Ruling 641

Chapter 641

Eric carefully thought back to previous events. Tanya's wound certainly did not come from doing chores at home. This meant it happened in the office. He knew that apart from cleaning, Tanya would also make and serve tea to her colleagues. He knew she was being friendly since she wanted to learn fashion design from her colleagues so he did not put much thought into it. After all, there was nothing strange about it. However, upon second thought, he connected all the events and resignation and realized the situation was not as simple as it seemed. He asked sternly, "Did someone in the company bully you? Be honest!"

Tanya bit her lips, refusing to speak.

Tiffany was so enraged that she began spouting profanities. "F*ck! Is that even a question? They must have bullied her! Eric, I put her in your care. She's with you most of the time, can't you even look out for her? Tan, what happened? If you refuse to tell me, I'll tell Ari about this. You know what she's like. If she finds out about this, she won't let the matter go!"

Tanya panicked when Tiffany mentioned Arianne. "No… Don't tell Ari. She's unwell and pregnant. She shouldn't get angry. Fine, I'll tell you. Ricky told me to learn fashion design from my colleagues so I can transition from doing janitorial work to the fashion design department. That's what I want as well. Initially, I thought my colleagues would teach me. However, as time passed, it's clear that they have no intention of even teaching me the basics, let alone everything else. They would only make me serve them drinks, buy food for them, and run their errands. Not only that, but they disdain me for coming from the country and think I'm a country bumpkin. They accuse me of using a sob story to manipulate Ricky into pitying me. They deliberately scalded me, locked me in the washroom… All these happen regularly. It's clear they don't think I fit in the company. I didn't want to mention it because I didn't want to trouble Ricky. That's why I decided to resign. I'm fine really. I can survive just fine on my own, and it's really not that bad. I really don't want to trouble you anymore."

Not that bad? Tiffany and Eric exchanged a look. They felt uncomfortable. The wound on Tanya's hand looked serious. The area around the scab looked red and angry. It was clearly inflamed and must be

extremely painful. However, she chose to silently endure it. Even when she could no longer endure it, she had left silently so as to not cause any trouble. Just how nice was she that she suffered so much from the bullying?

Eric did not expect something like that was happening right under his nose. He had asked Tanya to learn fashion design from her colleagues out of kindness. Moreover, he did not intend to let her be a cleaning lady forever. It's not like the company was lacking in cleaning ladies. It was just a temporary fix. After a long silence, he asked, "Who did this? Tell me."

Tanya shook her head. "Don't ask, Ricky. I don't want to pursue the matter. I don't fit in this city, but I'll try to adapt. I won't be beaten down so easily."

Tiffany's eyes brimmed with tears. "How can you be so stupid? Why are you defending your bullies? It's bad enough as it is! Those people clearly have an attitude problem. Eric needs to reorganize his company as well. It's not just for your sake so tell us!"

Faced with their insistence, Tanya had no choice but to reveal the identities of her bullies. Most people simply watched, there were only three people who really bullied her.

After Eric noted their names, he walked into the room and picked up Tanya's luggage. "Come home with me. I swear that this won't happen again!"

Chapter 642

Before Tanya could respond, Tiffany had pulled her out of the room.

When they passed by the front desk, the woman who had been cracking nuts asked, “So, you’re won’t be staying then?”

Tanya nodded. “Sorry, I won’t be staying here!”

“Why on earth are you greeting someone like that?” Tiffany grumbled softly, “Do you have any idea what kind of place this is? My god, this isn’t a motel. This is a place for pimps and prostitutes. You’re like fresh meat in the den of a pack of hungry wolves! Who knows what might happen if we didn’t find you today?”

Tanya shuddered in fear. “Are you serious? I didn’t know…”

Eric threw her luggage into the car. “You’re seriously naive. Let me tell you this; just because you’re nice to people, it doesn’t mean that they’ll reciprocate it. Some people will take you for granted no matter how nice you are to them. You have to be more assertive and learn to stand up for yourself. Being overly kind won’t do you any good.”

Tiffany’s phone suddenly rang at this moment. She quickly answered it. “Hello?”

Jackson’s worried voice could be heard at the end of the line. “Where are you? There’s no one at home. I just got home from work.”

Tiffany paused for two seconds before saying, “I’m out. I have some matters to attend to. I’ll be home soon.” She had assumed Jackson would be home late tonight. After all, it had become part of his regular schedule. He no longer had lunch with her and only came home late at night.

Jackson, who was unaware of Tiffany's thoughts, reminded her to be careful before ending the call.

Tanya felt very apologetic. "You should go home, Tiffany. I've messed with your schedule."

Tiffany felt sympathetic toward Tanya. She patted Tanya's shoulder. "Then… I'll leave her in your hands, Eric. Don't let this happen again. I'll let you deal with those bullies in the office. I won't and certainly can't interfere with your company matters."

Eric nodded. "Got it. You go ahead. Don't make Jackson worry."

