

A Ruling Passion – Chapter 0241

Eric shook his head. “Don’t know. You can tell this to someone else and bluff them, but lying to your bros? Do we not know who you are? Other than being a womanizer, you don’t have any weakness. Women around you are either your relatives or your lovers.”

Jackson smiled without saying anything back. When he heard glass shatter in the kitchen, he jolted. “You guys talk, I’ll go check it out.”

When Jackson left, Eric whispered to Mark, “Do we want to let sis-in-law know? This is her best friend. What do you think?”

Mark kept quiet, showing his disinterest in the matter. Not willing to give up, Eric fished out an exquisite box of cigarettes and passed it over. “Want one?”

Looking at the cigarette offered to him, Mark hesitated for a second before rejecting Eric decisively. “I don’t smoke.”

Eric teased him. “Oh ho ho, have you really quit? Yeah right, as if I believe that. Arianne isn’t here, so no need to pretend.”

Perhaps it was for the weak ego of a man, for Mark took a cigarette and lit it in front of the window. The riverside View was picturesque. The White Waters Bay was truly a serene location.

Despising Tiffany's clumsiness, Jackson asked her to just take a break. When she got to the living room, she saw Eric and Mark "Ari isn't here? You should've asked her to come along too."

Mark was stunned for a split second, not having thought of it, as it was usually the three of them gathering and talking about everything. It was not really suitable for a woman to be around. Arianne was not at ease with such situations in the past too. Now that he was reminded of this, Mark hesitated.

Taking in the man's silence, Tiffany tried to persuade him. "Call her and ask her to come. The more the merrier. I'm here too, and I'll be bored otherwise."

"Ask her to come," Eric spoke up as well.

Mark retrieved his phone to call Arianne. When the latter picked up, she was swinging on a swing with Rice Ball in the backyard. "What is it?"

Arianne was still timorous from what she had done, afraid that he was back to pick at her now that his head had cleared.

Mark glanced at Tiffany and said, "I'll have Brian pick you up. Come to the White Waters Bay. Your friend is here too." He hung up after that to call Brian.

Arianne was a little bewildered. She knew that Jackson was staying in one of the villas at the White Waters Bay, but she had no idea which "friend" Mark meant.

Delighted, Tiffany became swifter in her chores. She was unable to help out in the kitchen, so she went about other tasks. Jackson was the only one staying in the humongous villa, not even having a housekeeper. It was only recently that he hired her, a part-time cleaner. It was a waste just thinking about it.

When Tiffany was ironing Jackson's clothes with full focus, Eric came over to her and asked softly, "When did you get together with Jackson?"

Tiffany looked puzzled. "Together what? I'm just working. Laugh if you want to. My family went bankrupt, that's all. I need to feed myself. Why?"

Eric refused to believe her reason. "Quit it. Jackson's never brought a woman here. He doesn't even have a housekeeper around. He only occasionally has someone here to maintain the cleanliness. Other than that, it's just me and Mark who visit from time to time. Your presence is a surprise. I'm only asking since you're Arianne's friend. We're all adults. It's fine to have fun with Jackson, his marriage has been internally decided anyway."

Tiffany was amused. “No, is your brain fried? How should I explain it in a way that you’ll believe me? Do I look like someone who’s looking to ‘have fun’? Even if I really did have a thing going on with him, wouldn’t telling you be considered as stabbing your bro behind his back? Look at you being trifling!”

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Eric almost doubted himself after Tiffany’s spiel. “You... Fine! That’s all I have to say. Do whatever you want. I’m only giving you a reminder. You can’t sport with certain people, neither can you afford to as well. This is to prevent things from getting awkward when we meet Arianne in the future. Jackson’s never one to force others. If you’re reluctant to, nothing will happen between you both. Done and dusted, think about it yourself.”

Tiffany rolled her eyes at him. “Okay, okay. Thank you for your reminder. Now go away, don’t block my source of light!”

Forty minutes later, Brian dropped Arianne off at the White Waters Bay. The door to Jackson’s house was left ajar, but she still knocked first.

When Tiffany heard it, she sprinted to pull the door open like a gust of wind. “Ari!”

