

A Ruling Passion – Chapter 0041

Eric Nathaniel frowned the moment he entered the restaurant. It was lower-class and cheap, somewhere he never would dine in. Especially upon noticing the grease on the table, Eric was fueled by the impulse to turn on his heel and leave. However, thinking about Mark Tremont's favor, he swallowed his compulsion.

"Ari, here!" Tiffany Lane saw Arianne right away, standing up to wave without shame.

A beaming smile finally broke out of Arianne Wynn's face as she hurried over. Tiffany acted just as she would have three years ago, not changing a single bit, just like Arianne had imagined her to be.

Tiffany did not come alone. There was also Ethan Connor. Compared to three years ago, he looked much more mature, but his playful appearance of the past had transformed into a mysterious front. His eyes were smiling but they looked like two voids.

Tiffany was surprised when she saw Eric Nathaniel. "This is..."

"I'm Eric Nathaniel." Eric was easy going as he introduced himself.

Tiffany Lane did not pursue any further as she called the server to order.

“Ari, Eric, what do you guys want to eat?”

Before Arianne said anything, Eric Nathaniel subconsciously blurted, “Ignore me. You guys go ahead and order.”

He was not planning to eat anyway.

Discerning the disdain in his tone, Tiffany Lane felt rather awkward. Ethan Connor lowered his gaze, disallowing others to comprehend his current state of mind.

Arianne mediated the situation, not wishing for the atmosphere to turn sour. “Tiff, you know what I prefer. You can order.”

Tiffany ordered a few dishes and passed the menu back to the server.

“Ari, you have no idea how excited I was when I came back. It’s been three years. I’ve finally stepped foot onto this land again. I’ve always complained about the weather here, but now I love it. I freaking miss my hometown!”

Guilty, Arianne muttered, “Sorry... it’s all my fault.”

Tiffany waved her hand carelessly. “Meh, when have I blamed you? I honestly didn’t expect your brother to be Mark Tremont though. He can’t be blamed too, especially when something like that happened... Will Sivan is doing fine, you don’t have to worry. He’s...”

“It’s okay, I know,” Arianne quickly cut her off. Seated beside her was Mark Tremont’s ‘spy’, she did not dare talk about Will Sivan explicitly with Tiffany.

Eric Nathaniel butted in suddenly. “Mark Tremont isn’t her brother. More precisely, he’s her husband.”

There was a beat of silence in the air.

Ethan Connor locked his gaze onto Arianne.

Tiffany Lane was astonished. “What? You... you married Mark Tremont?! Then what about Will?”

Arianne planned not to mention him. She had thought that their marriage was Mark Tremont’s remedy to the scandal. However, later she discovered that he had not disclosed their marriage to the media, thus she had not been able to understand his intentions.

Now that Eric Nathaniel brought it up, she had to face the topic.

“Yeah, I was orphaned when I was eight. He took me in. I married him when you went abroad. It wasn’t a big deal and I wasn’t able to contact you, so I didn’t tell you.”

Arianne avoided mentioning Will Sivan. As the conversation had progressed to this topic, it was unlikely that there would be a continued discussion between her and Will.

Tiffany Lane was doubtful. “You... you aren’t being forced into it, are you?”

“No, I willingly married him,” Arianne said with a shake of her head, chuckling dryly.

In hindsight, Tiffany had realized. “Oh, then it’s reasonable to understand why he was so against both in e and Will. He likes you, of course he can’t tolerate unfaithfulness. Love can breed jealousy. Of course, he was infuriated when you and Will had that accident. Is he good to you? Does he mistreat you? What’s up with the bruise on your forehead? Did he hit you?”

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Arianne was caught off guard against Tiffany’s flurry of questions.

“No, no, I hurt myself accidentally. He’s never hit me. Don’t be suspicious. He’s quite nice to me, really. He always has been.”

The bruise on her forehead was caused by Aery Kinsey in the morning, however the situation was too complicated to explain.

Tiffany sighed and exclaimed, “Actually... Mark Tremont is pretty good too. He’s handsome and he’s rich, and you guys have been together for so many years. As long as you like him, I’ll support you regardless. I’m forever on your side.”

Arianne was moved. One of the best fortunes of life was to have someone who supported you unconditionally. Soon, the dishes were served. When Tiffany Lane saw that Eric Nathaniel was not eating, she was discontent. She came from a wealthy household as well but she despised dramatic, hypocritical, and contentious people. To cause mischief, she scooped some food onto Eric’s plate.

