Ruling 711

Chapter 711

Just the reminder of how Lynn had bedeviled her caused Tiffany's flames to flare. "Frickin' Lynn Brooks! According to Jackson, all they ever had was sex. God knows if they were ever beyond physical."

Mark looked a little stunned because admittedly, he did not know Lynn quite well. "I don't really know much about this," he said. "You should probably chat with Ari instead."

Mark retreated to his study unprompted after dinner, tacitly providing the girls with their space. Immediately after he left, Tiffany was like a stuffed box kicked open — nothing, from Grant's issue to Alejandro Smith's dramatic debut, was left out. When her account arrived at the part involving Lynn, Tiffany was evidently gritting her teeth. "Sh*ts between me and Jackson have never blown out to this proportion before! He frickin' smashed things! The tone he used in the office, Ari, you have no idea just how… how much it stung. I was so — so angry that I could almost burst into tears right there! And then he gotta' rub salt in my wound and say he's gonna deduct my wage! God, this is infuriating! Urgh!!"

"I think… I think Jackson's just upset that you didn't look to him for help for your trouble, especially since both of you occupy a significant place in each other's hearts," Arianne mused out loud after a beat. "Must have hurt his feelings when the one who solved his woman's problem was some unrelated rando, I bet. Then you went to have lunch with this Alejandro behind his back — it's a no-no for partners to have meals with the opposite gender, so of course he's gonna be pissed. I'm not saying you don't have legit reasons to do what you did; in fact, I don't think you're the one in the wrong here… But Alejandro and his creepy involvement are quite suspect.

"That's including the fact that Lynn — of all possible people looking for a job — was working under him! And then the two of you met within Alejandro's estate, and she told Jackson about it. No matter what angle I look at it from, this whole thing just reeks of conspiracies. My advice is that you avoid associating with Alejandro from now on to protect yourself," Arianne said. "He's far from what he let on, I'm sure. Even his first appearance in your life begs suspicions — you, drinking as well as a fish? Gimme a break. Who are you compared to expert bargirls, huh? It's far from the best; don't you fall for his sweet nothings!"

Tiffany couldn't care less about Alejandro's anything; she was too preoccupied with her trouble with Jackson. "Nope, didn't even plan to continue talking to Alejandro, and I don't care because the point is: me and Jackson are now stuck in this piss-annoying row, and it's all because Lynn is a little snitchin' b*tch and she provoked him into being mad!" she fumed. "He even said braindead things like 'oh, so you can eat with some other guys, but I can't have any contact with Lynn?' Like hello, mistah, I've never had sex with Alejandro, bruh! Can I say the same for you and Lynn? – God, just thinking about this past between them frustrates me!"

Arianne let out a good-natured chuckle to mollify her friend. "Alright, Tiffie, let's calm down. If you don't feel comfortable seeing him tonight, then don't go home just yet. Wait until his steam's all blown off and he comes to you all friendly, and you'll feel much better too, right? I mean, you lap up his super make-woman-happy tricks, don't you? Jackson's past escapades might have been a vice, but damn if he didn't learn how to melt a woman's heart into a puddle."

The couch cushion in Tiffany's hand was close to changing into a new shape. "Yeah, I'm gonna do just that! I'm not going back tonight. I wanna see if he remembers me!"

After finishing his errands, Mark descended the stairs to find Tiffany still around, chattering with his wife. Worse, the more he watched the two's rambunctious, jaunty banter strewn occasionally with bell-like laughter, the more green he became. The current atmosphere in his home could not deviate further from its usual insipidness — how come Arianne never acted this way with him?

Besides, if Tiffany did not leave, he was almost certain that he was going to lose his bedfellow tonight.

He looked down on his wristwatch. The time was past ten o'clock.

He returned to his study and sent a text to Jackson: ‘When are you finally going to collect your woman?’

The reply was quick. ‘No.’

The curt and rather tart response reflected off his phone screen to Mark’s confusion. Suddenly, he was confounded with Jackson’s manners and decided to confront him directly through a call. “What’s with that attitude? Growing weary of your woman?”

“Nothing,” Jackson’s voice was icily monotonous. “She’s able-bodied and strong-willed, isn’t she? She could go anywhere she likes or decide for herself if she wants to come home or not. Who am I to care?… If there’s nothing else you wanna talk about, then excuse me. I’m busy with overtime work.”

Mark frowned, the realization of the issue’s severity sinking in. “Alright. Talk to you later.”

Chapter 712

Mark hung up the phone and ordered Mary to prepare the guest room. By this point, he was fairly sure that Tiffany was not going away tonight. It was nearing eleven, yet his Arianne did not look at all like she was packing up for bed.

