothes. He still had some things to take care of in the office and could not be bothered to waste his time on a woman whom he had no intentions of spending his future with.

Just as he was about to take off his pajamas, the bedroom door burst open. Nina strolled right in in a nonchalant manner, “I’m exhausted from being constantly on the move. I went to visit Arianne immediately after coming back into the country, then came straight here to see you. I never got a

chance to sleep. Your room is still most comfortable. Are you going to the office? I'll take a nap then. By the way, nice bod…" Then, she naturally lay down on Mark's bed.

An unpleasant glint flashed across Mark's eyes. He quickly headed into the walk-in closet, "If you plan on staying for the time being, please sleep in the guest room. I don't like having strangers in my room and sleeping on my bed. Don't make me throw you out."

Chapter 574

Nina seemed completely oblivious to the cold edge in his voice, "Haha… Are you really going to throw me out? Is our relationship that shallow? I was under the impression that we were close enough to share everything. Can't I sleep on your bed?"

Mark did not give an immediate reply. He emerged from the closet after changing his clothes and immediately headed downstairs. The only words he left her with was, "Our relationship isn't as intimate as you may think. My house, my rules. I will only say this once."

Nina waited for his car to leave the Tremont Estate before climbing out of his bed.

Her face no longer seemed casual and nonchalant. Deep down, she knew that this man was not to be trifled with. Nevertheless, this drove her even crazier. She was forced into giving up back when she saw how in love Mark and Arianne were. Now, they had finally separated. She refused to be satisfied and wanted to try again.

This room was filled with Mark's unique scent, which filled her with fond longing. Every time she closed her eyes, she would hope to stay here forever and live with him until the end of their days. These thoughts had bloomed from the moment she first met him. Slowly, they festered deep into her heart.

As her mind filled with thoughts, Henry arrived at the bedroom door and softly said to her, “Miss Moran, it’s a call from Mr. Moran. Please answer.”

Nina felt slightly reluctant upon being cut off from her daydream. She grunted in reply and walked downstairs. Charles had called the Tremont Estate directly. “Hello?” she answered with a bite of impatience, “What? Didn’t I tell you that I don’t want to stay out of the country?”

Charles had just landed in the airport and was trembling with rage, “You stupid little girl. I’m coming to get you right now! You never listen to me. How could I have raised such a shameless daughter? Mark is married. You’ve humiliated me by clinging onto someone else’s husband!”

Charles used to educate his daughter in an amicable manner and was never overly provoked. Nina’s temper exploded from his scolding, “If I’ve humiliated you so much, why don’t you disown me? Mark is the only thing I’ll ever want. I’ll never give him up, as long as there’s a chance. I won’t go home with you. You’ll never find me!”

Then, she ended the call immediately, grabbed her luggage bags, and left the Tremont Estate. She would follow Mark wherever he went, as long as she could avoid Charles!

Charles journeyed through the night to the capital and rushed to the Tremont Estate straightaway. The result, as expected, was all for naught. He had no choice but to go to the office and see Mark. When he arrived at the CEO’s office in Tremont Tower, Mark icily said, “She was still in the Tremont Estate when I left. I don’t know where she’s run off to now. I hope that you’ll take her away as soon as possible. I don’t have time to take care of your daughter.”

Charles could sense Mark’s change in attitude towards him. He had no time for a detailed analysis in the midst of so many twists and turns, “She must be hiding from me… Please consider my torment in this

old age; contact her for me and trick her into coming here. I'll take her away at once. I won't give you any more trouble. Please, I beg you…"

Mark paused in thought, pulled out his phone, and gave Nina a call. Nina would only reject her father's calls and was always ready to answer Mark's. Nina was overjoyed when she received his call, "Mark, what is it? I'm doing some shopping."

Mark glanced at Charles, who was next to him, and calmly replied, "Come over to my office. I have something to discuss with you."

Nina wasn't suspicious at all. She openly agreed.

Charles heaved a sigh of relief once he ended the call, "Thank you…"

Mark didn't answer and focused on his work.

Not long after, Nina arrived at the office. She realized that she had been taken for a ride just as she pushed the door open. Charles was ready, having brought two bodyguards along with him. The big, brawny bodyguards moved instantly and restrained Nina, "You're coming with us, miss."

Nina struggled profusely, "Let me go! I won't go home! I refuse to live my life according to your rules. I'm not a three-year-old anymore. I don't need you to make all of my decisions for me, I have my own opinions!"

