Ruling 861

Chapter 861

Mark felt irritation. “Oh, so you treat us like we’re Uber, huh? Alright, fine then. My God, can you just look at how much the child’s suffering? He looks absolutely pathetic! Gah, is that mucus dripping into his mouth? Someone wipe that away now, urghhh…”

Seeing the disgust in his face genuinely irritated Arianne. “Are you — are you repulsed by your own son?! Mark frickin’ Tremont, did you just suggest wiping his snot as something too dirty for your royal hands?”

For some reason that only Mark knew, he was downright averse to the idea of cleaning his son’s mucus, as though the very act really was the most dreadful thing he ever had the misfortune of being asked to do.

Once in the car, Mark automatically took the passenger seat and left the backseat for Arianne and Mary. Arianne, meanwhile, gave out masks to Mary and Brian, as she wanted to reduce the number of people her son could infect. To have the entire Tremont estate be struck by the same malady at the same time was to spell chaos.

En route to the hospital, Smore began to mewl for milk. Unfortunately, the milk they had brought along was just enough for one feeding; for now, they did not know how much farther they were from the hospital and if the milk would be enough.

Arianne wanted to breastfeed her son, but the imagery made her sheepish. She was still rather new to the business of motherhood, so she was reasonably reticent to the prospect of breastfeeding publicly — even if she was in a car with very few people.

Mark hated noises, so his son's cry peeved him a little. "He's complaining, whining. Why in the blaze is he whining?"

"Looks like he's hungry," Arianne replied quietly, her head low.

He turned his head to face the two expectantly. "Well?"

Arianne shot him a silent but violent glare.

He quickly relented and took off his blazer before holding it out to her. "Use this. Then sate him."

A few minutes later, Arianne was nonplussed at the turn of the events. Since Smore was suffering from a blocked nose, and suckling milk made breathing his mouth impossible, Smore had to stop drinking every few whiles to gasp. Unsurprisingly, that caused the milk to spill all over the place, including Mark's business blazer and Arianne herself.

The feeding was more or less completed by the time they reached the hospital, and Mark began asking for his blazer. Arianne, too embarrassed to tell him, passed the shirt back to him shyly.

He missed her dodgy expression and wore the milk-splattered blazer.

Mary was swift to take the kid with her as she disembarked. “Let’s go, Ma’am; the poor child’s suffering from every wait! The sooner we bring him to the doctor, the better!”

Arianne leaped onto her feet and ran, or more accurately, escaped, after Mary. Only after the pair had entered the hospital did she ask, “Do you think I should tell him about it? You know, so that he could change?”

“Oh, it’s all spilt onto the inside of his blazer, and it’s not like it’s something dirty. No one would notice, so best just pretend not to know,” Mary answered, smiling. “The point is to let him know that it isn’t easy being a father. Heck, he should be happy that we haven’t asked him to change wet or browned diapers!”

Meanwhile, as the car went on its way to the company, Mark could not stop sniffing an odd scent that permeated the air — milk. It smelled like a mix of infant and milk.

He did not hate it, per se; he just did not think it would help prop up his dominance if he smelled like milk while bossing around his employees. He had thought that getting outside the car and having natural winds blowing around him would make the smell fade, but for some reason, the scent stuck. He felt both fuzzy inside and earnestly awkward.

Brian was not one to mince words. “Sir, do you think the Young Master had, er, spit some milk on your blazer? Back in the car when he was being fed, I’m sure that he had coughed quite a few times…” he pointed out. “My point is, you smell like milk. You smell like you frequently take care of the baby at home.

Mark cocked an eyebrow. “Are you suggesting that, in reality, I don’t? Do you think I'm cold-blooded? Well, I’ll tell you straight away — this scent is terrific. I like it, so is it wrong for me to wear it? It’s my son’s smell and I feel happy sniffing it. Is there anything wrong with that?”

Brian was bullied into speechlessness until he finally replied, “You know what? Forget I said anything, Sir.”

Chapter 862

The first thing Mark did after his meeting was to call Arianne. “How is it? All is fine, isn’t it? No cause for concerns?”

Arianne had just about finished her business at the pediatric department, so she had the mood to poke fun. “Hmm, are you asking about your son or me?”

Mark’s lips quivered. “I’m asking about both. Don’t try to bait me.”

Arianne espied Smore slumbering gently in Mary’s arms and replied, “It was nothing big. There’s no fever; he’s just suffering from a very mild case of cold, a runny nose, and coughs. The doctor said he’s too young for medication, so it’s down to making sure he’s all warmed up and drinking plenty of warm water. That’s the same order for me, too. I’m gonna breastfeed him, so I can’t take pills. So, yep, please have Brian send us home.”