He stood on the end of the stairs and called out, “Ari, it’s getting late. Time for bed, yes?”

Arianne eyed the clock on the living room wall. “It really is late. Why don’t we head to bed, Tiffie?”

A veil of moroseness still hung over Tiffany, who found it hard to smile when she remembered that Jackson had not given her a call or text even now. “Okay. But… I don’t wanna sleep alone. Sleep with me?”

Mark almost choked himself on how accurate his prediction was. He knew it; Tiffany would definitely dish out this card — it was always moments like these when he was forced to reckon with the women’s creed of “sistahs before mistahs.”

Surprising absolutely no one, Arianne said yes without batting an eyelash. “You got it, sis. Come, I’m gonna show you to the guest room.”

Mark stood still on his spot at the stairs as he watched the two women go past him. He was beyond reluctant to comply with their arrangement, yet he could not find it in him to object. In the end, he strode into the bedroom alone, and tossed and turned on his bed.

When sleep refused to come, Mark grabbed his phone and texted Arianne: ‘Sleep beside me please.’

Arianne was mildly shocked at first, but a small, pleased curve quickly formed on her lips. She was just about to reply to the text when Tiffany stuck her head close in curiosity before remarking loudly, “Oh my god, it’s only a few walls between you two, and the manbaby’s already sending you an S.O.S? Is he actually jealous of us? You’re his sleeping partner like almost every night! Can’t he just let you be mine for this once? Besides, all men sleep like pigs, which I bet brings risks to a pregnant woman like you. You’ll probably sleep more comfortably and safely beside me, if I do say so myself!”

“He’s not that bad,” Arianne explained while replying. “He doesn’t sleep too deeply, and sometimes he wakes up at midnight to tuck me in with a comforter and stuff. It’s no biggie; I’m just gonna reassure him real quick. You, on the other hand, stop wondering about things and go to sleep already. I’m usually

already fast asleep at this hour, you know… But I got so excited talking to you that I didn't even look at the time."

Tiffany considered her best friend and inferred that Mark must have been pretty pleasant to Arianne these few days — a conclusion that brought Tiffany a sense of relief. Sometimes, one could easily tell a person's opinion and feelings about a person through the subtleties in their facial expressions when they talked about them.

"If he's not gonna quit whining, I swear, you go ahead and mommy him before he turns as bitter as a wronged housewife," Tiffany quipped.

Arianne stared at the emoji sticker Mark sent to her, realizing she could not make out what he was feeling, and made a decision after a moment of hesitation. "No, no. It's fine. He doesn't form grudges that easily. Anyway, I'm just gonna go check him out for a sec. Will be back later!"

Immediately after pushing the door to their bedroom open, Mark yanked Arianne inside and pressed her against the wall, his hand stilling protectively on her waist. "I called Jackson a while ago, and I'll be frank: he's angry as hell," he recounted quickly. "He's usually a very congenial, agreeable guy, but with his fuse lit like that, he's turned into a brick wall no one could talk sense to."

Arianne raised her head and considered him. His head obscured much of the light from above, masking his handsome facial features with a slight blur. Suddenly, it looked as though he had never aged nor changed, and was still the same handsome eighteen-years-old lad from back then. The only and most crucial difference was his eyes — the edges in them had softened.

She gently tugged on the edge of his shirt, her eyes smiling. "Where is this going?"

Chapter 713

Mark's breath seemed to halt for a second before he lurched, his lips closing onto hers.

Arianne welcomed him. Her fingers changed position and dexterously laced around his neck.

When their breathings started to race, Mark stopped himself and released her from his grip. "I know Tiffany's still waiting for your company, so go. I'm satisfied with this."

Arianne lowered her head with a soft chuckle. "Right. Nighty-night."

She had always known the wiles to endear herself to him, or exactly what to do to please him. In the past, her goal was to ingratiate on him. But now, these little things had become bona fide seasonings in a relationship.

After all, a genuine bond between two people required both sides to be pleased and to be willing to practice endearment.

Tiffany spent her weekend cooped up with Arianne in the Tremont Estate. After days of bad weather, the sky finally turned blue today.

Unfortunately, a snowstorm was waging in Tiffany's chest. This would mark the first time the rhubarb between her and Jackson had ever reached the point of total dispathy and disconnection with one

another. Tiffany had come down from hoping he would proactively contact her, to feeling disappointed at his lack of action, to feeling dismayed, and finally, a long, hard musing. Surely, this whole thing did not seem severe enough to warrant Jackson's tantrum, did it?