When they arrived home, Eric dug out some ointment and carefully applied it on Tanya's burns.

Her hand trembled from the pain, but she stubbornly bit her lip, refusing to make a sound.

He instinctively softened his touch. "This will only take a minute. This ointment is pretty effective. It'll get better after you apply it for a few days."

Tanya smiled. "It doesn't hurt. Thank you."

Her smile was so pure that it looked angelic. How could there be people so wicked that they could bully someone so kind? He said through clenched teeth, “You’re staying with me from now on. No moving out. I’ll deal with the issues at work. If anyone takes advantage of you, tell me about it. Don’t keep it all to yourself. Understand?”

His tone was commanding, and she instinctively nodded. “Yes…”

Tiffany received pictures and information from the private detective on her way home. The woman with Jackson was not as simple as she seemed. Not only was the woman better looking than her, but she was better educated as well. The woman spent much of her time abroad, studying arts. Her name was Bernadette Legrand, and she was a well-known artist with an established reputation. The only advantage she had over this Bernadette was her youth. Bernadette was 29 years old, much older than her.

Chapter 643

Based on the pictures, Jackson had been meeting up with this woman at all sorts of places. It looked like a lovers’ rendezvous. The woman was smiling joyfully in every picture. Moreover, apart from going to the office and coming home, every time he was out, he had met with that woman. Most importantly, he had even visited that woman at the hotel a few times. One of the visits was from this morning. Tiffany had entered the office first while Jackson took his time. He had gone to see that woman to deliver breakfast to her at the hotel.

Five-star hotels usually provided breakfast, and yet, it seemed he doted on the woman so much that he even personally delivered breakfast to her. Then, as an afterthought, he had probably brought an extra set and gave it to her in the office. To think, at that time, she had been moved by his gesture. What a joke!

Tiffany was too afraid to examine these things in detail or read it again. She turned off her phone, pretended as though nothing was wrong, and went home.

Jackson was still awake when she arrived home. He had showered and was waiting for her on the couch. He looked exhausted. “Where did you go?”

She did not spare him a glance at all as she made her way upstairs. “Something happened to Tan. I was searching for her with Eric. You must be tired. Rest early.”

Jackson did not think too much of her behavior. He had fallen asleep while Tiffany was in the shower.

From that moment on, the pair no longer cuddled to sleep every night and were no longer inseparable. This change was intensely magnified, and Tiffany was overwhelmed with grief.

The next day, Eric brought Tanya to the office.

Tanya was reluctant to go but was unable to defy him in the end.

The women cowered, too afraid to speak, when they saw Tanya walking into the office. Someone who had already sent in her resignation letter had returned. That did not bode well for them. Perhaps, she returned to expose their behavior.

Eric directly led Tanya into the office. As he passed by those women, he coldly said, “You three, come into my office.”

The three women exchanged a look. They knew they could no longer keep things under wraps. They dawdled for a moment before following the pair into the office.

The three women stood in a neat row in Eric's office. Their heads were lowered. At this moment, they had lost their domineering air.

Eric smirked as he said, "How much do you think you're worth? Do you think you have the right to look down on others? To put it frankly, you three are just wasting your time in my company. I believe the most experienced among you has only been working for about two years, right? Your work is terrible, but it seems like you're good at bullying others. Tell me, what's there for you to be proud of?"

The woman who had slapped Tanya yesterday during working hours was the first to speak. "Mr. Nathaniel, what are you saying? Did Tanya say anything to you? We're so busy at work, when would we have time to bully her? We just don't have time to teach her due to how busy we are. It seems like she's making baseless accusations just because she feels dissatisfied..."

Eric rolled up Tanya's sleeve. "Do you have anything else to say? Are you still going to argue?"

The woman glared at Tanya briefly before looking away. "It was an accident. I asked her to pour me a glass of tea, but she didn't hold it properly and nearly scalded me. I didn't even make a fuss over it. It's clearly her fault for being clumsy. This has nothing to do with me."

The other two women were only cowardly accomplices. At this point, none of them dared to say a word.

Tanya was already unwilling to return to the office today. Seeing the woman vehemently denying everything, she was thoroughly disappointed. She had been serving this woman tea and water over the

past few days and used her own money to pay for the woman's meals and milk teas. Even then, she was treated like an errand girl. Her temper rose suddenly. She said, "Wow, you really don't blink when you lie. I've been tolerating you for a long time now. I disagree with what you said about me being clumsy. I've always been careful in the things I do. You deliberately spilled the tea on me. As soon as I passed the tea over to you, you intentionally loosened your grip. Furthermore, you've never given me any money when you ordered me to buy you food, milk tea, or coffee. Stop crossing the line over and over again. Even now, you still want to push the blame to me?"