Mark glanced at his wristwatch. “I’ll come personally. I have the time, anyway.”

He drove and fetched the group back to the Tremont Estate. Once they arrived home, Mary immediately brought the child into the nursery room while Mark swooped Arianne off her feet and bolted into their bedroom.

“We didn’t have fun at all last night, did we? Let me return what I owe you,” he declared.

Arianne’s cheeks began to burn. “In the middle of the day?” she exclaimed softly. “So this is why you personally sent us home? It’s all for this? God, you’re quite something, aren’t you…”

Smelling the scent of milk from him, she giggled, prompting him to stare at her quizzically. “What’s so funny?”

“Change into a new one before you go out later, alright?” Arianne said as she unbuttoned his blazer. “On our way to the hospital, our little sweetie had spilled milk all over your shirt. And now look at you, all manly and masculine while giving out this babyish-milky smell. It’s just the drollest, funniest thing ever! Hahaha!”

Mark finally understood what happened. His eyes darkened a little before he buried his head into her neck.

He inhaled deeply, letting himself immerse in her scent. “No wonder you two ran out of the car so quickly before… You can be quite a prankster when you want to be, hmm…”

Arianne’s heart thumped wildly when her ears caught the new layer of huskiness in his baritone. Sheepishly, her fingers worked on unbuttoning his shirt while her mind thought back on how inadequate last night was. They were both like arid deserts craving for rain, yet last night was akin to a drizzle that wetted nothing.

Arianne was no longer an innocent girl. She was a woman; she possessed the same kind of needs.

Her little proactive gestures fanned Mark's heat even more. The motions began to hasten, bucking their two bodies closer and closer to a state of a harmonic union and indescribable bliss.

Arianne noticed that his eyes never left her, and the attention — especially at this moment — made her face burn so much that it became feverish. "Why… are you looking at me like that?" she whispered.

"Because you're crazy beautiful," he breathed. "You always looked like a young girl before, but now… you're a woman."

Indeed, motherhood had granted Arianne rounder, perkier features and reshaped her into a voluptuous figure. That was not all; a new odor, exclusive to a lactating mother, had emerged and blended dangerously with the youthful scent of a maiden, resulting in an intoxicating cocktail that swallowed Mark whole.

And he refused to come out of it.

Perhaps his hunger had gone on for way too long. He was not particularly gentle; even his more tender moments were strewn with an untamed undertone. When she unconsciously tried to push him away, he seized her unruly hand and clamped the wrist above her head. The position laid every single peak and valley bare to him, and the more he drank in the view, the more maddened he became.

The dance was over. A dash of exhaustion bled into Arianne's scarlet cheeks as locks of matted hair framed a body too contented with its stupor. Aware that someone's appetite had yet been sated, she protested in a breathy voice that sounded like she was both on the verge of her tears and laughter, "N-no more, please. You need to get to work, Mark. And I… I may need a nap."

Mark took his sweet time to rise from the bed slowly. “If that’s the case, then I bid you sweet dreams and a content rest,” he replied. “I may come home late tonight, so go ahead and have dinner without me. Tomorrow’s Saturday, right? We’ll pay Granny a visit.”

Chapter 863

Mentioning Granny caused all of the warmth in her skin to dissipate. Nonetheless, Arianne nodded and answered, “Alright.”

Meanwhile, getting herself drenched in the downpour last night had caused Tanya to come down with a horrible cold. Today, on top of a barrage of sneezes, she developed signs of a mild fever, too.

Tiffany could not bear to see her like this, so she bought Tanya some cold medicines. “Where did you go late last night, huh? That’s the first time I’ve ever seen you return home later than I do, and then you were all wet and dripping! It must feel like sh*t, doesn’t it? Seriously, Tan. If it’s awful, you can take leave and rest at home.”

“I’m not like you, Tiffany,” Tanya murmured. “I can’t keep myself afloat if I don’t work.”

Tiffany pursed her lips. “What’s that supposed to mean? I need to work to keep myself afloat too! My mom never gives me a single penny. Hell, I’m the one who sends money home to her!… Okay, fine. If you wanna continue working, power to you. But you need to tell me when you’re too sick to go on.”

Tanya nodded silently.

Just then, a striking silhouette flitted across the door. Tiffany quickly elbowed Tanya. “Look who’s here.”

One look at Vicky was enough to make Tanya and Tiffany come to a silent, unanimous agreement to feign obliviousness. It seemed that no one was interested in starting friendly small talks with someone they did not like.