The more she thought about it, the more she suspected follies from Lynn. What exactly did the woman say to Jackson that provoked such an overblown grudge? All Tiffany did was have an innocuous meal with a man.

Tiffany was losing what little composure she had left by Sunday night. Tomorrow, she would be going to work, which meant that she was going to see him. With Tiffany's temper, this reunion was bound to be a conflict waiting to happen, yet it was not like she could skip work over this. There was a line between work and private matters that everyone needed to observe.

Tiffany stared at the phone in her hand, wondering if she should text or call Jackson. Just then, to her pleasant surprise, her phone vibrated.

In a burst of anticipation, she opened up the texting app but immediately plunged into a well of disappointment. It was just Alejandro Smith with the message: 'The weather's good these days. Fancy a meetup?'

Tiffany rejected him without a second thought. 'No, thanks. Busy.'

She leaned back onto the couch and let out a loud sigh.

Arianne, watching her from the side, broke out a giggle. “C’mon, if you can’t wait any longer, just call him. I mean, it seems pretty evident that he’s not looking to mend this relationship on his own. Besides, if both sides continue not to back down, I don’t think this fight’s gonna end anytime soon.”

“You know what I want? I wanna know the precise embellished crap that Lynn Brooks had flooded into his ear during that phone call,” Tiffany bristled acrimoniously. “We’ve been together for so long, and not once had Jackson ever treated me this way! Lynn is someone he knew since way back — I get that no matter how much their relationship had soured, no matter how bitter it’s supposed to have become, part of him would still give whatever she said this undue weight! God, I can’t believe I used to think Lynn was nice and my good, chatty fam! Do you know what that b*tch said to me when we met in that estate? She was like, ‘You and I are love rivals!’ Urrghhh! Christ! Just thinking about this… makes me mad!”

Arianne thought for a moment before asking tentatively, “Would you like me to call him on your behalf?”

Tiffany’s first reaction was to decline stubbornly, but her anxiousness and distress were bursting at the seams. “You know what? Yeah! But of course, you cannot tell him that I was the one asking you to call him. All I need is a confirmation that he’s at home and not going out there effin’ around. Just helping me confirm this will do.”

Arianne pulled out her phone and dialed Jackson’s number. The wait was an unsettlingly long one, but alas, the call connected. From the other side came Jackson’s rather breathless, tuckered-out voice, “Yes…?”

The women exchanged a glance before Arianne asked carefully, “Jackson, where are you?”

Chapter 714

Jackson was silent for two whole seconds before answering, “Home. Was asleep. What?”

Tiffany turned red right there and then. It was only nine at night — since when did Jackson West ever go to sleep this early?! He was either working overtime or goofing around, having his fun. He never slept this early!

The worst offender, however, was that Tiffany’s implicative absence did not at all worry him — to the point that he found no problem slumbering!

Even Arianne found words failing her. After a brief albeit glaring silence, Jackson’s nonchalant voice came. “If it’s nothing important, I’m hanging up.”

And he hung up without waiting a second more.

Tiffany bit her lips. Tears broke out of her eyes and wetted her cheeks like a deluge from two broken levees. Nothing Arianne said soothed her, so she ran upstairs and went to the one person she hoped could help. “Mark! I called Jackson for Tiffie’s sake, and Jackson was sleeping, and he just hung up the phone without even asking how Tiffie’s doing, and now Tiffie’s bawling so hard that nothing I say is helping! What am I gonna do?! You know Jackson very well, don’t you? What do we do?”

Mark had been working hard in his study. He could feel a headache coming just by hearing about this issue. “Look, you’re not wrong to say I ‘know Jackson very well.’ But does that make me a love guru who knows all there is to know about relationships? No. Do I look like I’ve dated Jackson before? Frankly, I think the best way to solve this is to send Tiffany home and force those two into confronting one another — doesn’t matter if they shout or duke it out, as long as the knot gets untied in the end. The way to talk to men is to confront them head-on, you know. No one should test the limits of an obstinate man… especially when he’s conversant with the minds of women,” Mark advised. “You aren’t going to

get Jackson to back down; he's simply better at forbearance than Tiffany could ever be. He won't find any problem enduring the grievances this whole thing is causing him with an outwardly blasé look."

Arianne was skeptical. "Are all men like that?"

Mark nodded confidently. "I have little doubts about it. The sky could fall and men would still be able to feign apathy."

An idea formed in Arianne's mind. "Have you finished your work? If yes, please help send Tiffany home. It's getting too late for me to leave the house."