“Eric, eat up. Being Ari’s friend, you’re my friend too. No need to be courteous.”

Eric Nathaniel looked at Arianne and braced himself to try the food placed on his plate. Disregarding the taste, he was already appalled by the environment. Forcing down his urge to throw up, he plastered a smile. “It’s not bad...”

Arianne knew that he was having a hard time, but she did not trouble herself. She was peeved by the fact that precious time spent with her friend required a third wheel.

As dinner progressed, Eric Nathaniel's face was blanched.

Ethan Connor had excused himself to answer a call and came back to say, "I have to leave, something needs my attention."

Tiffany Lane quickly quipped, "I'll go with you! "

"Okay." Ethan Connor smiled and helped her smooth down her clothes.

The emotion within his eyes looked overly distant for his seemingly caring act. No passion between the couple could be found.

Eric Nathaniel was struggling when they came out of the restaurant. "Arianne, are we going back..?"

Feeling like they could have mingled for longer, there however was indeed something to attend to. Tiffany spoke up bleakly, "Ari, I guess we'll have to leave it as it is today. I'll see you again. I've been more occupied recently since I just got back as well."

"Sure. Go ahead," Arianne nodded.

On the way back to the Tremont Estate, Eric Nathaniel stopped his car by the road and heaved for a long time. It was then that Arianne knew that he was not being contentious during dinner.

“Are you okay?”

Eric felt like he was dying. “Yeah... I... I’m fine...”

Finally arriving at their destination, Eric Nathaniel went home directly after dropping off Arianne Wynn.

The Tremont Estate was dazzling and luminous, signifying Mark Tremont was back early. He liked it bright and brilliant when he was home. On the contrary, Arianne felt a fleeting moment rush through her, as even a cool fluorescent street light gave her more warmth.

She saw Mark Tremont who was seated on the couch when she entered and greeted him softly. “I’m home.”

Of course there was no response, not that she had hoped for one.

Watching Arianne enter the bathroom, Mark Tremont picked up his phone and replied to Eric's text. His expression was indistinguishable since half of his face was shadowed.

Eric Nathaniel's text read: 'Aery Kinsey went to pick on her at the office and they got into a fight I believe. She was wounded.'

"Oh," Mark Tremont replied.

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Though his reply was nothing more than a simple word, Mark Tremont took several long beats before he sent it. Why did she not say anything when she came back? Did she not know how to complain?

Eric Nathaniel was absent from work the next day. It was said that he had gone to the hospital.

Arianne Wynn felt guilty. She should not have consented to Tiffany's antics yesterday. Tiffany Lane had always been carelessly casual and straightforward, causing Eric Nathaniel to be on the receiving end of her mischief. He still ate as his pride disallowed him from refusing.

Mark Tremont did not sleep in their room last night.

Arianne did not know if he had gone out. She could sense that something was wrong again. It seemed like peace could never be maintained between both of them.

Around noon, Tiffany gave Arianne a call.

“Ari, I’m alone for the day. Let’s have lunch together? I’m at the entrance of your company.”

“I’m coming down now.”

Arianne picked up her purse and headed out immediately.

When they met downstairs, Tiffany was visibly not her usual bubbly self. Arianne asked, “What’s up, Tiff? Something bugging you?”

Tiffany wore a forced smile and patted the fallen snow on her coat rather aggressively as she replied, “Let’s look for a lunch place first. I’m freezing to death!”

She decided on a lavish restaurant nearby and made her order promptly after being seated, she had no patience. Arianne was now reassured that something was troubling her best friend.

“Tiff, is it about you and Ethan?”

Holding the glass of water, Tiffany was silent for a while before saying, “I feel like Ethan only wanted to come back to our hometown, not to be engaged with me. He doesn’t plan for our future. When the incident happened three years ago, I was touched that he volunteered to go abroad with me. Without a second thought, I had my dad sponsor him. All his expenses overseas, for these three years, were covered by my family.”

“Not long ago, he’s gotten much quieter too. When I asked about it, he said that he preferred being here because he wants to take care of his mother who doesn’t have the best health. He wants to grow with me here in the future too, so we agreed to get engaged when we came back That’s why I called you. When I mentioned the engagement after dinner last night, he ignored the topic. This isn’t the first time it’s happened You know me, I’m not an overly sensitive person, but when it’s happened too many times... I’m not dumb either.”