Arianne was surprised. “Tiffie, why are you here?”

Pulling the girl inside, Tiffany explained briefly, “Found a part-time job. I’m working by the hour here. Some cleaning and whatnot...”

Arianne felt her heart clench. Tiffany could have been like the rest of the men here...

She did not show what she was feeling inside nor did she further question it. Smelling the scent of cigarettes in the living room, she went to open the windows.

Mark suddenly coughed, frightening Eric. “Uh... Mark didn’t smoke.”

Mark lounged on the couch and stroked his chin helplessly. Was Eric stupid? This was basically giving him away when he was the one who egged him on! He had coughed because he actually had to, not because he wanted to give a reminder!

Arianne was perplexed. “It’s okay... I’m just opening the windows for ventilation. It’s fine to smoke, don’t mind me.”

Suddenly, Jackson stuck his head out of the kitchen. “What’s the smell? I haven’t started cooking, so what’s burning?”

Tiffany blanched and sprinted back into Jackson’s bedroom. “I think it’s your clothes scorching from the iron...”

Jackson felt an incoming headache and followed her into the room. Looking at the smoking garment under the iron, Tiffany made a grab for it with her hand and almost jumped from the searing heat. "Ah!"

Jackson caught her hand immediately. "You okay? Never mind. I'll take care of this. Go chill outside."

Tiffany stood her spot and watched him clean up the mess with one hand. It was not that she did not want to leave but that her hand was still in his grip...

For some reason, Tiffany recalled what Eric told her and a siren blared in her head the more she thought about it. She flung Jackson's hand away. "I'll compensate for the ruined clothes."

Jackson was a little dazed as he stared at his now empty palm. "Hmm... it's not worth much, no need for compensation. It's just a shirt. It's fine as long as you don't ruin my suits."

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Truthfully, not many women could resist a man like Jackson. Even when you knew that he was a playboy, you would still think that he was elegant and charming. The unintentional details would always reflect his gentlemanly manner and his considerate character. More crucially, he had the assets to be a playboy. He was rich and handsome. Even devil-may-care Tiffany felt butterflies in her stomach for a while.

It was past ten at night when Mark and Arianne left Jackson's villa. Everyone had some wine during the dinner, including Arianne, but she did not have too much. She could feel her cheeks heating up but she was still clear-minded.

Brian had been waiting outside for a long time. When they got into the car, Arianne looked at the villa that turned scintillating in the nightfall and suddenly asked, "Is Jackson married?"

Mark paused for a beat before answering, "No, but soon. He knows what he's doing, you don't have to worry."

Mark was Mark, he knew what she was thinking with just one question. As a woman, Arianne's instinct regarding men was accurate, as was her inclination. A man like Jackson was unique and absolutely attractive. His eyes were friendly when he looked at people, he was handsome and wealthy with a good disposition, and he could handle any fight, as well as cook up delectable dishes. A casual time in the kitchen produced dishes of a chef's standard. A man like him was basically flawless in modern times. Arianne was worried about a relationship sparking between Tiffany and Jackson when they spent so much time together. There were some people you could not toy with, not that you would be able to...

In the villa, Tiffany felt a little weak when looking at the table waiting to be cleaned up. She had to settle it before she could leave. As a part-time cleaner, it was more than worth it, as she got to have a free meal and the dinner tasted just like the food in White Waters Bay Restaurant. It was as if she had a free meal in a posh restaurant and she did not have to pay for it. She must still complete her actual chores.

After a short break, she put on an apron and began to clean, but her mouth worked as well. "I didn't expect you to be so good at cooking. Your dishes are delicious. Your future wife is one lucky woman. Right, next time, toss your changed clothes into the laundry basket directly so I don't have to look everywhere for them. And if there's overtime work in the office, I won't be able to finish the chores here in one day. I can't really cook, and you wouldn't be able to stomach my food anyway. Even my mom curses at me daily when she eats what I make. But other than cooking, I can do everything else..."

