

Destined To Be His wife by L.T. Marshall Chapter 21

“Where are we going?” She asked with a nervous shake to her voice. Her anxiety had been ramping up all morning over this details and as she didn’t trust him at all she had worked herself up into a nervous wreck imagining the worst.

“A clinic. Sit back and enjoy the journey it’s a thirty-minute drive.” YuZhi didn’t even look at her.

“What kind of clinic and why? Haven’t I been examined, prodded, and poked enough? What else could you want to test me for?” TangShi was incensed that he was putting her through even more medical procedures after a week of this family massacring her body in so many ways. Between beauty treatments, hair salons, blood tests and even smear tests and fertility examinations, she had had enough. It didn’t feel like she had any say over her own body anymore.

“A fertility clinic. So we don’t have to have sex to have a baby.” YuZhi shrugged, lifting the iPad in his lap and going back to the documents he was reading on the way here. He wasn’t overly thrilled about this appointment either, but it was preferable to having to have sex with his bride when he didn’t want to. He had to think of the future and going back to Rhea when this was over and being unfaithful wasn’t in his nature.

“A what? I don’t understand. We haven’t even begun trying and you are taking us to a fertility clinic? Do you think I’m sterile or something?” TangShi gushed at him, her words slightly scrambled as she held back the frantic feelings overwhelming her. She couldn’t understand what he was thinking.

“No. It’s not that kind of procedure. He’s a good friend of mine, discreet, and willing to do this without a record or registering us. A simple five minutes of your time while he takes what I dump in a cup and inserts it in you where I don’t want to go. Simple... Clean, and easy.” YuZhi couldn’t see a problem with this plan and had no idea why she gawped at him in horror as though he had just slain a puppy in front of her. He thought she would like the idea of no physical contact to produce an heir.

“No way!” She snapped “You want me to let some man insert and I can’t even.” She turned away jerkily, shaking her head, her anger spreading from zero to a hundred in a second and her whole body started to tremble in reaction. She really couldn’t fathom how no matter he did, he still never failed to shock her.

“Don’t really see the difference. I’m some man you would let insert...”

“Stop. Don’t even say it. What’s wrong with you?” TangShi flushed, cutting him off, her cheeks instantly hot and pink with embarrassment at his crudeness and yet YuZhi really didn’t seem bothered at all. He was way more experienced and worldly than her and felt like she was overreacting.

“Is the virgin Mary act because you’re disappointed I won’t bang you or is it because you really are a prude and some sweet untouched innocent? I really didn’t think you would be the pure type to be honest. Not at twenty-four with passable looks and a half decent figure.” YuZhi eyed her up with a smirk, a half compliment but also not. Making her skin crawl and she could only scowl back at him.

“What is that supposed to mean? Does your ego ever just stop inflating itself?” TangShi swung away from him again, to haul her bag into her lap and stare moodily out of the window. Hating that once again he reduced her to this.

“I mean who am I to judge if you’re not? We live in twenty, twenty-one. I’m not a traditionalist and I sure as hell am not a virgin either. I don’t care what you’ve done before this or what you do after, as long as only my DNA mingles with yours until we’re divorced.” He chuckled at his own euphemism, amused at his own humor.

“Eww.” TangShi screwed her face up at him, skin flaming and unwilling to admit she had never gone beyond kissing anyone in her life, and that anyone was him. She hadn’t really done any dating in the last eight years or before that night of the ball. It wasn’t something she actively pursued while trying to escape a life she hated and focusing on her scholarship. “Could you make this sound anymore icky?” She deflected.

“What’s ‘ickier’ than having to do this with you?” YuZhi retorted, quick as always and she silently cursed his smart-ass comebacks and deadpan expression when delivering them. She hated his sarcasm and that cold and cool persona that other women seemed to swoon over. She didn’t know if he was quick witted because of a high IQ or if spending your days with cutthroat businessmen made it a necessity.

“Whatever. You know, I really don’t see what it is Rhea likes about you. She’s pleasant, likeable, and actually warm. You’re.... well, not.” TangShi wasn’t in the mood for trying to be sarcastic and witty, but she was mad enough to want to wound him with words too.

“Is that supposed to be a burn? Nice try. Rhea likes cold, distant, and sexy...so I don’t really care if we are opposites. I also don’t care if you don’t understand the relationship as it doesn’t concern you.” YuZhi flicked the screen of his iPad and turned a page to make it clear he had work to do and didn’t want to keep talking to TangShi. She was an irritation in his day and already taking up his valuable time to do this.