However, Vicky had a different idea. Right after she entered the office, she dashed straight toward them and yelled, “Just as I heard, the two of you do work under Ricky! So, how’s work going? Is it too tiring, too much? If he ever bullies you or demands anything from you, you can complain to me all about it. I’ll go after Ricky and give him a piece of my mind for y’all!”

Tiffany’s hurried reply sounded like she was trying to avoid the plague. “Oh, no, no-no-no. You shouldn’t, although we appreciate your kindness… I guess. Anyway, we’re not tired at all. Eric is a good boss, and he treats all of his employees kindly.”

Vicky turned her attention to Tanya. “I’ve heard that you’ve never tried your hands on designing before this job, and I recall that you started as a janitor here, right? So, how’s the learning process coming along? Is it out of your depth?” she asked. “Designing is one of those things that can get crazy-challenging to learn at once without spending a good few years establishing your foundation. That’s a bit too much work for a job that isn’t even that high-paying in the first place, isn’t it?

“I know, how about changing jobs? You can go back to work that’s similar to what you used to do, like waiting tables! Some establishments offer wages much higher than your current job, you know,” she added. “I know you might want to hold onto your dream and turn this into a career, but the reality is that dreams just don’t come true. Sometimes, the only reason why we’re working our butts off is to feed ourselves, so to stubbornly cling to a low-paying job like this one for the sake of an unattainable dream is quite a colossal waste of energy, don’t you think? Anyway, if you want to switch into a more suitable trade, I can help.”

Tanya’s cheeks burned, words failing her.

Tiffany took a deep breath and retorted, “Huh. Now that I think of it, we’ve never heard about your day job from Eric! But according to your surprisingly oh-so-in-depth knowledge, I wonder — could it be that you work in a nightclub? I mean, where else could you find ‘waitresses’ earning more money than what we’re doing here, hmm?… Oh no! You know so much about these things; maybe I’ve guessed right?”

Vicky turned hot. “Y-you! Tiffany Lane, why do you always insist on looking for a fight with me, huh? What the hell did I do to you? I was just trying to help. If you don’t appreciate it, then leave it! Must you throw in a personal attack, huh? My job and my family business are no secrets to Ricky. Don’t you frickin’ make up untrue assumptions about me!”

Chapter 864

“Aww, I guess I got it wrong, then. But, really, an accusation like that? You didn’t cross me or anything, and I’ve never looked for a fight. You’re a little too easily triggered,” Tiffany intoned, shrugging. “Anyway, aren’t you here because you were looking for Eric? Well, what’s keeping you? Get moving. We can’t be caught dead doing frivolous things during work, you know.”

Vicky started toward Eric’s office furiously, her high heels stabbing the floor on every step. She slammed the door shut so hard, Eric jerked and asked, “What’s with you? Someone crapped in your popcorn?”

She stomped her foot. “That Tiffany! A-And Tanya! They ganged up and shouted at me with this diatribe! What for? It’s not like I’ve triggered them or anything. Uuuurgggggh! Seriously, babe, you keep them around and give them jobs in your company and pay their wages, and this is how they repay you? Treating your girlfriend with that sort of nasty attitude? It’s like they don’t even realize that I’m their future Lady Boss or something!”

Eric was thrown off-board. “Why would they do that to you if you didn't provoke them? I also need to make myself clear. I’m not doing special favors by keeping them around. They stay in my company

because they're that competent, and I only want competent people working for me. So please, don't repeat that sort of thing. It's unpleasant, and it could hurt relations."

Vicky did not expect that this would be his response. "Oh. Et tu, Eric Nathaniel? Not exactly subtle in that change of attitude now that we're living together, darling!" she jeered. "I guess this is just what men are. Once they got their trophy, they don't give a damn about her anymore. Or should I be wondering if you have some special relationships with them, hmm? Why else would you take their side instead of mine? What if I want you to fire them right now? Would you break up with me just to save them?"

Eric could feel his head throbbing. "Jesus Christ, where is all this coming from? If anything, I think you're the one who's changed once we started living together! At first, I thought we were pretty suitable for each other. Heck, you were never so prone to flipping out back then. And now, suddenly, you're not friends with them anymore?" he countered. "Anyway, Tiffany Lane is my bro's bae, while Tanya's my other bro's bae's friend. That's it; that's as far as relationships go. What other relationships am I supposed to have with them? Look, Vicky, if you've got nothing else to do, you could go home or go shopping or whatever. If you'd excuse me, I've got work to do."