Charles Moran said goodbye to Mark with a sullen look on his face and forcibly dragged Nina out of the building. Nina argued strongly during the car ride to the airport, “Why do you always have to control me like this? You never objected to my interactions with Mark before, so why? Is it simply because he’s married? But he and Arianne have a lot of underlying issues now. No one can say for sure that they’ll stay together for long. Why can’t I take my chance and replace her?”

Charles’s chest rose and fell with rage, “What do you know? The most attractive things in the world are the most dangerous. It’s the same with humans. With your brains, you’ll end up dead if you get together with him, and you won’t even know how!”

Nina had some knowledge of the Tremont family history, “What are you talking about? The Tremont family’s shady activities only happened in the previous generation. Hasn’t Mark been doing honest business? You can’t bundle him along with his father and grandfather’s crimes. Besides… you used to be so close to his father. Are your hands really all that clean themselves?”

Chapter 575

Never, throughout Charles Moran’s long and storied life, had he ever slapped his daughter across the face.

The sharp crack of a wallop faded, revealing a stupefied Nina with her hand swinging to a gradually reddening, puffing cheek. Her eyes, trained on her father, were strewn with earnest bemusement.

“Why… Why did you hit me?! Was I wrong?” she demanded. “There’s only our people in this room, so why are you acting like I shouldn’t have said that?”

Charles gulped down the pill his bodyguard had passed to him. When his nerves finally settled a little, he answered, “This — this is the same man who killed his half-brother without batting an eyelash. Who are

you to think that he would go easy on you? If he likes you, you'll become the ruler of his heart. Otherwise, no amount of ingratiation will save you from his wrath!

"You are my only daughter, Nina. Do you think I can stomach watching you go down a path of self-destruction? Arianne Wynn may look like some unimpressive, nondescript little gal, but she's someone Mark himself has watched over for a decade or more. Who are you in comparison? Listen to me very closely, Nina. Put your mind on your own damn marriage and do not — do not! — even think about latching yourself onto Mark Tremont ever again!"

Nina said nothing. She knew very little about the man, so all these appalling bits of news of his belligerence were terrifying to a little woman such as herself. Suddenly, her composure failed her.

The guilt of hurting his daughter caught up to Charles, and his tone softened. "Nia, I just want what's good for you. We should not fly too close to the sun when we know we can't, and the Tremonts are a bunch you cannot beat," he admonished. "More importantly, passion begets hatred. I'm afraid that your passion will lead you to harm Arianne, and then Mark… He won't leave you unpunished. You must stop yourself before it's too late, do you understand me? I don't believe that you're anywhere close to a bad person, but jealousy drives people mad, Nia. Please, listen to me."

The fire in Nina's eyes died. "B-but I… I hate it! I hate that she's just some orphan with nothing to her name, whose looks aren't something mine cannot triumph over, whose family background is way below mine, yet I'm seen as lesser than her. I just don't understand why I've lost. But… But I understand what you're trying to tell me, Dad, and I won't do anything that would worry you again. From now on, I'll distance myself from Mark Tremont."

What defeated her was neither the desperation undergirding her father's advice nor the news of Mark's severity and capacity for cruelty, but the immutable fact that Arianne had been by Mark's side for a decade and longer. That was a bond that Nina could never forge, nor hope to emulate.

After settling his more urgent agendas by the evening, Mark texted Arianne: ‘You and me, dinner at 7. Sounds good?’

No instant reply came, not that Mark was waiting. He knew that the café was busy at this hour. Instead, he instructed his secretary, Davy, to pack his bags before heading to the airport.

By the time Arianne noticed his message, it was already five, late in the evening, when traffic in the café was much more sparse.

Arianne reasoned that he must be in the middle of his flight by now and no message would come through, so she eschewed replying to him altogether.

Arianne’s café usually closed by nine at night. Even if Mark reached her place by seven, she was skeptical that they would have their dinner exactly then. The most likely time to close shop should be eight, she reasoned, and that extra hour should be enough to rake in a lot more money.

She never liked her inert days back in the Tremont Estate, when she passed the time with idleness. Ever since she came here, Arianne had been able to peruse every minute to its fullest.

Arianne did not plan to reject Mark’s invitation for dinner on behalf of his special gift. He gave her a hand, and now she was indebted to him. Hence, she decided that paying for his dinner later would be the best chance to display her gratitude and to erase the debt she owed.