Chapter 644

The woman simply did not think Eric would do anything to her for Tanya's sake. After all, she had been working for Eric for two years. Her work was not terrible either. "You can say whatever you like. You're not really good at anything except for tattling and selling your sob stories. We gave you the money for food and everything else on that day, and now, you're trying to extort us for more money. Thank goodness none of us taught you anything, it would've been a thankless task. Mr. Nathaniel, please beware. Don't just pick up any rotten thing that comes your way. A woman without any relatives must have an ulterior motive for clinging onto you."

Tanya burst into tears of anger. It was bad enough that they were twisting facts. It was even more insulting to hear them speak of her this way when she had never harbored any intention toward Eric!

Eric's face turned ashen from anger. "Should I teach you manners? You're lucky I'm the one dealing with this matter instead of Tiffany Lane or Arianne Wynn. One is a member of the West family, and the other is a member of the Tremont family. You can't afford to offend any one of them. The 'rotten thing' you mentioned is much stronger than any of you. She has a keen eye for talent and all of her friends are outstanding individuals. Unlike those two next to you who are so useless that they're even afraid to speak. The only thing they know is to bully the weak and fear the strong."

Eric's relationship with Mark and Jackson was not a secret. Everyone in the business world knew about it. The three women did not expect Tanya to have connections with the Wests and the Tremonts. They thought she was a meek, mild-mannered little hillbilly they could push around as they pleased. Colors drained from their faces when they heard Eric's words. All of them fell silent in fear.

In the end, the woman who slapped Tanya yesterday finally mustered up her courage to apologize. “I’m sorry, Tanya, we shouldn’t have done that to you. Why don’t you tell us how you’d like to settle this matter?”

Tanya wiped the tears off her face before she stuck her hand out. “Just return me my money!”

The women simply could not figure out how poor little Tanya managed to established connections with the Wests and the Tremonts. She did not try to settle the score, instead, she only wanted them to return her money. Moreover, the money was not even a huge amount.

The woman forced a smile on her face before she pulled out her money and handed it to Tanya. “Is this enough?”

Tanya glared at her. “It’s 55 dollars for each of you. Since I have no relatives, I won’t be giving any of you discounts.”

The woman did not keep track of the things she had made Tanya buy for her. After all, she had no intention of paying Tanya back. Therefore, when she heard Tanya asking for 55 dollars, she felt as though Tanya was extorting them. “How could it cost so much? This is daylight robbery!”

Tanya showed them her phone. “See for yourselves. I’ve recorded every order! You didn’t intend on paying me back, naturally, you have no idea how much you’ve spent!”

With the evidence in front of them, the three women could no longer refute and had no choice but to return the money.

Tanya wiped her tears away and took the money. “You locked me in the washroom and slapped me, but I’ll be magnanimous. I won’t bite a dog just because it has bitten me. However, I’d like a sincere apology.”

The three women’s expressions soured when they were referred to as dogs. However, it was clear they were in the wrong. For that reason, regardless of their reluctance, they bowed and said, “Sorry.”

Eric waved his hand. “Alright, you can all leave. Collect your salaries from the finance department. Pack up and go. I don’t need people like you here, bringing down the work environment.”

The three women were shocked. They had reluctantly apologized to avoid getting fired. They were completely humiliated, and they still lost their jobs. They glared at Tanya as though it was her fault that they had lost their jobs.

Tanya knew it was difficult to find a good job and did not expect Eric to fire them. Her heart softened. “Ricky, let’s just let the matter go? They’ve already returned the money and apologized…”

Eric’s lips twitched. It was bad enough that she had called him Ricky in private, but she was even calling him that in front of his staff. He was slightly displeased. “Your heart is too soft… They deserve this. Only those with money and authority can show off in this world. You have that, but you’re not using it. Bowing and scraping to gain favor won’t do you any good. Don’t be so foolishly nice next time. Remember, the Tremonts rule the capital, and the Wests aren’t simple either. Having Arianne and Tiffany as your friends are more than enough to ensure you have a good life.”

Chapter 645

The Tremont Estate.

Arianne slept until she naturally woke up. Mary carefully supported her as she walked downstairs.

“Madam, Mr. Tremont is in the dining room, waiting to have breakfast with you. He says he’ll be accompanying you to your prenatal examination later.”

Arianne felt Mary was being too careful. However, when she remembered how she had miscarried twice, she remained silent. It was better to be safe than sorry. This was no time for her to be fussy.

When she sat in front of the dining table, Mark pushed a bowl of porridge in front of him toward her. “Eat it while it’s warm.”

She stared at the prawns in the porridge, not having the appetite to eat at all. All the food she used to enjoy made her nauseous now. She was rather upset by this. “I… don’t feel like eating this. Plain porridge will do.”

Mary was surprised. “Aren’t prawns your favorite? These prawns are fresh and have been peeled for your convenience. They’re really large as well. Plain porridge doesn’t have any nutrients, it’s very different from this bowl of porridge. You have a baby inside of you. Be good, have two bites. This porridge was made not too long ago. Mr. Tremont scooped a bowl out and left it to cool so you can eat it. He was afraid it’d be too hot for you to eat.”

Arianne glanced at Mark, surprised by how considerate he was being.