Looking at Tiffany busying around, Jackson was in a momentary trance. It felt odd. His otherwise dead home was suddenly full of life. It felt like the daily life of an ordinary couple, simple and homely, but it still hit home. It had been a long time ago, but he once experienced peace like this when he was a little boy... It was a distant memory.

Immersed in his reminiscence, it was as if the floodgates were opened.

Back then, Jackson's parents could only fend for themselves alone, as their relationship was not approved by the family. They had him then, despite the worse days. The peaceful days did not ultimately triumph over the reality, however. His father relented and took him back to the Wests. While his mother was allowed to enter the West family's doors, she was unwelcomed.

Speaking of which, it was ridiculous. Due to his mother's painstaking persistence, her sufferings were rewarded with a sweet end when Jackson's grandparents passed away. However, it was his father who had not remained faithful in the face of seduction, and he had other women. It made Jackson feel as if all the joy they used to have was just a mirage. When his father passed away from illness, his mother shouldered the Wests alone. It had been only a short ten years, but he was still a child when his mother had been too busy working to go home. Staying alone for so many years, it seemed rather sad to suddenly be affected by his emotions.

“What are you thinking about? I’m done cleaning. My phone’s dead. Lend me yours to call a cab.”

Pulled back to reality by Tiffany’s voice, Jackson was at a loss for several seconds while looking at the woman in front of him. Before he could react, Tiffany stuck her hand into his pants pocket to fish out his phone. After making the call, she returned the device to him. “Done. I’ll wait for my ride here. Do whatever you have to, don’t mind me. I’ll close the door when I leave.”

“Uh... Can you stay and sleep with me? Just this once.” Jackson looked utterly serious when he said this.

Tiffany thought that he was being rude at first, but his expression did not match the thought. This was not the first time he had made such a request. When it happened too many a time, Tiffany was skeptical about his true intention. “Sleep? Are you sure you’re not trying to be indecent? Is it really appropriate to simply ask a girl this?”

Jackson seemed to be determined to go through with his decision. “You can list your terms. Stay for the night. Just to sleep. Nothing else.”

The request was odd. Tiffany felt a little timorous. She had yet to reach the stage of resorting to things like this to feed herself and her mother. In spite of it, she was indebted to Jackson. It would not look good if she refused him too harshly. Including her father’s surgery bill and the blind date lunch bill, she owed him nearly \$36,600. You sell your liberty when you accept gifts —though, it was not gifts in her case...

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“Give me a reason. Don’t tell me that someone your age is still afraid of sleeping alone. Are you afraid of the dark?” Tiffany asked him jokingly.

“Something like that. Give it a thought.” Jackson got up and poured himself a glass of wine then drank half of it in one go.

Tiffany thought about it, but still refused in the end. “The cab I hailed is arriving soon. Besides... it’s not appropriate for us to do this. I heard from Eric that your marriage has been internally decided, which means you already have a partner. Why are you asking me to do something like this instead of your fiancée? I don’t want to be criticized by someone else. Come on now, there’s nothing scary about sleeping alone. Don’t worry so much.”

Jackson smiled, somewhat self-deprecatingly. “My fiancée? Didn’t you see her at the restaurant last time? She isn’t like you.”

Tiffany was suddenly at a loss for words. What did he mean by that? Was he insulting her? Being here with Jackson alone made her feel awkward. She could only hope the cab she called would come quickly. After waiting for more than half an hour, there was still no call. Tiffany finally asked, “Can you help me check where the cab is? Why hasn’t it arrived yet...?”

Jackson took out his phone and waved it in front of her eyes. “I cancelled it. No cab is coming. Besides, it’s not safe for you to take a cab this late at night.”

She puffed up her cheeks in anger. “Why are you like this? How can you force someone to sleep with you? Aren’t you being a jerk...?”

Jackson smirked at her. He leaned toward her, effectively trapping Tiffany between the sofa and his body. “Let’s just say that I am being a jerk to you. You’ll be paid for it. Why don’t you reconsider?”

She shot him a glare. “No! I’m still an innocent girl. Don’t you dare mess with me! Get off! I’ll go out and hail a cab myself!”

An innocent girl? Jackson was a little surprised to hear that and let her go. After all, he wasn’t a Vile man.