Mark came to the café by half-past seven, startling an unsuspecting Arianne with his sudden presence. “W-w-why are you here?” she stammered.

Mark found a seat and made himself comfortable. “Didn’t you read my text a few hours ago? Oh, well. I am happy to wait till you close shop.”

“Psst, should we, you know, close earlier today?” Naya whispered.

Arianne espied the clock on the wall and decided to stick to her original plan. “No, we close at eight. Eight o’clock sharp.”

Unfortunately, Arianne’s plan did not account for the unexpected. With the arid heat outside that was typical of summer, the café, which was fully air-conditioned, brought on an influx of youngsters that wanted to chill after work with a cup of a refreshing, cold beverage. A few working adults, too, had chosen to rush through their assignments with a cup of coffee and the café’s free AC, since this would save some electricity at home.

Soon, the clock struck eight, yet the café was still brimming with customers.

Arianne found closing her shop impossible. She had always waited until every customer left. When that was coupled with her reluctance to spur her patrons into hastening their meals, the unexpected traffic quickly turned into a pickle.

In the end, she shot an apologetic look at Mark and suggested, “Maybe you should rest in your hotel for the time being? I have a feeling this is gonna take a looooooong while…”

Mark was uncharacteristically amiable today. “No worries. I’ll wait here.”

“Dang, that’s so sweet,” Naya murmured to Arianne under her breath. “Your husband is not even the slightest bit as mean as you make him out to be… Instead, he’s hot, rich, and super considerate! For a good man like him, you really should try looking the other way when it comes to his flaws, Ari.”

Arianne could only look on with silent resignation. Mark was definitely not “super considerate”; he was just an incredibly possessive man whose generosity was only enough to give Arianne one measly year of freedom. Even now, Arianne could not admit to her coworkers that she planned to leave after that period expired — she was afraid that Naya and Tanya would panic at the prospect of losing their jobs.

Killing his target softly had always been Mark’s signature move. He loved closing her into a corner with slow but sure steps, leaving her with no way to escape him.

Arianne was finally able to close the café when it was almost ten.

Apart from Arianne herself, Naya was the last to leave. Since her husband did not have to work overtime today, he was able to watch over their kids, thus giving Naya a bit more leeway to return home late.

Arianne clicked the door to the café shut and turned to face Mark. “My apologies for keeping you waiting. Now, what would you like to have for dinner?”

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Mark paused thoughtfully, “Actually, let’s not go out to eat. It’s a little late and there’s only the two of us. We’ll go to your place and cook up whatever’s available. Don’t you know how to make ramen?”

He still remembered the ramen she made? That was the only meal that she made very well. Furthermore, it was only delicious by her own standards and it would largely depend on whether it turned out good or not, “Okay… It doesn’t taste that good anyway, so you’ll have to put up with it. I’ll free up some time tomorrow and buy you a meal to thank you for the present.”

Mark frowned but did not respond. He could sense her refusal to owe him anything. This made him upset. However, when he remembered that she would return to him in a year, he did not quibble with her.

Arianne turned on the air-conditioner in the living room when they arrived in her condo then immediately went into her kitchen, “Wait here, I’ll make some ramen for you.”

However, Mark did not sit down and wait for her. Instead, he followed her into the kitchen, stood on one side, and watched her cook, “Actually, this small house of yours feels a bit like home sometimes.”

Arianne’s heart skipped a few beats. What was he trying to say? This current situation felt like home? Their home?

She pushed him out to conceal her panic, “Enough, go out and enjoy the air-conditioning. The kitchen is hot. You’re here on business, aren't you?”

Mark nodded seriously, “Mm, to see you.”

Arianne had initially thought that he had made this trip for work and to see her at the same time. She did not expect such an honest reply out of him. Did he make this trip just to see her? She had promised to take a year off to consider this, simply because it was a convenient plan. She didn't actually intend on going back to him. Things between them might deteriorate even more in a year.

For some reason, the more casual he was about it, the more unsettled she felt, feeling guilty for lying to him.

Arianne served the ramen on the table once she was done cooking. There was only one bowl, "Enjoy. I've already eaten, so I'm not hungry. I'm going to shower now."

Mark sat down and accepted the fork that she gave him with a small smile on his face, seeming to be in a particularly good mood. After taking a bite, he teased her, "Despite making desserts for such a long time, your cooking skills are still quite horrible."