“What if I say no?” TangShi dropped that question sweetly while still watching the passing scenery fly by, with a heavy weight in her stomach. The thought of a clinic doing something like this consuming her and making her feel wretched. She hated going to the doctors as it was, and this was going to be both embarrassing and evasive. She couldn’t imagine anything worse.

“Then I guess I have to get drunk and make a woman of you.” She felt his eyes on her as he turned her way and glanced just in time to catch his wink her way. A smooth, bad

boy, and giving no cares kind of gesture before he smirked, showing off a hint of those shiny white teeth and going back to his device. TangShi inhaled heavily and gritted her teeth so as not to react and balled her fists instead.

“I’d rather go to a clinic” she ground out petulantly. Weighing up the two she didn’t really like either option, but the appointment was a lesser of two evils. She could bear it.

“Good. I can relax knowing we agree on something. We’ll come here twice this week, then again a month from now if your periods show up in two weeks. We’ll plan accordingly until you’re pregnant.” YuZhi spelled it out in an even disinterested tone and carried on reading while TangShi blanched at how easily those words came out of his mouth.

Most men in her life would never talk openly about anything like this with any females she had known growing up and yet he seemed unfazed and uncaring. He didn’t seem all that invested in the fact that all this was to make him a father at the end of it. He really didn’t show any kind of emotion about that at all.

“Anymore questions, or can I go back to what I was doing? I have a meeting this afternoon and several reports to read before then. I’d prefer if you just sit and be quiet and pretend, I’m not even here.” He dismissed her airily, eyes back on his screen and infuriated her.

TangShi didn’t respond but glared at him for a long moment wondering if there was any person ruder than him in this world, until he looked up, clocking a brow at her expression and smiled.

“Glad you agree.” He turned away, slid in his seat to adjust his position and lifted a leg to wedge his foot against the middle rest so he could use his knee to prop up his tablet in an easier position. Blanking her out and ignoring her presence.

TangShi turned way, so many emotions stirring up inside like a tidal wave looking for release, and she hated the fact that he made her feel like this anytime they interacted. A combination of anger, a sense of uptightness, and a deep wounded feeling in her soul. He always made her upset and annoyed. All muddled together to confuse her as to what she felt and left her in the worst kinds of moods.

YuZhi got to her for a million reason and now she could add this to the list of things he did that made her feel worthless. Using a clinic rather than physically touching her to get pregnant had to be about the worst way to tell a woman she repulsed you, and it left a scar on TangShi’s heart despite hating him with a passion.

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TangShi stared absently out of the restaurant window, reserved and low in mood now that the excitement of being reunited with Linlin had calmed down. Cuddles and tears

out of the way after their long separation and now comfortable camaraderie once more. As if they never parted.

YuZhi agreed to drop her off here on the way home instead of taking her all the way back to the house and Linlin was happy to oblige in rushing out to meet.

“I never saw that one coming at all. Really? What is wrong with him? I thought a red-blooded lothario like him would at least take advantage of a new squeeze in his bed and a free pass to do whatever he wants with her for two years.” Linlin crossed her arms and leaned on the table while observing TangShi. Digesting the details about the clinic.

TangShi didn't respond, instead she was still smarting and touchy about the ordeal she had just experienced in the last hour. The clinic was clean and pleasant but having that done to her made her feel dirty and emotional. Still cringing at the sensations and having to let a male doctor down there between her thighs to administer an implement. It was mortifying for someone like her.

When changing back into her clothes and discarding the medical gown in the changing room she had cried like someone she loved had died. Broken down about how sterile and clinical this was, how shameful it felt, and that getting pregnant this way was degrading to her pride. She would legitimately be a virgin carrying a baby soon enough and it seemed ridiculous to her. He had gone to such lengths to not touch her, and it was getting to her more than it should.

YuZhi had succeeded in hurting her in a whole new way and he wasn't even aware of it. She put it down to residual and stupid feelings and hopes from a long time ago. Naïve dreams and pointless memories. She shouldn't care that he chose this method and should be happy about it, but she wasn't.

“You okay?” Linlin brought her out of her daydream, aware something was off with TangShi's normally upbeat mood and threw her a warm smile.