Mark felt a little embarrassed. “Mary, go back to work. We’re fine here. If she wants plain porridge, then, make some for her. It’s good as long as it doesn’t make her nauseous.”

Mary nodded, turned around, and went back into the kitchen.

Arianne hesitantly tasted the prawn porridge. The smell alone seemed to irritate her, and the taste disagreed with her taste buds. Before she could swallow it, she rushed to the toilet, covering her mouth. It seemed that she had to go through this every morning for now. She would retch while brushing her teeth, during meals, and even when she did not eat.

Mark followed her and gently patted her back. “Feeling better? If you can’t eat it, then, don’t. Wait for Mary to finish making the plain porridge. Tell me if you feel like eating anything else. You can’t keep throwing up without eating.”

After calming down, Arianne was extremely depressed. “I’m fine… It’ll be alright after a while. A lot of women go through this during pregnancy.”

She had lost a lot of weight. Seeing her like this made Mark regret agreeing to keep this child. To him, her health was the most important.

When the plain porridge was ready, she had a few token bites. She still did not have much of an appetite.

The car felt unusually stuffy during their ride to the hospital so she rolled the window down for some fresh air. Suddenly, a distinctive fragrance assailed her nose, piquing her appetite. She hurriedly said, “Stop the car!”

Brian, who was at the wheel, steadily pulled the car to the side of the road.

Mark thought she was feeling unwell and asked anxiously, “What’s wrong?”

Chapter 646

Following her nose out of the window, Arianne’s eyes wandered before veering into a halt at an Italian eatery. “I… I want lasagna!” she declared.

Lasagna?! Mark was nonplussed, his mind mulling over how appropriate a dish that would be for pregnant women.

The craving on her face said it all, however. He had to admit that this was better than her not eating anything. With a sigh, Mark wrapped his neck with a scarf and disembarked from the car. “Sit tight. I’ll get one for you.”

Unthinkably, Arianne was at her most docile yet. She beamed at Mark with a sweet smile, “Okie-dokie!”

Brian watched Mark’s towering frame disappear into a crowd made up of old people and let out a sigh. “Mr. Tremont truly treats you like a crowned jewel, Madam.”

All Arianne could think about was lasagna. “Huh… what? Oh, uh, he’s alright.”

Mark returned with a large-size lasagna that Arianne wolfed down within minutes — honestly, she could gobble down even larger sizes had Mark bought them.

Pregnant women who were experiencing bouts of morning sickness rarely get struck by food cravings. Satisfying them, however, could immediately make the woman sunny for the rest of the day.

The lasagna was too odorous for Mark and his mysophobic sensibilities; his head began to throb. He would have rolled the windows down were he not afraid that the chilly air might nip Arianne.

By the time they reached the hospital, Mark quickly disembarked and gulped in all of the odorless air around him until the growing headache stopped.

Suddenly, Arianne’s attention was locked onto a particular direction before arresting her pace. Curious, Mark followed her gaze and found himself staring right at Helen and Aery Kinsey.

The subjects of their targeted attention appeared to be oblivious of Arianne and Mark as they paced into the hospital entrance. The cat was out of the bag, Mark realized, so he turned to Arianne and admitted, “Sorry. The other day, well, your mother talked to me. I was the one who bailed Aery out of jail ahead of her scheduled release.”

A slight smile surfaced to Arianne’s lips. “It’s alright. Thank you.”

Aery Kinsey was now a ne'er-do-well with a messy mop of technicolor highlights, a face painted with smokey make-up, and a future palpably in shambles. For Helen's sake, Arianne could not find it in her heart to stubbornly cling to Aery's punishment; it was beyond terrible for a mother to watch her daughter go down like this. No matter how much Helen despised Aery, she could never truly stop herself from intervening in the latter's descent.

Arianne understood why Mark did what he did and helped. To give Aery a chance was to give Arianne peace.

The Tremonts had not planned to bump into the Kinseys, but that intention flew when they met outside the gynecologist's room. The difference in goals was stark: while Arianne was here for a scheduled pregnancy check-up, Aery was planning for an abortion.

Helen's eyes shifted and dodged from focusing on Arianne before she murmured, "Arianne, I—"

"I heard all about it," came the reply, her expression indifferent.

Aery wore an ashen grimace when her eyes met Mark and Arianne, her words failing her. The sight of the pair woke up old bitterness and grudge embedded deeply in her heart, but this time, she had no outlet to release them. Aery was aware of how filthy and tainted she had become; she knew she had lost the respectability to stand beside Mark.

The doctor came out of his room and passed a bill to the seething girl. "Here you go, Miss. It seems that the fetus has grown a little too old to have a safe abortion carried out. You should have come to us earlier."

Aery's teeth gritted against one another for a second before she snatched the bill and strutted away from all of them.

Helen's eyes turned into two pools of unreadable emotions. "Arianne, I wish you and the child the best," she said. "The weather is starting to get chilling. Take care not to get a cold."