Arianne pretended not to hear him. She grabbed her pajamas and headed into the bathroom. She still had to serve this guy after working in the shop for an entire day. She cooked ramen for him, and he dared to grumble about it!

By the time she was finished with her shower, the dining table was cleared. Even the bowl and cutleries were washed. The kitchen was spotless, with not a single water stain in sight. She wasn't sure if Mark's germaphobia was a good thing or not…

"Do you have a spare toothbrush? It's late. I won't be going back to the hotel. Can't be bothered to run around."

Arianne was taken aback. She pulled out a brand new toothbrush from her bedroom cupboard, “Here. There’s only one bed. Will you be sleeping on the couch or shall I?”

Mark accepted the toothbrush and stared calmly at her, “Aren’t we sharing a bed? We’re not divorced.”

A sense of unease flashed across her eyes. She lifted her hand and tucked a lock of hair behind her ear, as a means to cover up, “Sure, but… remember what you’ve promised me. If you break the rules, everything we’ve agreed on will be void.”

He naturally picked up her cup, “I know. I won’t touch you if you don’t want me to. It’s only a year. I can wait.”

Arianne wanted to remind him that that was the cup she had used for brushing her teeth. Wasn’t he supposed to be a germaphobe? Did he suddenly forget all of that when he came here? She was too afraid to remind him…

By the time Mark was done with his shower, Arianne was already fast asleep. The room light was turned off, and only the hum of the air-conditioner could be heard. However, Mark’s footsteps were abrupt. Even his actions in getting into bed sounded crystal clear.

Arianne reminded herself not to reject his request to stay the night in order to prevent him from causing another ruckus and forcing her to go back to the Tremont Estate. However, she could not ignore the fact that a man was sleeping right next to her. They were both healthy adults. Lying with him as man and woman made her afraid of causing a spark from the slightest movement. When that happened, she would not be able to stop him with a few choice words.

Of all things, Mark had to drape his hand over her waist. She took a deep breath, feeling the immense weight of his arm. She couldn't sleep at all. She wanted to turn to her side and change her sleeping position, but he corresponded to her. Just as she turned to her side, he lifted his arm, waited for her to lie down in place, then put his arm back on her…

Unable to resist, she spoke up, "Quit squashing me with your arm… I can't sleep. It's too heavy."

Mark seemed to be well aware that she was still awake. He was not surprised with her sudden outburst at all, "You never complained about the weight before."

Her face burned up immediately. When did this fellow pick up tactics on "starting his engine" whenever he pleased? There was obviously a subtle meaning behind his words. She couldn't sleep anyway, so she tried to have a normal chat with him, "Is Eric alright? His stomach is so weak. How did this even happen?"

Mark was rather cooperative, "He used to toy with his life by drinking a lot. He brought this onto himself. He'll have to take care of himself for the next half of his life. Jackson has brought Tiffany to officially meet his parents. I'm guessing that an engagement party will be coming soon. You'll be coming home by then, right? Jackson's father is back."

Chapter 577

Jackson's father? Arianne had never heard of him and felt curious, "Of course, I'm going. His dad? I've never heard of him…"

Mark did not explain too much, "His family situation is complicated, very complicated. When you come back to the capital, stay at the Tremont Estate. You can see Henry and Mary too."

He didn't give Arianne any chance to refuse. He knew that she wasn't a fickle person, and probably missed Mary and Henry. Hence, he used them as an excuse for her to go back to the Tremont Estate. She shouldn't have any reason to refuse if it was only temporary… right?

"We'll talk about it when the time comes. I'm tired. Good night," Arianne closed her eyes after that. She really was exhausted. After all, she had been working throughout the day.

Mark did not say anything more. His vision was clear despite the darkness, as though he wasn't sleepy at all. His woman was lying right next to him, but he couldn't touch her. Of course, he wouldn't be able to sleep. A small flame flickered in his heart, hotter than the 40°C summer weather.

The next day, Arianne dashed into the bathroom once she woke up. She was still in a daze as she sat on the toilet bowl, reminiscing the shameful dream she had last night. She wiped her face, feeling slightly ashamed. This was the first time she had ever had that kind of a dream while she was in bed with Mark, after so many years. She began to suspect that he had done some things to her while she was asleep…

Mark remained asleep as she got ready for work. It was a little strange for someone who had always been strict with time; however, she suspected nothing. It was time to go to work.