Mark looked at her with the gaze of a man clinging to his composure at the face of adversity. "You're suggesting that I send your girl friend home, just the two of us, in the dead of night? You don't wonder if it's an apt thing to do? Do you really trust me that much? More importantly, didn't she drive her car to our place? I don't think she needs a lift."

Arianne shot him a meek but pointed glance. "Well, believe it or not, I do trust that you'd never cross the line, Mark. And yes, Tiffie drove, but she's been so stressed lately that she hadn't eaten or slept well these past two days. I'm apprehensive of letting her drive alone in this state," she explained. "Plus, the main point of getting you out there is to have you talk to Jackson and try to mediate between them, okay? If we leave it up to those two, unhelpful conflicts might happen. I mean, Tiffie is carefree and unmeticulous while Jackson is sensitive and conscientious — that's quite some room for misunderstandings, am I right? Look, if you're still reluctant to go, then I'll go."

Facing that ultimatum, Mark knew he had to relent without question. "Alright, I'm going, happy? Go to bed early while I'm outside; I'll be back after I send her."

Mark grabbed his car keys and descended the stairs, only to be greeted by the sight of Tiffany throwing a tantrum. “Hell no am I going back home! He doesn’t give a damn about me, so why the hell should I wag my tail and beg him to care, huh? As if I’m the one who’s wrong! All I did was have a meal with this random guy who helped me out of a pickle — that sh*t’s nothing compared to him having contact with Lynn! I’d rather move back to my mom’s place; it’s not like I have no place to stay outside his stinking house! Who knows; maybe if I come back right now, he might even blame me for interrupting his beauty sleep!”

Weary, Mark shot a sidelong look at Arianne.

“Um, Tiffie, honey? Please. Let us be rational about this, okay? This has gone on long enough, don’t you agree?” Arianne began, a little distressed. “You need to do something — give in a little — unless, well, unless you don’t love Jackson anymore. The two of you are engaged, remember? It’s not at all a shame to back down a little with someone as important as that, right? Besides, aren’t you afraid that Lynn might seize your absence and steal Jackson away? Don’t forget who’s the one that’s getting in between the two of you!

“If I were you, I’d do my damndest to be all lovey-dovey with Jackson right now. Or, at the very least, go back home and give him the cold shoulder. If you’re unhappy, then torment him just as much. Who knows, maybe hiding at my place is precisely the sort of blessing he wanted, since he was given his own space while you were here going ballistic,” Arianne finished.

Chapter 715

Tiffany’s resolve began to waver. In truth, she very much wanted to go home. She was just looking for a way to admit it without losing her face.

Catching the hesitance in her friend, Arianne pressed on. “You are his fiancée, not his mistress. What’s wrong with you going back to his place and shoving your worst grimace at him every day? None whatsoever. Now, if you still can’t take it, or if he continues to sting you with his pigheadedness, well! You could always pack up your clothes and move back to your mom’s. Let’s see if he stops you. If he doesn’t, you go, free and guiltless. If he stops you? Mission accomplished. So here’s what you should do: you’re gonna leave your car at my place and I’ll have Mark send you home. If you decided to move out, you won’t have a car to take you, which means he — if he’s man enough — has to yield and be your driver. He can’t let poor Tiffany go to her mom’s all alone in the middle of the night, can he?”

While Tiffany nodded vigorously, Mark sank into a mild panic. Arianne’s little scheme made a lot of sense, which was why it was dangerous. It seemed that his future homelife was going to be a lot more precarious than he initially predicted; and the last thing he should do was to be as apathetic as Jackson, lest he ask for suffering.

Mark and Tiffany arrived at White Water Bay Villa soon enough. As he promised, he did not leave immediately after dropping his wife’s friend off. Instead, he knocked on the door for her. It seemed that Tiffany was so furious that she had forgotten to grab her keys when she left.

Five aching minutes passed between Mark’s disjointed knocks before they finally heard Jackson’s sluggish footsteps booming from within.

Tears welled up in Tiffany’s eyes again.

The door opened to a Jackson West leaning languidly by the door, donning a casual white sweater as he looked on with a groggy face. Mark had to punch his chest lightly and reminded him, “Come on, man. Have some class.”

Jackson wordlessly went to the living room and poured himself a cup of water. Mark shoved Tiffany through the door and shut it tightly.

Thank God this was no longer his business.

Tiffany could not bring herself to look at Jackson and his current state, so she stormed upstairs. The man, meanwhile, placed the cup down upon hearing her steps and waited for a few seconds before following.

Tiffany was in the bathroom when he arrived, removing her makeup. Jackson thought against going back to sleep, so he grabbed his phone and began browsing absent-mindedly as his mind wandered.