Arianne nodded. "Mm."

Helen flashed a smile brimming with solace before starting down the direction her other daughter had taken.

Jean and Aery Kinsey were the rightful retribution for abandoning her husband and daughter. Helen wondered if the fact that she was carrying out a karmic sentence emboldened her enough to stand before the daughter she had wronged and accept the latter's judgement.

Back in Bright Incorporated, Jackson West suddenly busted out of his office in a furor, his uncontrolled gait attracting eyes from his employees. Even Tiffany stared at him, stunned.

Chapter 647

Tiffany shot the man a questioning look before her periphery vision espied a flitting but striking silhouette: Bernadette Legrand, the twenty-nine years-old artist renowned in international art scenes. She had found this company after all!

Aye tightened her hand around Tiffany's. "Okay, calm down, Tiffany. Calm. The. Eff. Down. Now that she's here, Mr. West will have no choice but to give you an explanation now, right? Or else, he would reeeeally cross the line —"

Tiffany, however, was not one to silently bear. The fact that she had been patient up to today belied how much she loathed the entire debacle. Admittedly, she might be able to continue the role of an observer as she monitored the affair before any action, but if this woman had the audacity to appear right by their doorstep, hell was she going to play blind!

With a glower, Tiffany followed them out of the door. Worried about her wellbeing, Aye sprung behind her after mustering her courage.

Soon, the two arrived at the lounge on the first floor. Even from a distance, they could see Jackson engaging in a face-to-face conversation with that woman ahead.

Tiffany took a deep breath and strutted toward the pair, her face cracking with a smile. "Oh dear, fancy seeing you bolting out of your office for a secret date, Jackson West!"

Her tone might spot a veneer of joviality, yet the expression on Jackson's face warped into apprehension the moment he recognized her voice. "You — what are you doing here? Quit making jokes and go back to work."

Tiffany pretended not to hear him and extended her hand to Bernadette. "Pleased to meet you. I'm his fiancée."

With that vanilla-white fur coat draped over her body, Bernadette looked absolutely elegant and regal. She took Tiffany's hand with a smile and greeted, "Pleased to meet your acquaintance! I'm Bernadette Legrand."

Tiffany's smile did not waver at all. "Oh, I've heard of you."

Oh, she heard of her — she knew her so well that she was just one hair away from exposing every single dirty secret this woman had. If Tiffany continued to feign ignorance, this homewrecker would trample over her like she was a doormat!

Aye, being more lily-livered, tugged on the corner of Tiffany's shirt and whispered, "How about we, um, go…?"

Tiffany let go of Bernadette's hand and said sweetly, "I only came out here to see if everything's alright. Now that it's turned out to be something not worth my attention, I better get back to work. Well, Jackson, you two have fun chatting!"

With that, her smile reversed into a poker face, and she spun to leave. She did not give a damn about their conversation; all she awaited was Jackson's explanation.

It did not take ten minutes before Jackson returned. When he passed by her cubicle, he leaned close to her and whispered, "My office. Now."

Tiffany did not waste a second to rise to her feet and followed him closely into his office. As soon as they stepped in, she turned and clicked the door shut; regardless of one's follies, everyone deserved to have their most basic dignity retained.

Tiffany's eyes became two unflinching laser beams piercing through Jackson. She could not wait to see how well Jackson lied.

“There’s nothing between that woman and I.”

That was it? Tiffany laughed despite herself. “Oh, is that so? I’m impressed that you brought a fresh face into your ensemble, ‘cause I’ve never seen this one before. You wrap one of your arms around me, your young, fresh-into-society ingenue, and then wrap another around a thirty-something vamp. Gluttonous, aren’t we? Gotta’ hand it to ya’, you found someone who outclasses me in every way. While I’m the sort of loser who dabbled in fine arts only to become a lame old designer, she — oh, she’s a famous artist with a gorgeous profile that eclipses mine, and a body more voluptuous than I could ever be. Dayum, I’m ashamed of being so subpar!”

The color in Jackson’s face appeared to have drained. “You… You investigated her?”

His reaction stung, but Tiffany did not falter and continued in her happy-go-lucky attitude, “Yup, yessiree. Whaddaya’ think of my investigative skills? Or do you hate how I hyper focused on every little movement you made that I thought was out of line? Doesn’t matter — I don’t exist to please you, and neither can I allow myself to die to an enemy I know nothing about. So, come on, spill it out. It won’t hurt me, I promise.”

Jackson’s mien became an unreadable clash of emotions. He let silence linger for a little too long before replying, “No, it’s nothing like that — but I don’t want to talk about it. I told you I’d never betray you, and I mean it. Please, don’t overthink this, and stop investigating her.”

Tiffany gave a jeering chuckle. “Oh, of course. It is what it is! I’m done with investigating this sh*t, anyway — it’s a waste of my money and energy. God, when I found out that the breakfast you bought for me was just some by-the-way thing while you personally delivered hers, my heart ached quite a bit! But I guess these things ain’t deep enough to warrant more investigation, especially when I’m quickly reaching the bottom of it all.