She decided to clean up the kitchen before things got busy at the shop. A cleaner, spotless kitchen put her in a better mood at work. Naya came in to help and spotted something strange on her neck, "Your neck…"

Arianne was confused, "What's wrong with my neck?"

Naya blushed, “It… Mark… Did your husband spend the night at your place last night? Looks like he’s left a hickey while you weren’t aware. You’d better cover it up. There are people here…”

Arianne’s mind went numb. Was that dream she had… not a dream at all?

She checked out her neck with her phone and managed to make out a red hickey. She had gone too easy on Mark… Would she have a reason to flip out on Mark if he really had touched her last night?

She went off to buy a headscarf on purpose, then gave Mark a resentful call. His tone sounded lazy from the other end, as if he had just woken up, “Hello?”

“Last night… Did you… Did you do something to me…” Arianne couldn’t bring herself to spit out the words.

“Do what to you? Hmm?” Mark seemed to be doing this on purpose.

“Don’t you know what you’ve done? What happened to my neck?” She was annoyed.

“Neck? There’s a mark on your neck? Oh… I understand. I’m not allowed to ‘eat’, but does that mean I can’t have a taste too? Don’t worry. I didn’t do anything else. It doesn’t count as going against the rules.”

Arianne ended the call, afraid that she would end up arguing with him. She really had been too easy on this guy!

The capital.

Tiffany energetically called for a cab to the office. It wasn't easy for her to get a job. She certainly didn't want to be late on the first day!

She had just stepped into the company office when her phone rang. She pushed the elevator buttons frustratedly as she answered the call, "Hello? Jackson, I'm at the office now. I don't have time to talk to you. I'm going to be late. It wasn't easy for me to get this job. Don't mess this up for me. I'll talk to you after work. Love you!" She ended the call with a kissing noise.

The call ended before Jackson could react to it. He stared at his phone, speechless. Then, he chuckled indulgently. It looked like moving in together would have to wait. Tiffany was now fully focused on her job and had no time to think of anything else. He was handling the engagement party all on his own too. She really didn't seem to put any heart into it.

For some strange reason, Tiffany felt as if she had been more at ease at the café, probably because she hadn't had an office job in a while. Working at the café was tiring, but not to the point where she realized that she was working for someone else. She was even shouted at and ordered about, all because she was a newbie. She never really did any actual work for the entire day and simply acted as a runner. She even had to make coffee and tea.

She wouldn't have cared if these orders came from a regular colleague, but these orders came from her Department Supervisor. The excuse was that she was new and had to get used to the working environment while also establishing a good relationship with her colleagues. No matter how bad her

temper was, she had no choice but to grit her teeth and act as a runner, because she was afraid that her boss might make things difficult for her, and she would be out of a job.

Near the end of the work day, everyone else in the department gradually clocked off. She had expected to be released, finally allowing her to go home to Jackson so that she could hug her “long suffering husband”. However, someone stopped her — it was a colleague from her department, Henrietta Little, “Hey, newbie. Print these documents out for me. I’ll need them for tomorrow. I’ve got a dinner party and won’t have time to do overtime. This should take more than half an hour to complete. You do it.”

Chapter 578

Tiffany’s patience was nearly at an end. What gave her the right to make her do overtime work that wasn’t supposed to be hers in the first place? Henrietta had clearly been yapping on the phone during working hours and watching anime. That’s why she couldn’t finish her work. She swallowed her anger and amicably said, “I have something to do too. I can’t help you with your overtime work. You’ll have to take care of it yourself. I’ve gotta go.”

Henrietta dumped the heavy pile of documents on Tiffany’s desk, “You’ll have to do it, either way. Or do you think that the office is just a place for you to enjoy the air-conditioning? You should at least make our money’s worth for the air-conditioning bill. Shouldn’t you consider your contributions to the company for the day and give the company some worth for your existence? I’ve only asked you to photocopy some documents, yet you’re dawdling away. Total newbies are the most difficult to teach!”

Was it really her intention to not do any tangible work today? Tiffany completely lost it, “First, I am not a newcomer in this industry. I have work experience. I’ve worked as a fashion designer. I am only a new employee in this company. I don’t need anyone holding my hand. Second, it’s not that I don’t want to do actual work but that the department supervisor wants me to get used to the working environment and my colleagues. I’ve been working as a runner for all of you for the entire day. I don’t ask for any thanks, only that you don’t take it for granted. Third, my name isn’t ‘newbie’, it’s Tiffany. You can’t even remember my name; we’re definitely not friendly enough to remember each other’s names. What gives you the right to make me do overtime? You are not my superior. It’s not within your right to order me around. Working hours are now over. The boss doesn’t even have the right to order me around. What makes you think you can?”