"Really? You 'bro's bae'? News flash, Tiffany and Jackson have split for a long time, mister," Vicky sneered. "The woman you're keeping? She's your 'bro's' ex. They broke up, and you rushed to save someone's ex-fiancee like some hero. Why, hmm? And work, work, work! You work all the frickin' time! Do you even remember who I am?"

Eric suddenly sank into silence.

Before he met Vicky, he had thought the two of them were kindred spirits; their conversations had been sweet and heartwarming, and they both yearned to meet each other in the real world. Their first meeting went just as well as they had dreamed, but as time passed and they got to know each other more, Eric realized that it was less of a smooth sail and more of a rocky ride. There was no guarantee of frictionless blithe.

Eric's goal was to enrich their materialistic lives before they eventually got married. He would give Vicky anything she wanted, but it was on the grounds that she did not act unreasonably and would not frustrate him.

Aware that he was genuinely mad, Vicky decided to yield a little. "Fine, fine. I'm sorry for that… outburst, okay? I'm not exactly in my best mood today, but I know I shouldn't have fought you. I know you're weary of your work, isn't it? I just… I feel insecure…"

Eric raised his head to gaze into her eyes. "Insecure? My bank cards are in your hands; you know the pin to every single one of them. I let you use them however you like, and man, did you do that without feeling even a little bit embarrassed. Meanwhile, all I do every day is work and stay at home. You? You're either chilling at home or spending my money. Where's the sense of insecurity supposed to come from? Listen, I'm over my guys-just-wanna-have-fun age; all I want right now is a family and a career. So, you better not turn into a deadweight because I hope we could get married someday, okay?"

"I could have become something big, yet I gave that up for you," Vicky muttered, sounding a little hurt. "I didn't take up a job because I don't know what our society is like, and of course, you promised that I wouldn't need to work to stay afloat. Am I a good-for-nothing to you now?"

Eric took a big breath. "No, I've never seen you that way. As long as my financial status allows it, I don't mind any money you spend at all. What I want, though, is positivity! So can you please give me some of that instead of your constant negativity? I know you said you're not at all offended that Tanya once took up residence at my place, but you act pretty damn offended anyway. Seriously, I don't have anything going on with her, okay? She's an orphan and all alone; I was just doing my part to help. Hell, she's moved out already! So please, don't flip out over something that happened way before, will you?"

Chapter 865

Vicky recognized an impasse. She also knew that nothing good was going to come out of her tantrum if she kept it up — at some point, she would have to stop.

“Alright, alright. I get it. I’m leaving. Don’t stress yourself so much, alright?” she relented.

En route, she passed by the shared office area and scowled at Tanya, though curiously leaving Tiffany out of her malice. The reason was simple; Vicky found Tanya the more obnoxious one of the pair because she was the woman that was once under her man’s care. Tanya had stayed in Eric’s place before Vicky met him in real life. It was the sort of thing that would have crystallized into a grudge in anyone, yet Vicky was forced to feign nonchalance despite her genuine opinion.

Tanya waited until Vicky left the company before entering Eric’s office. “Mr. Nathanial? Um, Tiffany got into a minor tiff with your girlfriend earlier, so I guess she came in and complained to you about it?” she said. “Please don’t be mad at Tiffany. She says what is in her head without filters all the time. It’s her nature.”

Eric waved dismissively. “I’m fine,” he replied, before Tanya’s choice of address drew his curiosity and he added jocularly, “Huh, why aren't you calling me Ricky? I’m really not used to ‘Mr. Nathaniel.’”

A shadow of despondence and somberness crossed into Tanya’s eyes. “Because someone else calls you that. Do you remember? You told me that no one else called you that before I did, so I guess this must be a very special moniker. And I think… only someone who’s very special to you has the right to use it.”

Eric’s eyes glinted. “Er, it’s just a moniker; there’s no special meaning. Hey, Tanya? Vicky’s only been around me for a while, so this environment is still pretty new to her, and she might not observe some unwritten rules between us friends. All I’m asking for is that you and everyone else give her some leeway for the mistakes she might make and, I guess, not hold them against her? I really want her to belong to my social circle as soon as possible. She gave up so much for me. I must do the bare minimum to acknowledge her feelings too.”

Tanya bit her lips. “I… see. You know, had you... had you told me that you already have a girlfriend, I would have never stayed at your place. She must be really upset about the past,” she murmured. “God, it’s my fault — it always is. Everything I touch turns into a mess, and I don’t even know why. I’m so sorry.”

Eric flashed her an encouraging smile. “No, no. You’re better than you think, and you didn’t mess up anything. Don’t get hung up over it. It’s seriously trivial. If there’s nothing else, you could go back to your work. All is fine.”