“You know what impressed me the most? The fact that you can lie about your betrayal with a straight face even after I caught you red-handed. You say it with such conviction that I almost believed you! Now, I know you so much that this doesn’t surprise me, so hey, don’t feel embarrassed just because Ari and I are friends,” Tiffany finished. “I’ll tell the world out there that we’ve undergone ‘an amicable split’ because let’s be candid: it’s over. As for the gifts and dowry, they will be returned without a penny less.”

Chapter 648

Tiffany turned around and took off. Unlike the past, her eyes were dry this time. Her tears had run their course when she was waiting for him to come home…

“—She’s not my mistress. She’s my dad’s!”

Tiffany’s heavy footsteps screeched to a halt. She definitely, positively, absolutely did not expect that.

She turned and faced Jackson with an expression of abject disbelief. Her first thought was that this was yet another lie, but to push his own father into the pyre would be a little too unscrupulous, even for him. That was not counting the fact that it sounded too downright ludicrous to be believed. Ironically, this meant that Jackson was telling the truth… right?

“Your dad’s mistress? Why would your dad’s mistress keep grinding herself on you, huh?” Tiffany questioned skeptically. “Why do you keep visiting her in her hotel? Why wouldn’t she take a five-star hotel's breakfast buffet instead of insisting that you personally deliver breakfast to her, which, holy sh*t,

you actually did as she asked! And then there was that day in the mall; I spotted the two of you together! And that stupid fur coat she was wearing just now was bought on that day itself! Hell, you even pressed her to the door of the changing room — urgh, God knows if you were smooching her!"

Jackson was aggrieved by the very mention of that day. Yes, he had pressed Bernadette against the door, but it was not out of any smooching intent but an aborted desire to punch that woman in the face. Bernadette's coup de maître was to plunge a knife into her enemy as she graced them with her sweetest smile, after all.

"Tiffie, I really don't wanna talk about this. She…disgusts me. Before I can make this bane vanish, I can not let my mom know of her existence," Jackson muttered.

Tiffany was still unconvinced. "Oh, I get it. You're trying to keep me in some kinda suspense, aren't you? You used to spend your time after work with me, but now it's all squandered on that Bernadette. You really don't think you owe me an explanation, do you? Christ, why are you the one who has to solve your daddy's affair, huh? Do you even realize how much this whole debacle is harming the trust between us? Well, I ain't gonna sit here and watch the thing between us die! If you insist on keeping your lips shut about this, then I'm gonna have to get answers straight from your dad's mouth!"

Tiffany knew that provocation was the only way to loosen Jackson's mouth enough for the whole truth to fall out. She was nearing a breakdown; the last thing she wanted was her man to stubbornly keep secrets from her.

Jackson sank into his chair, sunken and defeated. "Christ, you already know about it anyway, so I guess — God-f**king-dammit, I hate how revolting this whole thing is! I should tell you the truth.

"Nine years ago, Bernadette Legrand met Atticus West while she was overseas. She was fresh into her twenties, but already she was ambitious and vain. When she met someone as successful and in the

same profession as she was, she lunged and refused to let go," Jackson recounted. "At first, he was her mentor and her his mentee, but Bernadette told me that she and Atticus were together before. And that her success all came from his."

"Here's the thing: Bernadette was candid that she didn't give a f**k about how much Atticus attracted her because all she cared about was his background and fame. They split after three years, but they allegedly had a child together — a son, nearing six-years-old. Look, I have not a f**king clue why Bernadette didn't look for Atticus and instead came to drag me into her troubles, but I've investigated her background and damn it, she wasn't lying! That sh*t between her and Atticus? That sh*t's a known rumor by everyone in the artistic scene. I can't rule out how legitimate it might all be. The only thing that I'm unsure of is the validity of her child claim. Even now, she hasn't shown me that kid of hers."

Tiffany was stupefied. She came in thinking she was the wronged woman and came out realizing that Summer was the unlucky one instead. "What… What does any of that mean? She must have an ulterior motive, doesn't she?"

Jackson shook his head, wearily. "I don't know. This damn vixen is not at all simple to deal — Christ, she's more wily than any woman I've met in my life. When she first found me, she had said nothing of her true motive. She sat and watched me dig up her secrets and her history; then she told me she had a child, calling him my 'baby brother.' The more she does all these with her ridiculous aplomb, the less I know what's real. If everything she said is right, what's going to happen to Mom? Mom had wasted all of her youth waiting for Atticus, that undeserving bastard. If this crap comes out, how… how hard would her heart break? How much hope would she lose? F**k, she shouldn't have forgiven that piece of sh*t!"