Arianne was no relationship expert. After the whole conversation, she merely understood that Ethan Connor seemed to not want to get engaged. However, anything else she could not detect.

“I... I don’t know what to say either. Maybe he just wasn’t paying attention to your words and it’s not that he actually doesn’t care. Talk to him again. You’ve been together for three years and you’ve been nothing but great to him. Even if he’s stone cold, by now

even a stone would have felt your warmth. What's more, you dated each other willingly. Feelings have to be mutual for that to happen, right?"

'Even a stone would have felt your warmth'... Arianne thought about Mark Tremont for some reason when she uttered the words. He seemed like he was never going to warm up, however...

Tiffany took a gulp of water and put on a nonchalant smile. "There are plenty more fish in the sea. I don't have to be the attached one if things don't work out between me and Ethan. You, however, I never would have imagined you'd marry Mark Tremont. Good job.

That's the man millions of girls desire and you caught him. I think I said something about it being worth dying for if I ever got to sleep with him. I take back my words. I don't lust over my best friend's man!"

Arianne was entertained as a chuckle escaped her. "Stop it..."

Tiffany had an evil grin when she asked in a whisper, "You and Mark Tremont... are about ten years apart right? Is it harmonious between you both?"

This was an expected topic when women gathered. Arianne felt her face heating up.

“Tiff... we haven’t...”

Realizing something, Tiffany pursed her lips. “He cared for what happened three years ago? Honestly, no man won’t care. Besides, the scandal was all over the news back then. He’s Mark Tremont. His pride must’ve suffered, but even then he still married you. That’s true love. I don’t think your effort will go to waste if you’re nice to him. I’ll be a busybody just one last time... You and Will Sivan... that night.. did you?”

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Arianne was quite lost.

“I don’t know... I had his clothes on when I woke up... I drank too much that day, plus it’s been too long... I don’t remember a thing. I think... that’s all, I supposed what’s done cannot be undone. Forget it, I still have to go back to work after this. Oh, and Eric wasn’t being a hypocrite. His stomach is really delicate. He’s absent today and he’s my boss. I’ll be out of a job if you knock him out again. Be nicer.”

Tiffany Lane was nonchalant. “It wouldn’t kill him would it? Plus, I was being considerate for Ethan. He liked that restaurant from last time. The general hygiene is bad, but he enjoys the atmosphere. His family isn’t doing well and he always wears a long face when I take him to more expensive places, making both of us unhappy. It doesn’t bother me anyway. What does Eric have to do with you? He’s never been around you in the past.”

Arianne then identified Eric Nathaniel. “He’s Mark Tremont’s friend. You can think of him as keeping an eye on me for Mark Tremont yesterday.”

“Holy..! No wonder you dared not talk to me about Will. Men are terrifying.” Tiffany felt speechless.

All of a sudden, Arianne caught a familiar frame from the corner of her eyes. It was Mark Tremont. He was here at this restaurant too! He was not alone either, there was also Aery Kinsey.

“What are you looking at?” Tiffany was puzzled when she did not give a reply.

Arianne stood up quickly to block her view. “Nothing... Uh, right... I need to go to the washroom.”

“Go, go. Be quick. Lunch is going to be served.” Tiffany waved her hand to excuse her.

It was not Arianne’s actual intention to go to the washroom, so she stood still on her spot before sitting down again when Mark Tremont and Aery Kinsey had left into a private room.

Tiffany Lane looked at her as if there was a fool right in front of her.

“Didn’t you want to use the washroom? You can hold it in by standing up?”

Arianne was distracted. “Don’t feel like going suddenly…”

Knowing that Mark Tremont and Aery Kinsey were here and worrying that Tiffany would see them, Arianne kept glancing toward the private room during lunch.

She was shrouded with pins and needles less than ten minutes into their meal.

“Tiff, I’m not eating. Eat faster, I have to go back to work.”

Tiffany complained as she had only just begun to eat, “What? That’s how long you have for lunch? Not even enough time for a warm meal. Is Eric Nathaniel human? I see why his stomach is problematic now, serves him right! I think he’s too harsh towards himself, as well towards you employees. Scary!”

Arianne could not care to save face for Eric as she was preoccupied with rushing Tiffany.