Tiffany sniped sneaky glances at him several times, but his attention never seemed to leave his phone. Infuriated to the brinks of tears again, Tiffany stormed out of the bathroom after removing her makeup and went downstairs, not pausing for him.

She would rather sleep on the couch than stay in the room and stare at that pighead's face for one more second!

Jackson took in a deep breath. He tossed the phone aside and waited. When he understood that Tiffany was not going to sleep with him tonight, he rose to his feet and tiptoed to the mouth of the stairs, observing.

Tiffany had laid down on the couch, so he courteously brought her a comforter — and placed it close to her feet before leaving like his job was done.

Tiffany kicked the comforter to the floor in fury. “No one’s buying your stupid act!”

Jackson stopped in his tracks and turned to her. “What do you want?”

What did she want?!

Tiffany glowered at him with flames in her eyes. “What’s that supposed to mean?! What do I want? You’re making it sound like it’s all my f**king fault… Even though I should be the one asking you! I’ve explained my situation, haven’t I? I’ve apologized, haven’t I? But you — you just can’t admit that you’ve done wrong, can you, and would rather paint the narrative that I’m the harpy demanding things from you! Eating with someone from the opposite sex is a f**king sin when I do it, but contacting a woman you’ve f**ked before is totally cool, ain’t it?!”

Jackson frowned. She had brought up his unsavory past again. Women always did that, he reckoned — they always seemed to suddenly remember every horrible detail in the past and recount them all during a quarrel. Honestly, the wisest way to deal with it was to not deal with it at all.

Hence, he spun on his heels wordlessly and began climbing up the stairs. What he did not expect was for Tiffany to furiously brush past him, bumping him maliciously in the process. He then watched her storm into their bedroom.

Jackson wondered if the woman had more drama in-store for him, so he hesitated a little before entering. There, right then, he saw her haphazardly stuffing her clothes into a suitcase, her eyes puffy-red like a rabbit’s.

He reached out and grabbed her wrist. “What are you doing?”

Chapter 716

She glared at him. “None of your business!”

He kicked her luggage away. “You’ve said it. You’ve apologized and explained, so now the ball’s in my court, okay? Can we stop talking about this? It’s late; let’s get some sleep.”

The very mention of sleep made her boil over with rage again. Back in the Tremont Estate, when she couldn’t eat a single bite, he ate as if nothing had happened and slept as if everything was fine. He looked as if he had simply moved on. At this point, she felt as if chopping someone up alive would be the most cruel thing, but he was quiet, he said nothing and simply stared at her with a cold look on his face. Who could possibly stand that? They had obviously parted on bad terms on Friday, and he never made a single move to contact her — for two days! Suddenly, she felt as if he didn’t care about her at all!

“You might be able to sleep, but I can’t! You have no heart, you don’t hurt, you feel nothing, but I’m not like you!”

Flying into a rage mixed with her own grievances then chastising the man for his cruelty, in an equivocal way — these were a woman’s natural talents. At this moment, the woman would never consider the initial cause behind the quarrel, but the man’s current attitude, a continuous wild goose chase. That’s just how it is, no matter how unreasonable it seemed. Men still displayed the same behaviour. It had nothing to do with love. Therefore, a woman’s mind would have 50% suspicion, 30% grievances and 20% rage. Logic? Zero.

Jackson pursed his lips, speechless. He was usually calm and collected when quarrelling with his exes, but for some reason, he couldn't stay calm at all when it came to Tiffany. Solving problems used to be a piece of cake for him, but now, he was grasping at straws. His head was filled with questions like: "what do I do?", "what can I say to calm her down?", "will she hit me if I say the wrong thing?"

Of course, Tiffany had zero inkling of the thoughts running through his mind. All she knew was that she was extremely pissed, but he was extremely calm. She was yelling at him and he was acting like a mute! She struggled away from his grasp, bent down, and continued packing her bags, tears streaming down her face again. She wailed and sobbed.

Jackson's mind was close to exploding. "It's my fault, okay?"

"Did I force you into admitting your mistake?" she sobbed while snapping angrily at him. "You're not in the wrong, you're always right! Jerk!"

"I-I… I really was wrong… No one forced me into admitting my mistake…" he stammered.

She shot him a glare. "What did you do wrong?"

"E-everything… I've done everything wrong, okay?"

She picked up a bra from one of her bags and flung it at him. "What do you mean 'okay'? Am I forcing you into an apology? Are you even human?"