Tiffany slipped away quickly. He knew that it wasn’t easy to hail a cab in this area but still decided to let her try. It took Tiffany almost half an hour just to walk out of the White Water Bay Villa area. When she finally reached the main road outside, she didn’t even see a car, let alone a cab.

She walked along the side of the road while waiting for a cab. The night breeze was very cold and the temperature had dropped. She trembled in the cold and couldn’t even feel her legs.

All of a sudden, she heard a car honking at her from behind. She was a little scared. If it was a kidnapper, a girl like her wouldn’t be able to outrun them in a place like this. She calmly pretended to be talking on her phone that was already dead. The car behind her

pulled up to the side of the road next to her, and her legs started to tremble involuntarily. Just when she was about to start running, the window rolled down and Jackson poked his head out. "What are you doing? Get in the car. I'll give you a ride," he looked at her with great amusement.

Tiffany let out a long sigh of relief. After getting into the car, she suddenly recalled something. "Weren't you drinking just now? What if there are cops?"

Jackson curled his lips. "That'll be your fault then. If I hadn't come, were you really planning on walking all the way back?"

Tiffany frowned. "Let's not... It's too dangerous to drink and drive. You can go back by yourself first, I'd rather walk home myself since I don't have to work over the weekend. I'm fine with walking home until dawn, at least I can sleep the entire day away after that."

Jackson turned the car around and headed directly back to the White Water Bay Villa area. "Let me get off first!" Tiffany tried to stop him.

"You sleep on the sofa, I sleep on the bed." He quickly made the final decision without giving her a chance to go back on her words.

Tiffany never expected that she would be back to square one after going through so much trouble. Had she known that, she might as well skip all those troubles. She was initially looking forward to getting a good sleep on the sofa, but the scene in front of her

eyes stunned her. There was a huge red wine stain on the sofa, which had still been fine when she left earlier.

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“You did this on purpose, didn’t you?” She gave Jackson an accusing look

“No, I didn’t. The wine glass was on the armrest when I left. I don’t know how it spilled.” Jackson shrugged innocently.

“You’re deliberately making things difficult for me, aren’t you? You knew how tired I am already from cleaning and created another mess for me! How am I supposed to clean this sofa?” Tiffany looked like she was about to cry because she had absolutely no experience in cleaning up a stained sofa.

Jackson burst out laughing on the spot. He thought Tiffany was going to accuse him of deliberately soiling the sofa to force her into submission. He didn’t expect her mind to be this pure. It was as if her brain didn’t function like a normal person’s.

It was already midnight and Tiffany finally accepted the fact that she wouldn’t be going home today. Even so, she still insisted on not sharing the same blanket as Jackson. At least, it felt safer that way.

At the Tremont Estate...

Nina was forcing Arianne to choose some limited edition branded bags in front of the computer with her. They were all recommended by Nina's friends from overseas. Due to the different time zones, they had to stay up late into the night.

"Nina, shouldn't we call it a day now? I'm so sleepy..." Arianne couldn't hold it anymore. It was half past twelve already. She had been 'commandeered' by Nina as soon as she got back. Arianne couldn't help but be jealous at the thought of Mark probably being sound asleep by now. She wanted to sleep too!

Nina was still full of energy, looking as though she would never run out of stamina. "We'll be done soon. Don't worry! Hurry up and choose one for yourself. I'll buy it for you."

Arianne randomly pointed to a small beige bag. "This one then."

By the time they were done, it was past one in the morning. Arianne went back to the bedroom with her eyes closed. Her eyelids felt so heavy, as though they had been sewn together.

As soon as she laid down, Mark drew close to her and wrapped his arms around her. But Arianne's mind was a mush now. "Cut it out... I'm dead tired..."

Mark ignored her and pinned her down on the bed with his body instead. At this point, she was too lazy to be bothered. She just relaxed her body and drifted into sleep.

In her daze, she felt a chill on her body that slightly woke her up. She cracked open her eyes and was shocked completely awake by his sudden assault. She never expected that their first moment of intimacy in such a long time would be under such circumstances. She couldn't see his face clearly in the dark and could only vaguely see his strong body...