Just then, a violent fit of coughs seized Tanya. The poor girl succumbed to it so much, tears almost flew out of her eyes.

Eric quickly took out a box of cold tablets from his drawer. “Here. I’ve kept it for the occasion, and I guess this is it. Please, do take care of your health.”

Tanya received it with a smile. “Thank you. I think I kept you long enough, so I’ll be going now.”

Once she disappeared, Eric let out a long sigh. Was it an illusion, or did he catch a glimpse of an uncanny undertone in the way Tanya looked at him? It was alien and absent from their past interactions, and it had caused Eric to tense up intuitively.

As a Casanova with a long record of relationships, his younger years had taught him what that gaze meant, which was why he knew he must never respond to it or acknowledge it. She was just not his type. No amount of force could make two incompatible people work, even if they did, for a while, live under the same roof.

Tiffany immediately spied the medicine in Tanya's hand the moment the latter returned to her desk. "Did Eric give you that?… Wait a minute, I bought you some already, didn't I? Can you even finish them all?"

Tanya dropped the mopey affectation she had adopted back in Eric's office. It became clear that her spirits were rather high. "Well, he offered it to me. Who am I to refuse? We're pretty good friends, aren't we? Can't be a crime to accept medicines from a good pal."

"Say, Tiffany?" she suddenly asked. "How does it feel to like someone? What should a woman do to win the heart of the man she likes?"

Tiffany gulped. "Don't…Don't tell me you're still feeling the hots for Eric, Tan! He's got a girlfriend. Ain't too good to go for a man who's taken, right?"

Tanya pursed her lips. "Naw, who says anything about courting a taken man? The only reason why I went after Eric was because I thought he was single, and all I want is to try being in a relationship and know how it feels. Now that he's got a girlfriend, I'm definitely backing out. But… I have a new target, hee hee. I just want you to tell me what to do to win over my crush's heart."

Chapter 866

"When you're in love, your heart will race every time you see him. You'd immediately feel nervous," Tiffany replied after some thought. "You have to be bold enough to take the first step, no matter what. If you like someone, you have to boldly pursue them. Maybe even resort to a few tactics too. There's nothing shameless about it, as long as you don't cross the line. Don't worry, I'll support you in everything you do. If you've truly found your objective, stop worrying and go after it."

"And what if I told you that my objective… is Jackson? Will you support me then?"

Tanya's question had taken Tiffany aback. She was momentarily unsure of how to answer her. Suddenly, Tanya giggled. "I'm just teasing. Did you really think that I was serious? But seriously, what would you do?"

Tiffany secretly heaved a sigh of relief and treated it as a joke. "Hehe, if it really did happen, you could go ahead. You'd be considerably formidable if you managed to do it. I wouldn't mind… We've broken up anyway. He's single, and you're single…"

Tanya stuck out her tongue. "You said it… By the way, it's been a while since we've eaten out. Wanna have dinner tonight? I have some extra money from my salary this month. My treat."

Of course, Tiffany agreed without hesitation. "Sure. It's a rare occasion for you to buy me a meal. Of course, I'm going to come along. You can choose the venue. I have a big appetite, so don't hate me for eating too much…"

At the end of the work day, the pair left the office, arm in arm, discussing what to have for dinner. They had initially planned on going back to the condo to get the car and drive out, until they saw Jackson's flashy car in front of the condominium lobby. He had come to see her.

Tanya clicked her tongue. "Looks like we won't be alone for dinner tonight. We're going to have an extra seat."

Tiffany rubbed her nose. "I'll go check it out. You get into the shade, away from the rain. It's not raining heavily, but you've already caught the flu. I don't want it to get any worse."

She walked towards Jackson's car and knocked on its glass window. Jackson winded the window down. "Done with work? Let's go. Time for dinner."

She turned to Tanya, who was standing under a tree not too far away. "No way. I've promised Tan that I'd have dinner with her tonight. Why didn't you call me beforehand? It's Tan's treat tonight, so I don't think it'd be a good idea to have one more person come along. How about another day?"

"Wouldn't you have declined me anyway if I called?" Jackson asked, raising an eyebrow. "Why don't I buy dinner instead then? Bring her along, no excuses."

Tiffany had no choice but to comply with his demands. She waved at Tanya. Tanya knew that it would end up like this, so she climbed into the car.

Tanya was sitting in the back, until she suddenly covered her mouth, looking extremely uncomfortable. She said, "W-wait… Stop the car… I think my flu is making me car sick. I need to puke."