Unfortunately, the best guess Tiffany's mind could cook up with was that it was all about money. "Er, do you think this woman might be after his inheritance or something? I mean, it's actually kinda terrifying that you have this unknown baby brother, especially since Bernadette is younger than you…"

"I think she's after money, too. She's honestly the most insatiable cur I've ever met. Since her debut, she's spent my money on everything in her life. I can't say no to her because she threatened to tell Mom

all about her if I fail to fulfil a single one of her stupid wishes. I'll be honest with you, Tiffie — I've imagined snuffing the life out of her with my bare hands so many times. Lord, she's sickening!"

Every mention of Bernadette would incite an expression of unadulterated repulsion and abhorrence, so pure that it could not possibly be faked.

Tiffany, meanwhile, was miffed. Did this not mean that her man had to spend his money providing for another woman? And not just any woman — it was Bernadette Legrand, who burned through Jackson's wallet way faster than Tiffany ever could. Just her purchase of that white fur coat was evidence enough: while Tiffany had to ruminate on the thought of buying it, that woman threw her man's hard-earned cash onto the counter without batting an eyelash.

"So what are you going to do? Judging by what you said, it doesn't seem like you've gotten under her skin at all. Are you just gonna wait for the day when she's sucked you dry? What happens when, well, she finishes your money and you've gone through all of her disgustingness, yet the truth still comes out anyway? God, that'd be so devastating!"

Chapter 649

Jackson rubbed the side of his aching temples before grumbling, "Jesus Christ, I really think you and I aren't exactly on the same IQ; discussing this with you is like discussing policies with a toddler. Look, I'm only telling you this to stop you before you double-back on the wrong idea; I'm not asking you to intervene. You do what you always do, and let me handle it, okay? The last thing I want is to drag you along into this sickening sh*tshow."

Tiffany rolled her eyes at him and retorted, "Gee, thanks for pointing out how dumb I am. Sure, throw up buckets on your own, but don't ignore the fact that I'm just as sickened by this whole thing already, ok? Like, just the thought of my man currently spending money on other women makes me hurl! If Bernadette were, say, my daughter, fine; parents lavishing their children is the right thing to do. But who the eff does Bernadette think she is?! Urgh!!!

“But okay, I’m not gonna tell anyone about this. You, oh-so-clever boy, better work up your speed in solving this issue. ‘Cause if that b*tch crosses me one more time, imma rip her to shreds!”

Tiffany did not dare to suggest visiting the West Residence when the weekend came. Bernadette suddenly making an appearance in his life might cause Jackson to commit patricide if he saw his father — and Tiffany knew there was no way she could stop her fiancé by then.

Instead, she cooked up an excuse to loiter in Arianne’s place. Then, when the chance presented itself, she snuck into Mark’s study and asked, “Yo, Mark. Ever heard of Bernadette Legrand?”

Her dodgy behavior elicited a frown in Mark’s face. “Yes, I’ve heard a thing or two about her. She’s rather famous in the art scene, and since I’ve learnt fine arts before, I know her. But why do you ask?”

He did not know, did he? And if he did not, then Tiffany could not ask more. Honestly, she was hoping that Mark would know of Jackson’s trouble because then she could seek help from the former. But now, it seemed that Jackson was so thin-skinned about this issue that he could not bear to tell his best amigo about it.

Then, out of nowhere, Granny Wynn materialized inside the room. “What are the two of you up to?”

“Nothing ma’am. Just whispering secrets with your son-in-law,” Tiffany replied, nonplussed. “That against the law?”

The old woman’s attempt to hide her undue suspicion was painstakingly blatant. “You are Arianne's friend, young lady; this is against courtesy! What kinda secrets should the two of you even talk about?! Shoo! Mark’s busy!”

Amused, Tiffany broke out into a chuckle. “Aww, c’mon Granny! You don’t seriously think I’ve got the hots for him, do you? Or — are you insinuating that my Jackson isn’t cute enough to keep me loyal? Damn, Granny, you’ve got the mind of a modern gal!”

The back-and-forth was getting so rambunctious that Mark felt as though his head was going to split. “Excuse me, madams — if there’s nothing else that requires my attention, please continue your banter downstairs. I still have a lot of errands to run through.”

“Argh, okay, okay! I’ll go, happy?” Tiffany suddenly exclaimed exasperatedly. “I’m going shopping. At least then someone doesn’t have to stare at me like I’ve got some nefarious motive!”

Immediately after she left, Granny Wynn sidled up to Arianne's side apprehensively. “You’re pregnant, girl. Don’t invite those friends of yours to the house so often.”

The warning was mind-boggling. “Um, excuse me? Tiffie isn’t just anyone. She’s my best friend.”

“So? Are best friends supposed to whisper and giggle in their friend’s boyfriends’ ears, hmm? Quit being so naïve, honey. You never heard of how itchy men can be when their wives are pregnant, have you?”

Chapter 650

Arianne’s expression was the phrase “you serious, bruh?” coming to life.

“Uh, Granny? You do know that Tiffie has a fiancé, right? And he’s not just any random guy — he’s Mark’s best friend. Besides, Tiffie isn’t that kind of person at all,” she rebutted. “Seriously, Granny, don’t you ever insinuate something like that about her character again, okay? You don’t know the depth of our relationship; Tiffie and I have a long intertwining history. There would be no me today without her.”