After a while, everything calmed down again, leaving only the silence of the night.

Everyone got up late the next day. Nina slept in after a late night shopping. On the other hand, Arianne and Mark had a busy night.

For this reason, Mary and Butler Henry had more free time today. They stood at the door chatting with each other. In the past few years, they'd never seen Mark sleeping in until noon.

In fact, Arianne had woken up at ten in the morning. But when she went to get up, Mark pulled her back into the bed. Although her experience last night was better than the ones in the past, it still drained her. In the end, she only had one thing in her mind when she looked at the man hovering above her—she would probably never be able to get used to things like this in her whole life!

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After a wild storm, Mark finally got up and went into the bathroom. “I’ll send Nina off later. You should get more sleep after getting some food.”

Arianne blushed and sank into the blankets, still panting slightly. The man looked as cold as an iceberg again after getting out of the bed, but they were talking a lot more now. In the past, he would never talk to her unless necessary.

In the White Water Bay Villa, Tiffany woke up freezing cold. Except for the warmth on her back, she felt cold everywhere else. She didn’t know how the two blankets ended up being kicked onto the ground. Jackson and her were supposed to be sleeping on each side of the bed, but they were now in each other’s arms! No, to be precise, she was the one being held in his arms. She would’ve murdered him if it wasn’t for the fact that he kept his arm on her waist and not any higher than that.

She only now understood what he meant by sleeping with him. Jackson only wanted her to be his pillow. It was only as simple as that.

After walking so much last night, she really didn’t want to get up yet. It took her a lot of effort to finally pick up the blanket from the ground with her feet before falling back asleep again.

All of a sudden, Tiffany was woken up by a series of knocks on the door. Since she was still muddle-headed from sleeping, she thought she was at her own house and muttered under her breath, “Who is it knocking crazily...”

Jackson was woken up by the knocking on the door and got up to check. As soon as he opened the door, his body stiffened at the sight of the woman standing at the door. "Why are you here?"

Annie waved an exquisite looking food box in front of his eyes. "I specially made you some delicious food. Since you're so great at cooking, I wanna learn from you too. Hurry up and give it a taste!"

Jackson didn't speak. Annie Noriene was his fiancée, the one whom Tiffany met in the restaurant last time. They were considered a good match for their family backgrounds and social statuses. Annie had a beautiful face, a hot body, and the voice of an angel. She was definitely the epitome of a beauty in the eyes of most men. However, Jackson just couldn't feel interested in her, knowing that their marriage would be for business gains. In the past, he would never refuse any woman who tried to climb into his bed as long as they were decent looking. Annie was an exception, however.

He usually fooled around, but marriage was supposed to last for a lifetime. He hated to act according to old conventions and hated being bound to someone.

Noticing his lack of interest, Annie lowered her head in slight disappointment. "What's wrong? Are you not happy that I came here

to find you privately? Maybe I should have informed you in advance since I know you dislike being intruded by others..." While

Annie was talking, she noticed a pair of white female canvas shoes. Her face instantly paled. “You... You have someone in your room? Is that why you’re not happy that I came?”

Jackson moved his body slightly as he subconsciously tried to block Annie, fearing that she would suddenly barge into his room to ‘catch his lover’. “It’s not what you think. Put your things down and leave first. I’ll contact you tonight.”

For a wealthy socialite like Annie, there was no way she would take things lying down. “Jackson West! What do you mean by this? Everyone knows you like living in this White Water Bay villa alone so people rarely come to disturb you! It’s only my first time visiting here since I didn’t want to disturb you before. I didn’t expect you to be someone like this! I want to see who’s the woman on your bed!”

Tiffany heard the commotion and went into the living room while rubbing her eyes. “What’s going on? Why are you disturbing my sleep...?”

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Silence immediately set in. Jackson started to get a headache. Annie didn’t expect this woman to be so ‘daring’ as to not take her seriously! She stared at Tiffany and suddenly recalled meeting her in the restaurant before. Not only that, Jackson even footed a \$6,600 bill for her back then!