Afraid that his beloved car would run into misfortune, Jackson quickly stopped on the side of the road. Tanya got down and retched, looking as if she was in great discomfort.

Chapter 867

Tiffany got down from the car and gave her a bottle of mineral water. "Are you feeling better? Are you still feeling uncomfortable? Maybe you should sit in the front instead? You'll feel better then."

"That's not a good idea, is it?" Tanya asked. "I've heard that a lot of people believe that the front seat of a man's car should only be occupied by his girlfriend… You and Jackson won't mind?"

Tiffany, ever insensitive, simply never thought of it that way. “What are you talking about? What are we? Do we have to nitpick over these things? I can’t possibly leave you feeling uncomfortable, can I? Stop talking and get in the car. You’re sitting in the front.”

Jackson furrowed his brow when someone else climbed into the front seat for some strange reason. “What’s going on? Why did you change seats?”

“Tan’s caught a cold and isn’t feeling well. She’s car sick,” Tiffany explained. “Let her sit in the front. It doesn’t matter who sits in the front anyway. The back seat feels really spacious to me. Start driving. It’s been raining so much over the past few days, it’s annoying. Why can’t we just have a heavy downpour and be done with it? Instead, we keep getting drizzles. It’s so dense. I only got down from the car and my hair’s all wet…”

Jackson didn’t want to say anything more. They couldn’t have anything too heavy, due to Tanya’s cold. Tiffany recommended the Chinese restaurant that she had gone to with Alejandro. She simply felt that the Chinese cuisine there was light and comforting, and delicious too.

Just as they walked into the restaurant, a waitress stepped forward and greeted Tiffany warmly. “Hello miss, will it be the same table tonight?”

Tiffany stared blankly at her. Alejandro had booked the table the last time, so she had no idea why the waitress would talk to her. She didn’t exactly have a striking appearance, right? Alejandro was more recognizable. “Uh… No need. Any table will do. For three.”

Jackson caught the hint. After they were seated and had ordered their food, he scowled and asked, “Who did you eat with here?”

“Alejandro,” Tiffany replied honestly. “I just thought that the food was delicious here, and it’s light-flavored comfort food. Tan is sick, so she can’t have anything too heavy. Nothing else.”

Jackson sighed. “Couldn’t you lie? Don’t you know that you can hurt someone’s feelings when you’re too frank sometimes?”

Tiffany chuckled. “Feeling uneasy? You’ll have to bear with it. I don’t like lying.”

Tanya silently listened to their conversation and did not butt in. She quietly poured tea for both of them. Jackson wasn’t used to drinking tea, especially not restaurant tea, so he pushed his cup aside after thanking her. Tanya’s pupils vibrated a little when she noticed this. “What’s wrong?” she asked with a smile. “Are you too afraid to drink tea from another woman? Scared that Tiffany will get angry?”

“He doesn’t like drinking tea,” Tiffany answered for Jackson instinctively. “Not even I, his ex-girlfriend, could make him drink it, let alone other women.”

Surprised at her scrupulousness in remembering his habits, Jackson’s eyes finally lit up. “Do you have any plans for the weekend? If not, come and have some fun with me. I’m going to Ayashe to sign a contract. I can bring you along for a two-day vacation.”

Of course, she had no plans. However, Tiffany wouldn’t agree to this so easily. “Why are you taking me, your ex-girlfriend, on a vacation? Besides, it’s been raining non-stop lately. It’s depressing. I want to stay home and sleep.”

Jackson pulled out his phone and searched for the weather report on Ayashe. “See for yourself; it’s not raining in Ayashe. The skies are clear and hotter than the capital. It could be a great way to avoid the rain.”

“Just to avoid the rain?” Tiffany exclaimed, unable to resist treating him with snark. “You’re being too extravagant. Let me think about it. Let’s have dinner first.”

“Tiffany, you should go,” Tanya chimed in. “Can I come along too? That is, if you don’t mind.”

Initially hesitant, Tiffany agreed after hearing Tanya’s advice. “Alright, let’s go together, since you want to go too.”

Chapter 868

Jackson was rendered speechless. Why wasn’t anyone asking for his opinion? Was he invisible?

After dinner, Jackson sent Tiffany and Tanya home. The trio had agreed to leave together tomorrow.

…

The next morning, at the Tremont Estate.

Arianne changed into a black outfit, ready to go to the cemetery.

Aristotle was still too small and had caught a flu; plus, it was raining outside. Hence, they decided against bringing him along. They left him at home in Mary's care.

Mark was dressed in a black suit too, which gave him a very stately air. The pair brought a bouquet of flowers and left the house. It was a two hour drive before they arrived at the cemetery.