After another ten minutes, Tiffany was finally done with the last of her lunch and asked for the bill, before she was forcefully dragged to the restaurant’s exit by Arianne.

The moment they stepped out of the door, a shadow overcame them. Tiffany nearly fell to the ground from a head on collision when Arianne caught her in time.

Looking up, they met Eric Nathaniel's surprised gaze. Eric was miffed with a hand over his chest, in pain from Tiffany having ran into him. Due to what happened yesterday, he did not look his best today. There was a

questioning look on his face.

"Huh, you're out for lunch when you should be resting in bed? Posh restaurants won't upset your stomach, is that the case? Young master Nathaniel? Let me give you a suggestion. Extend lunchtime to at least two hours, you're making Ari eat like she's in a competition!"

Once Tiffany opened her mouth her words flew out, stunning Eric from her mockery.

Arianne said nothing, leaving in a fluster, as she tugged Tiffany along. Eric Nathaniel's gaze frightened her. She was afraid of being exposed, so she ran away as fast as possible...

When the girls were some distance away, Eric entered the private room Mark Tremont and Aery Kinsey were in. He looked casual when he brought it up. "I met familiar faces at the entrance when I came in just now."

Mark Tremont was disinterested, but Aery Kinsey asked sweetly, blinking her lively eyes.

“Who was it, Eric?”

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“Arianne Wynn and her friend,” Eric Nathaniel answered with a slight smile.

Aery Kinsey froze and shut her mouth, carefully observing Mark Tremont’s expression. When she saw he did not bat an eye for Arianne Wynn, she could not help feeling victorious. She was dying for the latter to catch sight of her and Mark together.

Eric Nathaniel was nettled by Mark Tremont’s feigned indifference and purposely continued to explain. “Her friend mocked me out of nowhere, asking me to extend the company’s lunch hour to two hours at the very least, otherwise Arianne Wynn needs to rush through her meals. I’m bewildered. Lunchtime has always been sufficient and it’s not even time yet. There’s enough time for another lunch... they looked like they were in a hurry though...”

Mark Tremont stiffened while his gaze darkened abruptly too, though it was unnoticeable.

Eric shut his mouth contently after taking in the former's reaction.

When lunch was served, Mark Tremont suddenly got up with his coat and headed out.

"I'm making a move first."

Aery Kinsey hurriedly clasped his sleeve. "Mark... you said that you're eating with me today!"

The corners of Mark Tremont's lips curled up into a gentle smile, but there was no tenderness in his eyes. "Next time, be good."

Knowing how to play hard to get and understanding that Mark Tremont disliked her being clingy, Aery Kinsey was calculative by acting cute and soft. She sprang up on the tips of her toes and kissed him on the cheek.

"Don't bluff me, okay?"

Mark Tremont's expression hardened and turned to leave without a reply nor hesitation.

Aery Kinsey was stunned, caught at a loss. It was not they've never been close before, but why had the usually gentle Mark Tremont seemed to have transformed into a different person?

Momentarily frozen, Aery Kinsey sat down after calming herself down and spoke in her syrupy voice. "Eric, you didn't tell Mark that I went looking for Arianne Wynn at the office, right?"

Eric Nathaniel shrugged. "I'm not that free. That's among you guys."

Aery Kinsey breathed in slight relief. "Then... Eric, do you think Mark likes Arianne Wynn? You know him best. Tell me..."

Although Eric looked unimpressed, inwardly he was cursing Mark Tremont over and over again for leaving him this mess to deal with. He hated resolving matters with women the most.

"I really don't know, but... she's his wife by law. Is it important if he likes her? With Mark, just gladly accept when he's good to you, don't ask for too much."

Understanding what he meant between the lines, Aery Kinsey acted unconcerned and pouted prettily. "Mark is away now. You'll have to eat with me!"

Goosebumps raised all over him from the overly sweet voice of Aery Kinsey. Eric Nathaniel thought that he could have left right away, if it only weren't for her decent looks. He did a double take on Aery Kinsey, she did look subtly familiar to Arianne Wynn, but it was only the vague feeling they gave off.

"Alright, eat up. I have to go to the office in the afternoon. I'll send you back after lunch."

Mark Tremont's car was parked opposite of Glide Design. He gazed at the floor Arianne was on from the car window.

After some time, Brian reminded him softly. "Sir... can we go now?"

Mark Tremont raised the window and answered faintly. "Yeah, to the office."