Realizing the tense atmosphere, Tiffany was finally fully awake. Upon seeing the situation at the door, she gulped audibly. “Um... this is a misunderstanding! It’s all a

misunderstanding! I'm just a part-time cleaner here. Have fun chatting, I'll be leaving now."

Naturally, Annie wasn't buying that. She tried her best to spread her slender arms and blocked the door. "Cleaner? Are you taking me for a fool? How did a cleaner end up on his bed!"

Tiffany stopped trying to explain herself. There was no way she could justify the situation with her sleepy face and dishevelled clothing. No one expected Annie to pull out her phone in the next second and snap a photo of her. After that, she barged her way into the bedroom and took a few snaps of the messy bed. "Just wait and see! I've seen plenty of shameless women like you!"

Jackson finally couldn't stand it anymore. "Can you not get anyone else involved in our affairs? You can complain whatever you want to me. We can talk about it. There's no need to do things to this extent!"

Annie furiously shoved her cell phone into her bra, with all the evidence saved in it. "Come get it if you can!"

If Jackson were to snatch her phone away, he would need to put his hand into Annie's clothes. This was the first time Tiffany had seen anyone this ruthless. Since she was aware that she was the one at fault, she could only leave the whole mess to Jackson to deal with while she quickly fled from the scene. Annie intended to chase after Tiffany while yelling at her, but she was stopped by Jackson. Tiffany ran all the way out of the White Water Bay Villa area without stopping, her lungs ready to explode. She then took

her phone out to call Arianne. “Ari... I’m having a breakdown right now! I might go viral soon!”

Arianne was still drowsy from her sleep and couldn’t understand the situation. “What’s going on?”

At this point, Tiffany had nothing to conceal. She told Arianne everything, including about her part-time work at the nightclub. Arianne frowned upon hearing this. “Don’t go to Jackson’s house again, Tiffie. I’ll ask Mark later if there’s any part time job for you. Now that things have developed to this extent, it’s about time you be more careful.”

Tiffany agreed with her point of view. “I think so too. I’ll tell Jackson later that I’m quitting. I’ll go home first, or my mom will be shouting at me again. Gonna hang up now!”

After the call ended, Arianne got up and washed up. She hesitated for a while before giving Mark a call. The call was very quickly picked up. “Is it convenient for you to talk right now? I have something to discuss with you privately. It’s best if you don’t have anyone else around you.”

It was quite noisy over at Mark’s side, but the noises soon died down, perhaps because he went off to a quieter place. “What is it?”

Arianne calmed down and repeated Tiffany's story to him. Mark fell silent for a moment before speaking, "Jackson went overboard. I'll talk to him about it later. This is a mess that he started, so he has the obligation to clean it up. Don't worry about it."

Arianne let out an impatient sigh. "Tiffie is a strong-minded girl. How would she feel being branded as a homewrecker? I just don't know what's going through Jackson's mind. He has plenty of women out there. He can't go after Tiffie. Can you tell him that clearly? And also... Do you have a suitable part-time job for Tiffie? I'm worried that she might do something crazy again."

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Mark thought for a while. "We'll talk about it later when I'm back. Still busy right now. There are still a lot of things we need to buy for Nina's new place."

In the afternoon, Arianne met up with Tiffany at the Southern Cafe. Both of them looked glum. There was no news from Jackson's side, but Annie was merciless. She immediately found someone to edit the article and posted it on the Internet. The views skyrocketed within a few hours. Tiffany was the only one exposed in the article and there was no sight of Jackson in the photo. Not even his shadow. In the end, this just made Tiffany feel like she was the only one shouldering the blame for everything.

Arianne had always despised these condemning news. “I called Mark just now; he will find Jackson. Don’t worry, I won’t let this news stay on the Internet for more than a day. You’re not to be blamed for this.”

Tiffany took a sip of her coffee then curled her lips. “How can I not be blamed? The fact is, I still slept with someone else’s man. Although I suffered some losses, that woman got the worst of it. Fortunately, we were only sleeping and didn’t do anything else. Damn, that Jackson. He already has a woman. Isn’t it better to sleep with her? I really don’t get what’s going on in his mind. I ended up being made into a villain. I guess I should maintain a respectful distance from these rich guys.”