Henrietta was so enraged that the colour on her face changed from green to white. She stayed quiet for a long time, unable to say a word.

Tiffany couldn't be bothered to deal with her. She grabbed her bag and left.

Henrietta's eyes landed on Tiffany's handbag. That bag was a limited edition piece from a luxury brand and cost at least five figures. How could anyone with a few thousand dollars' worth of salary possibly afford such an expensive bag?

Back at White Water Villa, Tiffany threw herself into Jackson's arms, "I'm so pissed. I worked as a runner for the entire department for the day. When it was the end of the work day, someone even asked me to do her overtime work for her! I don't know how much more of this I can take. It's not like I'm a completely ignorant newbie. Is it that hard to be a fashion designer this year?"

Jackson, wearing his apron, had been cooking when he turned around to hold her, "Why must you endure this? I've told you to come and work for me, but you won't listen. You insisted on getting your own job instead. Now, I'm sure you're aware of how difficult it is, right? No one would dare bully you, the lady boss in my company. Alright, alright, there there. Dinner will be ready soon. I rushed right home after work to make this for you. I've made all of your favorites. You can always change to another company if you can't take it anymore. Don't be discouraged."

Tiffany pecked him on the cheek, "You're the best. Don't worry, I'll keep going. If they keep making me their runner instead of giving me actual work after a week, I'll quit and switch to a different company. I'll just start all over again. I'm not scared."

Jackson showed Tiffany a picture of the engagement party venue during dinner, “What do you think of this venue for our engagement party? You decide. We can change it if you don’t like it. We have a month to arrange this, and we’ll keep changing until you’re satisfied.”

Tiffany gave it an overall look, “You decide. I’m not picky. Just don't make it too extravagant. We still have to survive. It’s only the engagement party, not the wedding. There’s no need to turn it into a huge event.”

Her absent-mindedness upset Jackson, “Is our engagement party not important to you at all? You said you didn’t want to get married so soon; we wouldn’t have needed the engagement party if it weren’t for that. The West family can afford to foot this bill. It won’t affect our survival. You don’t have to worry. Mark is with Arianne now, so I’m sure that she’s aware of our engagement. She’ll definitely be there. You should at least try and make her jealous, right? I can give you anything you want. I am not lacking in that department.”

Tiffany slammed on the desk when he mentioned Arianne, “Are you an idiot? There was nothing grand about Arianne’s wedding with Mark. Instead of making Ari jealous, I’d be upsetting her. Can we not do this? I don’t want some grand ceremony. Just get me an engagement ring, it will do, and we can take a two-day vacation. Wouldn’t that be enough? It saves both money and effort…”

Jackson was close to a breakdown from trying to navigate through her brain circuitry. He rubbed the space between his brows, “Honey… While there was nothing grand about Arianne and Mark’s marriage, the Tremonts want for nothing. Are we supposed to follow their preferences too? Besides, if Arianne goes back to the Tremont Estate with Mark, you can stop worrying. Mark will make it up to her wherever he needs to. He won’t treat her unfairly. Are you that much of a worry-wart? I can understand that your heart aches for Arianne, but you can’t… drag yourself down too, alright? Furthermore, you’re causing grief to me as well. Shouldn’t you consider my feelings from time to time too? Even if I didn’t want anything extravagant, my mother wouldn’t agree.”

Chapter 579

After some thought, Tiffany began to think that it was impossible for her to have a secret engagement. After all, the Wests were an affluent family. Jackson's parents were still alive as well. If Mark's parents were around, they would never have had such a quiet marriage. The elites require dignity. She couldn't be selfish, "Alright… I'm sorry. That never occurred to me. You can do whatever you like. I've got to go home after dinner, and I have to get up early for work tomorrow. I'm not like you, I can't sleep whenever I want to. I'm so busy that my feet practically don't touch the ground. Sigh…"

Jackson felt a little resentful, "We mentioned moving in together… Looks like we're not going to be discussing it at all? Am I some kind of stepping stone to you? It's not like you can't go to work if you live with me. I can even drive you to work in the morning…"

Tiffany shot him a fierce glare, "This wouldn't have been a problem if you would actually let me sleep at night, but you won't. It's always late at night by the time you're done. Who could possibly put up with that? We'll talk when my job is more stable. We'll be officially engaged by then, and I can officially move in. We won't attract gossip either. Alright, it's decided."