The old woman remained obstinately cynical. “Honey, everyone wears a mask. We don’t know her true face! Besides, who cares? Being alone with your man in a room itself is a red flag!”

Failing at another attempt to convince her grandmother, Arianne gave up. “Okay, fine, whatever. Why don’t you go take a stroll in the backyard or make yourself a cuppa instead of cooking up conspiracy theories about my friend, eh? I don’t want you scaring Tiffie away from visiting me in the future…”

After her short-lived visit to the Tremont Estate, Tiffany invited Tanya and Aye to a shopping spree. Were Arianne not forced into confinement, she would have dragged her into the ensemble too.

Since Aye found out about Tiffany’s real socioeconomic background, the latter abandoned all restraints and began sweeping items off the rake like no tomorrow almost the moment they stepped into the mall. Just the thought at the back of her head reminding her that another woman was currently burning through her man’s money made her bilious. To fight back, Tiffany was going to spend all of this money too, lest some random b*tch claim them.

It only took a while before all three had their hands full of bags, which all belonged to Tiffany.

Tanya, by chance, spied the notification mail from Tiffany's bank concerning her spending, and all of the color in her face drained. "H-h-holy moly, we should stop, Tiffany! The money you've spent could cover the down payment for a house!"

Tiffany was still dissatisfied. "Puh-lease, hon. This amount isn't enough for down payments anywhere in the Capital; it's peanuts! Look, I'm feeling really sh*tty right now, so can you just lemme get a serotonin boost? Oh! Speaking of which, are you still working at Eric's? Any trouble lately?"

"O-oh! Um, no." Tanya shook her head. "Um, Ricky talked to everyone in the company. No one's bullying me anymore. O-oh! And he also brought someone to teach me how to design, too!"

Just thinking about that incident roused Tiffany's ire. "Seriously, Tanya, stop being such a pushover next time. Lookie here — see all of the bags in your hands right now? Those are my gifts for you; 'cause girl, you need a glow up! I am not gonna let anyone else call you a hick anymore. Imma show those plebs that all of Tiffany Lane's sisters are queens!"

Tanya's eyes darted back to all of the bags in her hands, and she suddenly felt a little ill. "N-No, Tiffie! There are too many and too expensive — I can't!"

Aye was not at all embarrassed. "Yo, translation: all of the stuff in Aye's hands are for Aye! Right?"

Tiffany cocked an eyebrow. "Wrong. Oh, except that watch; that's yours!" she said lithely before turning back to Tanya. "Come now, Tan, don't say no. Here, let's go to that cosmetics store there, and we'll get you the essentials: makeup and skin products, then we let them give you a free makeover. I'll be honest with you, Tanya. You've got outstanding potential, and you know what they say: 'Beauty is power, and makeup enhances that; it's a woman's secret!' So, what you should do is wake up a bit earlier to transform your face a little, and voila, you'd be a lot more radiant and brilliant! Like, come on! Prowl the streets; how many women go out without makeup, huh? You gotta start treating yourself right, hon.

Don’t be a miser to yourself. We only live once, so be frugal all you want to other people, just never mistreat yourself.”

Unexpectedly, Tanya wholeheartedly agreed with Tiffany and expressed no reluctance in using cosmetics. She had been watching her female colleagues bringing out the best of their looks every day; the longingness to emulate them had long taken root in her heart. She, too, wanted to be like them.

The desire to be beautiful has always been a human — and particularly — feminine trait.

At the end of a long, eventful process, Tanya looked as though she had undergone a metamorphosis. The makeup had allowed her facial features, which were already pleasant to the eyes, to express their hidden vibrance and delicate profiles. Her hair, which had never been permed nor dyed, became a game changer when let down. Tiffany was so pleased with the makeover that she made the girl change into a new outfit altogether.

“Puurrrfection!” she exclaimed in the end. “From now on, go watch makeup tutorials on the internet to learn how to do it yourself; you’ll pick it up in no time! I learned mine from the internet too, after all. Oh! And these skincare products and cosmetics gotta be put to use, okay hon? They’re hella costly, so don’t waste them by not using them.”

Tanya hung her head in embarrassment and mumbled, “Oh… T-t-thank you, Tiffany.”

Even now, Tiffany could not get over Tanya’s penchant to shrink into herself and lower her head. “God, straighten your back firmly and be proud, Tanya! Don’t hang your head over nothing all the time, man. It makes you look so submissive that people will waste no time treating you like a doormat!” she chided. “Anyway, let’s go! Time for meals, girlfriends! Let’s eat at my man’s place. Eat whatever you fancy, the meal’s on me!”

Being back in White Water Café quickly turned Tanya’s mood a little blue. It was one of the places her grandfather had visited prior to his passing, so returning here inadvertently brought back grief-tinted memories.