As soon as she finished speaking, her phone received a bank transaction notification. The amount stated on it stunned her. “Ari... I think I didn’t suffer any losses after all. I got a four-figure paycheck for sleeping a night without doing anything else...”

Arianne was amused by her. “You silly girl! You can’t buy back your reputation with money. You’ll understand that when you get married one day. Trivial things like these will become a thorn in your husband’s side and root causes of many fights. Although Mark never directly said it, he still minds about the scandal I was involved in back then...”

Tiffany smiled knowingly. “Ari, you’ve really grown up and matured. It seems like marriage will indeed accelerate the growth in some people. In the past, you were always that delicate damsel that needed protection in my eyes. Not only that, you were also not good with words and was always timid. But now, you’re different. I don’t really mind now that things have escalated to this point. I’m already living in hell, now nothing can be worse than that.”

A ringtone interrupted their conversation. Arianne knew it wasn't her phone so she looked at Tiffany. "Is that from Jackson?"

Tiffany shook her head. "It's my mom."

As soon as she picked up the call, Arianne could hear Lillian's voice even though Tiffany didn't put it on speakerphone. "Where the hell are you! What's with the news on the Internet? Here I am, wondering why you're no longer at home at night! Are you doing these shameful things to embarrass me?"

Tiffany seemed to be very used to it. She sipped on her coffee nonchalantly and retorted, "If I don't do 'shameful things' like this, how am I going to find money for you to gamble and buy branded goods? If I were you, I wouldn't have the face to ask these questions. Alright, leave me alone for now."

As soon as she finished speaking, she ended the call and instantly turned off her phone.

Arianne couldn't help but say, "Jackson still hasn't contacted you until now? He only transferred you the money?"

Tiffany nodded. "I'm guessing that he got into a big problem with his woman. I think she's a pretty feisty one. All I'm worried about now is losing my job. If that woman finds out that I work for Jackson, she'll never let me off the hook I've already mentally prepared myself over the possibility of losing my job. I'm out of groceries at home, so gotta do some shopping first. We'll call it a day. I'll give you a call if anything comes up."

By the time Arianne returned to the Tremont Estate, it was dinner time. Since Mark wasn't home yet, she took it as Nina having asked him to stay for dinner, so she didn't inquire further. After one afternoon, Tiffany's incident got even more intense. Some people had even started crowdsourcing information about Tiffany.

Arianne was so worried that she could hardly eat or sleep. She wanted to wait for Mark to come back and discuss the next course of action. Who knew by midnight, he still wasn't home yet. She couldn't help but call to ask. Unexpectedly, the call didn't go through. His phone was turned off.

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Arianne went to work as usual the second day and found out that Mark had not returned home the entire night.

It was not that she suspected that something happened between him and Nina. She was just curious as to why he did not inform anyone in advance about not coming home.

When she arrived at the office, Eric looked the usual as if nothing happened. His state of ease was supposed to relieve Arianne since the former shared a close relationship with Mark and would know if anything happened to either of them, but it still did not assuage her.

Tiffany texted her then. "Ari, I realize that there are people guarding nearby my house and someone painted curses on my door in red. I dare not go out now!"

Arianne was close to jumping when she read the text and decided to go to Tiffany's house. Too afraid to go alone, she thought about it before dragging Eric along.

When Eric's car stopped outside of Tiffany's house, Arianne took note of several suspicious people roaming the vicinity. Eric knew about the situation as well. "I suggest that we think this through. If Annie hired these people, they won't go away so easily. Someone might get hurt. I'll call Jackson first; he'll have to take responsibility for this."

Arianne was puzzled. "Who's Annie?"

"His fiancée. Don't worry, I'm not familiar with that woman. Jackson hasn't taken her to hang out with us either," explained Eric.

Eric's phone was connected to the car's Bluetooth. When the call connected, it wasn't Jackson's voice that was heard but someone else's reprimand. "What have you done? Jackson, what are we supposed to tell the Norienes? You've always been a good kid. For so many years, I've never had to clean up after you. Why the sudden mishap?"