He caught the bra and rubbed the space between his brows, feeling a headache. “How am I inhumane? Can we please stop fighting? Let’s smooth things over. Yes, I wasn’t comfortable in the beginning. When you were in trouble, you didn’t come to me first. This really upset me. I’m your fiancé, so it’s not Alejandro’s place to help you. Even if he initiated the help, that clearly shows how two-faced he really is, and you had the nerve to have a meal with him, behind my back. I don’t think there’s anything wrong in being angry with that, right? My biggest mistake here was that I should never have contacted Lynn in the first place. No, she contacted me. I’ve never even called her. I was still pissed when you got back from your meal with Alejandro, so I wasn’t on my best behaviour. Didn't you storm off on me after barely exchanging a few words?”

Chapter 717

Tiffany stopped whatever she was doing, got up, and faced him. “Who said that I could have a meal with Alejandro, that you contacting Lynn shouldn’t be a problem? Do you know nothing at all? You’ve got a lot of tolerance. I’ve been away for two days and you never called or texted. Am I still important to you? Am I? Did you even think about coming down to open the door for me when I got home just now? I probably wouldn’t have been able to get in if I came here on my own!”

Jackson went silent again. As expected, it was useless to have a reasonable conversation with a woman. He had known that she was staying at Arianne’s, which is why he didn’t call. If she wasn’t going to come home, wouldn’t they just end up quarreling if he called? Wouldn’t it be better to quarrel in one’s own home? He had been waiting for her to come home so that they could solve this together… Who would have thought that she would stay away for two days?

He was wondering why she didn’t open the door herself when she arrived home; she clearly had the keys. He was also wondering why she chose to knock instead of calling him. Why was she so apprehensive over whether she could come in or not? There was no reason for this problem to exist at all…

His silence brought on another wave of Tiffany’s rage flames. “Fine, talking is too precious of an action for you. I won’t put my hopes up on receiving any more golden words from you. To get this much out of you is really more than enough for me. I shouldn’t have come back today!”

Then she bent down and continued packing her bags. He grabbed her atrocious luggage bags and threw them back into the closet. “Where do you think you’re going? Hm? Get in bed and go to sleep!”

Tiffany bit her lips and walked to the door. “You sleep if you want. I won’t hold up any more of your sleep time.”

He stepped forward and stopped her, softening his tone as he said, “Stop this, okay? It’s late. Where are you going?”

She struggled away from his grasp with all of her might, but to no avail. She couldn’t get away. After all, he had her in a firm grip. “None of your business! You don’t care anyway! You don’t care!”

He flipped the switch on the wall and turned on the lights. Then, he scooped her into his arms and threw her onto the bed. Just as she was struggling to get up, he climbed on top of her and began to soothe her softly. “Stop kicking a fuss, be a good girl. Go to sleep…”

If only he had been this gentle from the beginning, she wouldn’t have been so angry now. The more she thought of it, the more upset she was. She turned her face away and sobbed.

He heaved a sigh of relief once she stopped struggling. “It’s my fault. But if anything like this ever happens again, you have to talk to me first, before anyone else. Okay? Please don’t make me feel like I’m not important to you at all, as if I’m completely useless…”

“That thought never crossed my mind,” Tiffany mumbled. “It’s not like you’re not aware of what my mom’s like; she’s brainless, particularly gullible, and easily swayed. Our social statuses are already incompatible, then something this humiliating happened. How could I possibly have faced you? How could I possibly bring myself to talk to you about my mom getting cheated in her quest for remarriage? I’d be a laughing stock if this got out. What would your parents think of me if they ever found out? What would they think of my mom? I know I’m not exactly smart enough to you, which is why I’m not good at solving these things, but I have my dignity. I didn’t want to bother you over every single thing. You’re so exhausted from doing overtime every day, and I was just trying to be considerate of you. Anyway, what exactly did Lynn say to you?”

Jackson reached out and picked up his phone then pulled out the message from Lynn and showed it to her. “See for yourself.”

It was true that Lynn did not actually fan the flames, but the contents of the message alone were enough to spark a misunderstanding: ‘Tiffany is at Alejandro’s manor. They had lunch together this afternoon too. It looks like Alejandro has done her some sort of favor. You and Alejandro don’t even know each other, so what are they doing together? Alejandro never treats anyone to meals. I’m not harboring any ulterior motives, just curious.’

Chapter 718

Jackson did not reply to her message. This somewhat satisfied Tiffany.

Actually, she would have been fine after a bit of cajoling. It was his fault for putting on such a sour, icy exterior. She stuffed his phone back into his hand. “Get up!”

Now that everything had calmed down, Jackson gradually returned to his senses. He knew exactly what to do to completely dissolve her anger. “You’re not angry anymore? I’ve never answered her messages and certainly never contacted her, so you should stay away from Alejandro. From now on, don’t run away from home when you’re not happy. Let's talk about our problems behind closed doors instead.