Jackson drove Tiffany home after dinner. He still looked very sullen when they arrived downstairs. Seeing this, Tiffany wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him passionately. Then, she patted him on the cheek, acting frivolous, "I'll take good care of you once I have the time. Don't sulk."

Jackson chuckled helplessly, "Alright, fine. Go home. Get a good night's rest, since you're tired. Call me if you need anything. I'll always be there."

Tiffany paused in her footsteps, turned around, and sent him a bright smile, "Jackson, meeting you has been my greatest fortune."

Jackson raised his brow, “Is it fortune or a trap? Don’t make me wait too long. I’ll be on my way to a nightclub if you don’t come over to my place in three days. I’m a healthy male. I won’t be able to resist my burning loins on my own for too long…”

Tiffany’s romanticism was completely destroyed by Jackson’s flippant response. She placed her hands on her hips and scoffed, “See if you dare! I’ll tell your mother if you do. Try it if you don’t believe me!”

Jackson was afraid of getting thrashed, so he hastily drove off after saying, “Get an early night’s rest. I’ll be doing overtime at the office. You’re always welcome to give me a video call to check up on me!”

The corners of Tiffany’s lips were still plastered with a smile when she walked into the house. Seeing this, Lillian smiled and asked, “Did Jackson send you home? Look at that smile blooming on your face… How was work today?”

“Not bad, I’m a little tired. I’m going to rest after a shower. Have you had dinner, mom?”

Lillian draped herself indolently on the couch as she watched television, “I have. Do you really think that I’d starve to death in your absence? Your mother has learned how to cook now, but not very well. Not as good as that chef of yours, at least. You’ve really caught a gem. Ask Jackson over to the house this weekend. I want to sample his cooking.”

She would settle this at a closer date. Tiffany gave a half-hearted response and went back to her room. She was in no hurry for a shower and gave Arianne a video call, “Ari, Jackson and I are getting engaged. I’m feeling a little nervous. You’re coming back, right?”

Arianne was in the middle of dinner with Mark at a restaurant. It was pretty quiet in the private room, “Of course, I am. You’re my one and only best friend. How could I possibly miss your engagement party? Don’t worry. It’s just something we’ll all have to experience. I’d hope that you would have a grand wedding with the person you love. I’m happy as long as you’re happy.”

Mark’s expression stiffened. What was Arianne implying? He hadn’t given her a thing for their wedding. Hadn’t she married the man she loved too? She seemed to be implying that she wasn’t happy and hoped for Tiffany’s happiness instead…

Entirely focused on her conversation with Tiffany, Arianne was completely unaware of the changes in Mark’s expressions. After the conversation, she made up an excuse, saying that she needed to go to the washroom. She secretly paid the bill at the same time. After all, she had promised to treat Mark to dinner and couldn’t give him any chance to pay for it.

Mark had already put down his cutlery by the time she returned to the private room. She picked up her bag and said, “I’ve paid the bill. Let’s go home?”

Mark nodded, got up, and walked out. When they got into the car, he suddenly said, “To make it up to you, I’ll throw you a grand wedding when you’re back in the capital and let everyone know that you’re mine.”

Arianne was in shock before becoming panicked. She never really considered going back to the capital with him, but he’d already made plans for her…

“Um… You don’t have to. It’s been quite a while after all.”

Mark was determined to carry out his decision, “I must. I will make up for the things I haven’t given you. That’s all. I’ll take you home.”

He said that he would “take her home”, and not “go home with her”. Arianne heard it. He did not plan on staying the night. She heaved a sigh of relief.

Once they arrived downstairs at her building, Mark remained in the car. He winded the window down and stared at her, “Get an early night’s rest. Good night.”

Arianne wasn’t used to this gentle side of him. She nodded awkwardly, “Mmm… Good night.”

Chapter 580

Just before her shower, Arianne was taken aback when she noticed an extra toothbrush in the cup on her sink. Mark had used it before. After some thought, she decided not to throw it away. There was no harm in leaving it there anyway. She refused to admit that she had unconsciously acknowledged the possibility of Mark staying the night at her house from time to time. That’s why she left the toothbrush alone…

She checked her phone after stepping out of the bathroom and found a missed call from a strange number. It could have been a spam call if it had only been one call, but this number had called her seven times. She didn’t hear it, as she had been in the bathroom.