Eric dared not even breathe louder. He carefully gestured to tell Arianne that it was Jackson's mother.

Knowing that they could not count on Jackson for now, Arianne hung up the call. “Let’s head up on our own and discuss if we should call the police or something. Tiffie’s my best friend. I can’t allow this to happen to her, nor will I watch her being threatened.”

When both of them knocked on the door, Tiffany only dared open it after making sure of who was behind it. Lillian ceaselessly complained in the house. After all, she would still be fast asleep during this hour. Now, she could not even rest properly from the fright.

Tiffany was going crazy. “I can’t leave the house and I’m already late to work. My salary is already peanut-sized and they’re gonna reduce it even more. Ugh, it’s frustrating!”

Arianne was decisive. “Let’s call the police. Just say that you’ve been targeted and someone’s even splashed red paint on your door with curses. The police won’t sit and do nothing.”

Before Tiffany could say anything, Lillian was the first to spring up. “How could you call the police? If they ask about the cause, it’ll be embarrassing! It’ll pass as time goes by. Just put up with it.”

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Arianne and Eric exchanged a look while Tiffany grabbed her hair in exasperation. “Put up with it? How? Starve to death at home? Or are you not scared of people breaking in at night? Stay out of this, we’re going to discuss it and solve it.”

To alleviate the situation, Eric coughed twice. “Uh... Tiffany, has Jackson contacted you?”

Tiffany nodded. “He came to me in the middle of the night last night, said that the articles that the woman posted online have been taken off. He found someone to erase things off the internet too, but I don’t know why it’s grown more serious today. Seems like what he’s done is ineffective.”

“Tiffie, are you saying that the man involved in the scandal with you is Jackson West?” Lillian’s eyes shone.

Tiffany braced herself and asked, “What are you planning?”

Lillian’s eyes were practically turning into dollar signs. “The Wests are rich. They destroyed my daughter’s reputation. They gotta compensate for the mental anguish. Of course, you’ve already slept with him, so it’d be the best if you can marry him. Not like I want anything out of it; I just want to minimize your loss. Since we can’t change the reality, we’ve got to seize the opportunity. We can’t suffer both physical and financial loss!”

Tiffany chuckled humorlessly. “How dare you—I’m telling you, I have nothing to do with him! If you were this clever, you’d have helped my dad manage his company and factory, but all you know is taking advantage! I’m telling you now that my dad’s hospital bill was donated by Jackson, and the ridiculous blind date that you set u p for me extorted \$6,600 from me—that was borrowed from Jackson too. So shut up! I’m not asking you to help, just don’t add to the mess!”

Lillian clamped her mouth shut with a long face. She had qualms about lashing out since there were outsiders.

After a long discussion, there was no conclusion. Recalling that Mark had not returned for the night, Arianne could not help saying, "Eric, do you know what Mark is doing? I haven't contacted him since he left yesterday. Although Jackson and Tiffie are caught in a scandal, it shouldn't have affected you and Mark. What's he occupied with?"

Eric was perplexed. "He's been in the office the whole night, you didn't know? Something happened in his company. Maybe he didn't get to tell you in time. He might not be going home these days. You can look for him after work to see what's going on in order to stop your worrying. No need to bother him with what's happening here with Jackson."

As issues erupted at the same time, it made everyone fretful. Half an hour later, Jackson called back Eric answered it while pacing to one side. "Hello? What the f*ck are you doing? Tiffany doesn't even dare step out of her house now."

Jackson's voice sounded glum on the line. "What's wrong? I talked to Annie last night. The articles are removed and the trending keywords are taken off too. Why can't she go out?"

Eric was bewildered. "You're asking me? Someone vandalized her house door with red paint and curse words. There are strange people patrolling downstairs too. Your public relations isn't working."

Jackson was quiet for a moment then said, "I came clean with my mom just now. I'm not marrying Annie according to her arrangement. She respects my choice. I've been too docile in the past. It's fine, I'll take care of it. Ask Tiffany not to head out for the day. Help me out over there. That's all for now."