You said that you were going to Arianne's house and in such a rage too. If I stormed in there, you'd scream at me. Don't you think I value my dignity too? Did you really think that I could sleep well when you were not around? I didn't really sleep. I finally collapsed at six after work and fell asleep as soon as I got home. I've been doing overtime at the office over the weekend. You think I'm that free and easy? Don't cry. Otherwise, your eyes will be swollen tomorrow morning."

Tiffany wiped the tears from her eyes. Her anger had long dissipated. "Who'd believe that? You couldn't have sent me a message or called? Stop making up excuses… And stop crushing me. You're too heavy…"

He reached out and picked up her tiny little chin, flashing a wicked smile. "I did consider contacting you, but I held back. You didn't contact me either though. So what, now you're annoyed with me for being heavy?"

She slapped his hand away. "Dream on! Continue with your sleep if you haven't had enough rest. You have work tomorrow… I need to sleep too… I'm exhausted…"

He lowered his head and planted a kiss on her lips. "Are you really tired? Why do you seem so energetic to me? You looked like you could scold me to death when you were screaming at me. You certainly didn't look sleepy. As they say, absence makes the heart grow fonder. You don't have any… thoughts?"

She knew exactly what his thoughts were. "No!"

He skillfully took off his top then reached out to lift her shirt. "I do."

She could see a faint outline of his perfect figure under the dusky light. To deny her own cravings for him would be a lie. She couldn't resist him. She surrendered completely after a show of resistance, her final

display of feigned reservation. In fact, she was more inclined to launch a counter-attack! They hadn't seen each other for two whole days and had such a huge rowl. She missed him so much!

Her phone rang at the climax of it all. She had put her handbag on the bathroom sink when she was removing her makeup. The phone's ringtone sounded as clear as an annoying, urgent melody on this quiet night. There was simply no way to ignore it. Jackson got up and answered the call before she could. Based on his tone, it sounded like a call from Arianne. He ended the call after a few simple words, but he took his time before emerging from the bathroom.

Alarm bells began to go off in Tiffany's mind. She hadn't deleted the message from Alejandro last night! Jackson must have seen it!

She did not put her clothes on or get up to check. She curled up under the covers, playing dead. A few minutes later, Jackson came over. "Asking you out during such good weather... What does this guy want? Aren't you going to consider blocking his number?"

She let out two dry coughs. "O-of course. You do it. I certainly didn't agree to go out with him. Look at my reply, didn't I reject him? Don't you argue with me…"

Chapter 719

Jackson promptly blocked Alejandro's number. He went back to the bed, but he had lost the mood to continue. He was mostly exhausted, having not slept for the past two days. "Let's get an early night. I'm a little tired…"

He shut his eyes just as he spoke.

Tiffany was a little disappointed. She wasn't sure if he was angry or actually tired. He was clearly excited a while ago, but when he saw the message from Alejandro, he… She quickly ascertained that he was actually tired by carefully kicking him; he simply grabbed her delicate foot as usual and patted her butt too.

The Tremont Estate.

Arianne sat on the bed, holding her phone in deep thought. She couldn't seem to figure out the tone in Jackson's voice during their phone conversation. She turned to Mark, who was next to her, and asked, "Do you think they've made up? Jackson answered the call just now."

Mark snatched her phone away and placed it far, far away from her. "He's answering calls for her, so of course, they've made up. Stop worrying. It's nearly 12AM. Even if they've been quarreling, they're probably done by now. Jackson isn't a child."

Arianne nodded. Just as she was getting ready to lie down, she felt a dull pain in her belly. It wasn't very obvious, but there was pain. She had experienced a miscarriage before, and this feeling was very familiar to her. Her face immediately drained of color. "Mark… M-my stomach… just hurt…"

Mark immediately shot up, turned on the light, and looked at her. "What about now?"

She shook her head. Her forehead broke out into cold sweat. "I don't know… I think it hurt a little bit just now. I'm scared…"

He got up and grabbed her coat. “Let’s go. I’ll take you to the hospital!”

Arianne did not dare delay. The pair did not bother with changing their clothes but simply put on a coat over their pajamas. When they arrived downstairs, their movements woke Mary. Mary wondered why they were going out at such a late hour, so she asked, “Why are you going out so late?”

Mark carefully helped Arianne along, his eyes focused squarely on her abdomen. “Ari’s not feeling well. I’m taking her to the hospital. It’s fine. Go back to sleep.”