The dark clouds in the sky cast an eerie light over the cemetery. It was practically deserted, except for the old, bespectacled caretaker, who was reading today's paper in a small hut.

Arianne felt gloomy. It had been a long time since her grandmother's death, and she was only visiting her now. She felt resentful and helpless at the thought of Zoey and her husband's antics. Life was short, and no one had ever been able to enjoy it in peace. Most just drift along. The Wynn family had broken ever since her father, Zachary, had run away to be with Helen. She was later orphaned, so the family disintegrated again. In reality, no one has ever been able to escape a horrible fate. No one's fate was worse than another's.

They walked along the small winding path along the cemetery. The gravestones around them couldn't speak but were still capable of pulling one's spirits into an all-time low. The epitaphs carved on each headstone described the grief that the living had felt for their deceased loved ones.

Suddenly, Mark noticed a figure not too far away and said, "I think someone's beat us to the gravestone today."

Arianne followed his gaze and saw Helen. Did Helen have someone she knew, aside from her grandmother, buried in this cemetery too?

Mark soon disproved her theory. “She’s here to visit granny too. Let’s go over there.”

Helen was here to visit Tabitha? Arianne was surprised. Logically speaking, Helen should hate the old woman. Tabitha’s insistence on separating her with Zachary was the catalyst for many tragic events that followed. The old woman didn’t even get to see her son one last time, not even in death.

Helen turned around in panic when she heard their footsteps approaching her. Her eyes flashed with anxiety when she saw Arianne. “I-I… I just happened to be in the neighborhood…”

Arianne placed the flowers that they had brought in front of the grave with a blank look on her face. The flowers that Helen had brought were right next to hers. What did she mean by “just in the neighborhood”? Was a cemetery that convenient? It was such a weak excuse. She knew that Helen was worried about upsetting her and didn’t want to make her angry. “I thought you hated granny.”

Helen lowered her gaze, her eyes filled with a mix of complicated emotions. “No, I never hated her. Quite the opposite, in fact. I’ve always felt guilt towards her and your father. It’s just my way of completing a part of your father’s unfulfilled duty. I’ve made too many wrong choices in my life.”

Arianne was unsure of what to say, so she kept quiet. Humans were beings with complicated emotions anyway.

She did not feel any tears as she stared at her grandmother’s headstone. She only felt pale and weak. Unbeknownst to her, she ended up standing there for a very long time.

Chapter 869

Mark shaded the mother and daughter from the rain with his umbrella. His clothes were soaked too. Helen noticed this and said, “Arianne, I think it’s time to go. The rain is getting heavier. Mark’s completely soaked.”

Arianne looked at Mark. “Okay, let’s go.”

Helen had driven herself here. Arianne stopped before getting into the car. “Come over to the house and have dinner with us when you have the time. You can see your grandson.”

Helen’s eyes brimmed with tears. “O-okay!” she stammered with great difficulty. She knew that Arianne had finally forgiven her and recognized her as her mother.

Along the way home, Arianne turned to Mark and asked, “Are you feeling cold? You’re completely soaked.”

Mark shook his head with a smile. “I’m not, it’s fine. You’ve grown up.”

She smiled as well. “The last time you said this to me… wasn’t really a good omen…”

He did not comment. He had too many memories of her that flooded his entire brain. He couldn’t remember when he had said those words. It was probably during a time before she had become his. That’s why she remembered it so “fondly”.

Ayashe.

Jackson, Tiffany, and Tanya had arrived at the hotel that they had booked. Tanya had asked to have her own room from the very beginning, as she was sick and didn't want to infect Tiffany. Hence, everyone had their own room.

Jackson didn't feel as excited as he initially was. He had initially planned on spending time alone with Tiffany so that he could develop their relationship. Unfortunately, a third wheel had appeared along the way, so he certainly couldn't do anything now. He had no choice but to behave himself and focus on his work, as if it was a full-on business trip.

He went straight into settling the contract after checking in. Tiffany and Tanya were not familiar with Ayashe, so they could only walk around nearby.

By the time Jackson was finished, it was past 3PM. Tiffany and Tanya were exhausted from their walk, so they rested in the hotel, refusing to go out. They even insisted on getting takeout for dinner.

Jackson's mood plummeted even more by nightfall. That contract signing was supposed to be his secondary objective, and now, he didn't even have the opportunity to be alone with Tiffany! He opened a bottle of red wine and sent Tiffany a message: 'Come over for a drink. Alone.'