Suspicious, she returned the call, and it was soon answered. A familiar-sounding middle-aged man’s voice spoke from the receiver, “Miss Wynn, what took you so long to answer the phone? I’m a condo security guard. There’s some people here to see you, claiming to be your family members. I wasn’t sure if I should let them in, so I tried calling you. It’s a middle-aged woman and an old woman on a wheelchair.”

A middle-aged woman and an old woman on a wheelchair? That sounded even more suspicious to Arianne. The voice on the phone actually sounded like the security guard's, but she had no idea how he managed to get her contact details.

It had been ten years since she had last heard the words "family". After her father's death, she had become an orphan and was raised by Mark. Where did these two come from?

She changed her clothes and went downstairs to the lobby entrance. When she arrived, the security guard welcomed her as if she were his savior, "You're finally here. I was close to being scolded to death. It's not like I don't want to let them up, but I can't. I have to be responsible for the safety of the tenants in this building. Besides, they don't even live here."

Arianne stared at the middle-aged woman and old woman, and confirmed that they were strangers to her as well, "I don't know who they are. Besides… I don't have any relatives."

The security guard slapped his thigh, "Thank goodness that I didn't let them in then. However… they gave me your number. How did they get your phone number?"

That was suspicious. Arianne frowned and walked forward to ask, "I'm sorry, but who are you?"

The middle-aged woman surveyed her, and her eyes lit up, "You're Arianne, aren't you? Your father was Zachary Wynn, right?"

Arianne was shocked. She nodded numbly. It had been a while since anyone else had mentioned her father's name. She felt slightly apprehensive, and the vortex of misgivings in her heart began to swell.

The middle-aged woman wiped the sweat off her brow when she nodded, "Then we're in the right place. Let us inside first. It's too hot out here. I might be able to stand it, but this old woman can't. This is your grandmother, and I am your aunt. Hurry. Let us in. Your security guard is too strict. I'd been talking my mouth off and he still refused to let us in. Like I said, I wasn't lying, was I?"

Arianne instinctively tried to defend the security guard, "It's not that; he's responsible for the safety of the entire building too. I may be living here, but the unit does not belong to me. I'm only renting it. It's hot out here, come into my house then…" She wasn't sure of the situation anyway. How on earth did she end up with an aunt and a grandmother? She had to find out.

She only remembered her father, Zachary Wynn, and Helen Cameran, who had left them long ago for another man. She had never seen her grandparents, aunts or relatives. Now, as she stared at the two women who claimed to be her aunt and grandmother, she felt confused instead of excited. After all, relatives were like distant strangers to her. She wasn't used to bringing strangers into her house. It was simply due to the fact that they had mentioned her and her father's names and that the weather was hot outside.

After saying goodbye to the security guard, they went into her home. The old woman in the wheelchair, who had been silent the entire time, finally spoke up, "Such a tiny bird cage. Mark Tremont is certainly stingy, and it's rented too!"

Mark Tremont? The old woman knew who Mark was? Did that mean that they were aware of her marriage to Mark? Were they also aware that he had raised her? Why didn't they take her in years ago then? Why were they seeking her out now?

Arianne was completely lost. She could no longer help herself and asked, “Who are you?”

The middle-aged woman, who spoke in an accent from the capital, answered, “Didn’t I just tell you? I’m your aunt. This is your grandmother. Your father insisted on marrying Helen Cameran years ago, but your grandmother disapproved. So, your father took Helen and lived on his own. Helen was from out of town, so your grandmother turned her nose up against her. It’s been many years since we’ve severed ties. I got married to someone far away and took your grandmother out of the capital along with me a while back. We don’t even know when your father died. We would’ve taken you away if we had known sooner. However, we heard that someone from the Tremont family had taken you in, which seemed like a pretty good situation. Now, you’ve even become Mrs. Tremont. However, you really are falling short. You’ve refused to stay in the Tremont Estate and have come all the way here to this horrid little bird cage.”

They weren’t aware of her father’s death? That’s why they never took her? Arianne poured two glasses of warm water for the women. She did not explain her reasons for moving here, as she really didn’t feel like bringing up the myriad of issues she had faced, “So… Why have you come here?”