How could Mary possibly go back to sleep after hearing that? She followed Mark and helped him put Arianne into the car before dropping the subject.

They called for emergency treatment when they arrived at the hospital. After a series of checks, the doctor scanned the report and said, “It’s alright. There’s nothing wrong. Nothing to worry about.”

Arianne was still a little unnerved. “But my stomach hurt… It was clear, throbbing pain.”

The doctor stepped closer and checked her belly then lightly pressed down on it. “This tends to happen from time to time. It’s alright as long as there’s no bleeding. The results from the examination are normal. Don’t get too anxious. Try to relax.”

Mark bent down and carefully straightened out her clothes for her after the doctor was done with the examination. “I’m glad that everything’s okay. Just a false alarm.”

Arianne held her belly and let out a sigh of relief. “It scared me to death. We’re going to encounter a lot more of these alarming situations in the future…”

The doctor pulled out her medical file and looked through it. “Your belly is growing. Try to stay in bed aside from minor daily activities. Your health is pretty frail after all. There’s no harm in being extra careful. Try to limit your activities to walks. No strenuous exercises and no bedroom activities either.”

Arianne blushed when she heard the last bit. “Mm… Got it… Thanks…”

Chapter 720

Mark couldn’t help smirking when he saw the look on her face. “We’ll be on our way then. Thank you, doctor.”

Arianne’s heated face slowly reverted back to normal. The doctor didn’t even need to mention sex; she was well aware of it. Mentioning it out loud only made it more embarrassing…

“Why were you blushing?” Mark asked, teasing her on purpose.

She looked out the window, pretending as if nothing had happened. “I was not. The hospital was warm, so I was feeling hot from all these extra layers. What’s wrong with that?”

Due to the tedious trip to the hospital in the middle of the night, Mark woke up later than usual the next morning. By the time he arrived at the office, it was almost 10AM. He had just stepped out of the

elevator when his secretary, Davy, greeted him and said, “Mr. Tremont, Miss Cameran is here to see you.”

Miss Cameran, who else could it be except Helen?

Mark wasn’t surprised. This wasn’t the first time Helen had come to see him behind Arianne’s back. “Got it.”

As he entered the office, Helen was looking through the fashion magazines on the coffee table. She got up when she saw him walking in and smiled. “Mark, you’ve come in pretty late.”

He lifted his hand, gesturing at her to sit down. “Can I help you?”

Helen paused momentarily before replying, “I just want to know how Arianne has been doing. It’s not convenient for me to see her, you know. Especially since she’s pregnant. I don’t want to upset her. She won’t be happy to see me.”

Mark sat down on the couch across from her. “That may not necessarily be true. She’s managed to accept her grandmother, whom she’s never met before. She might be able to forgive you too. She’s stronger than you think. She’s pretty good now, but the little one in her belly has been pretty exhausting. I had to send her to the hospital in the middle of the night last night, but it was a false alarm. If you want to see her, then go.”

Helen shook her head. “Forget it. I’m just glad that she’s alright. I’m not like her grandmother. She’s never met her grandmother, so there’s no sense of abandonment or hatred. I, on the other hand, have abandoned her. It’s not the same… Aery has done so many hurtful things to her, and so have I. I can’t

face her. This is a critical time, so I won't add on to your burdens. I hope that she'll deliver the child safely."

"How is Aery?" Mark asked, now that the subject was brought up. "Has she been behaving herself after her release from prison?"

Helen's eyes filled with disappointment. "She's never going to change. It's my fault for not raising her right; that's why she's turned out this way. Consider this my retribution. I surrender. I'll stop holding you up and let you get back to work. Goodbye."

Mark nodded. "Take care."

Helen was about to get into her car after emerging from Mark's office, when Aery ran towards her, nearly knocking her down. "You went to visit Mark?"

Helen frowned. "That's none of your business."

The expression on Aery's face seemed to warp. "None of my business? What do you mean? If you hadn't given birth to Arianne, Mark would have been mine! You've gone to see Mark because of Arianne, haven't you? You won't even see her yourself, but you keep thinking about her. How low can you go? You're the one who abandoned her in the first place and now you won't stop thinking about her. You're such a fake!"

"For how long are you going to be like this?" Helen asked with a straight face. "Haven't you been taught enough lessons? I didn't bail you out from prison to have you cause even more problems. You'd better behave yourself from now on, or I'll sever ties with you. I managed to abandon my old life and run away

with Jean Kinsey before; I can always do the same and abandon you for the sake of my own freedom too. Do you understand me? Don't think that you can cling on to me just because I brought you into this world. No one on this planet can ever hold me down!"