Their rooms were not too far apart, so Tiffany came over in her bathrobe. She looked very exhausted. She had been walking around too much in her high heels during the day, so her legs were in pain. "Calling me up for a drink in the dead of the night like this… I'm beginning to suspect you of having ulterior motives…"

Jackson poured her a glass of wine. “Despite your suspicions over my ulterior motives, you came anyway… And in a bathrobe too. That alone is enough to put me in the mood, if I already wasn’t in the first place.”

Tiffany clinked his glass. “Heh. You make it sound like I’m trying to seduce you. I simply saw no need in changing my clothes, since our rooms are so close by and we’re pretty friendly with each other. I can go straight to bed after this drink. Why should I go through the trouble? Work is tiring, vacationing is tiring too. My legs are swollen now. It hurts so badly; I feel like I’m stepping on knives everywhere I go.”

Chapter 870

Jackson pushed her onto the side of the bed. “I’ll massage it for you. Will that do? Why did you choose to walk around in high heels? It’s not healthy to wear heels too often.” He lifted her foot and placed it on his lap then carefully massaged it. He was pretty skilled.

Tiffany stared at him calmly. “Why have I never noticed this extra skill of yours? We’ve been together for so long, yet you’re still keeping secrets from me! It’s not like I like wearing heels. The men around me are so tall, it’s like they inhaled hormones while growing up. I’d look way too short if I don’t wear heels, like a pumpkin next to bamboo trees. Do you really think that I can avoid wearing them? You, Mark, and Eric, which one among you is short?”

Jackson chuckled at her. “Haha… You… seriously… Must you describe yourself in that way? I like you just the way you are; that’s good enough. Why should you worry about how others perceive you? Arianne isn’t any taller than you, and she wears flats when she’s next to Mark anyway. Look at Mark; do you think he’d dare breathe a word of dislike?”

Acupressure points on the bottom of feet were usually sensitive spots. Massaging those areas when one’s feet were sore would bring great relief. Tiffany couldn’t be bothered to chat at this point. “Hey hey hey… Gentle… Not there, it tickles…”

Her cries pushed Jackson to his limits. “Can you keep a lid on it? How can you expect me to massage you when you’re making those noises? I’m no upstanding male.”

Tiffany resisted the urge to cry out when he said this. She couldn’t bear giving up on such enjoyment, so she covered her lips and restrained herself. Soon, she began to blush and moan from time to time. Her calves were considerably slender and very delicate, even among women. Her toenails were painted with a light pink, half-transparent nail polish, which made her legs seem even more fine and tender. The teasing flash of her thigh aroused Jackson, and he unconsciously added pressure in his fingers.

“Let’s start over.”

Tiffany was taken aback. The feeling in her legs had rendered her incapable of thought. “No…”

He expected her frank reply. Jackson slid his hand upwards along her thigh as he stared at her with keen, sparkling eyes. “Then what are we?”

“Friends with benefits?” Tiffany answered thoughtlessly. “Secret lovers? Whatever you w-want… O-oh… Stop tickling me! If you’re going to massage my foot, do it properly!”

Jackson felt frustrated. “You’d rather be f*ck buddies than my official girlfriend? Do you have a loose screw in your brain?”

Tiffany avoided his gaze when she noticed that he didn't seem like he was joking. She wanted to pull her thigh away from his hand, but he held onto her with a tight grip. "It's not like I'm a willing f*ck buddy… You're the one with a loose screw… Let go. I'm going to bed."

Jackson tugged on her, causing her to lose balance and topple onto the bed. He then climbed on top of her, staring right into her eyes. "What the hell do you want? Why can't we be together? Are you trying to torture me, or yourself? Who are you trying to inhibit? You should at least give me an answer. Either you let me give up on you completely or you come back to me!"

She was scared, afraid of giving her final answer. She was afraid of saying anything, in case there was no turning back. She didn't want to disappear from his world, but she couldn't bring herself to be with him. Was she being too greedy?

Her silence tugged on Jackson's last nerve. "How does your brain process these things? If you say that there's absolutely no hope for us, I'll stop contacting you. I swear. If you really want me to stop getting involved with you, I will let you go."

She wanted to end it. She wanted to gather the courage she had when she asked for their break up. However, the words remained hanging on her lips, refusing to leave. She knew that it was unfair to waste time, both his and hers, like this. However, she couldn't free herself.

Just as they were reaching their limits, her phone suddenly rang, arriving like her final saving grace. She frantically pulled out her phone from her bathrobe pocket and answered it. She did not even bother to look at the name on the screen. The call was from Arianne. "Tiffie, where are you? Are you free this weekend? Wanna go shopping tomorrow?"