“Yeah. Just feeling a little fragile. It wasn't exactly pleasant, and I think I need to process my feelings a little. I mean. I might be pregnant after this..... that blows my mind.”

Linlin was sobered at that thought too and reached out across the table to scoop up her hand.

“I'm sorry, I never even thought about it like that. Just try and see all this as a temporary learning curve in your life. A path to a future away from all of them. A stopgap.” Linlin had always been an optimist who saw something good in every scenario.

“I know.” TangShi sighed and then physically shook herself to cast off this weary mood because she didn't want to drag Linlin down with her into depression. “Let's order. I'm starving.” In other words, can we please stop talking about this and move on. TangShi was never one to dwell and tended to bottle things up to moon over later.

“You know you could look at this as a blessing in some ways. YuZhi doesn’t want to tie you up in bed and demand sex at every opportunity. You have more freedom with him than ever with your father, financial security. I mean, look where he willingly dropped you off, and handed you a credit card to cover it. Maybe try and get along with him while dealing with what’s expected. Who knows, maybe it won’t be so bad and it’s not like he’s some sort of drunk, wife beating tyrant. Rhea seemed happy all these years so he must have some good points.”

TangShi exhaled heavily and nodded. Unable to refute what Linlin was saying. YuZhi did bring her here, to a restaurant in Pudong, one with a high price tag, without questioning it. Linlin’s favorite place to eat, the Aura Lounge of the Ritz Carlton and didn’t mention the fact he was dumping her at a hotel. He just handed her a black card and told her to be home before it got late or else his grandfather would send out a search party. A nothing conversation and he seemed uninterested in her plans even when she began to explain out of habit about who she was meeting. He shrugged it off, waved her out of the car and didn’t give her a second look.

She didn’t know if it disappointed her that he truly didn’t care, wasn’t curious, or if her emotions were already spiraling downward because of what she just endured before it.

“I want hotpot. I have a craving and they don’t do it here. Do you want to go explore and have some fun?” Linlin wanted to bust TangShi out of this weird mood and knew that classy surroundings and expensive food were not the remedy. TangShi was a girl of simpler tastes.

“Hotpot sounds good. Exploring.... Maybe.” A smile lifted the corner of TangShi’s mouth as she turned it over in her head.

“You know you want to and before long you will join the celeb A list and have to hide for fear of the paparazzi. Let’s enjoy your freedom before YuZhi makes your face a household image.”

“Don’t remind me. I still haven’t got my head around that aspect yet and I don’t really like the fact my life is going public. Especially not under these circumstances.”

“It’s a little bit of pie in your dad’s face though, right? All these years hiding you away like some shameful secret and boom.... YuZhi is going to put you in the limelight and make you a household name just by marrying you. Suddenly Lei Enterprises will be hot topic and shares will go up, just because they chose you.”

Linlin found this ironic, that after treating her like a leper from birth, TangShi was doing more for the Leis in one arrangement than he had done his entire life.

“Not to mention the collaboration I know he bartered for. It’s yet to be announced but something big is in the works between them which will catapult Lei Enterprises up nearer Leng Group in status, all because of my sacrifice. Will he ever acknowledge it?”

No, he will pat himself on the back for being so clever in selling me off to someone like Mr Leng.” TangShi’s words were sour in her mouth and brought bitterness up from the depths of her stomach. Anything related to her father was always a sore point but particularly this.

“Ughhh, this is why high society sucks, and I’m glad my parents don’t care about any kind of marriage alliance to boost what we have. They are both too busy playing with lovers and taking vacations to care about managing things. As long as they have enough dough to support it, they have no ambitions to grow it.” Linlin raised a glass of water to toast her parents, thanking her lucky stars that she never had an upbringing like TangShi.

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“I’m glad that they raised a daughter like you, so I had a friend all these years who didn’t care about high society and my lack of status all that much. I would have been lonely without you.”

“I guess we can high five Ava for sending you to an all-girls private school to get you out of the way and falling into my clutches, my little lamb. She done us both a favor, although I am truly disappointed that in my raising you, I didn’t even corrupt you a tiny little bit.” Linlin grinned, flashing a mischievous twinkle in her eye at the years of escapades she had gotten TangShi into. Not regretting a single one.

“You corrupted me a lot!” TangShi burst into joyful laughter as a million memories flickered through her mind too. So many naughty moments orchestrated by her best friend and started to feel a lot better than when she arrived. Linlin was always a mood enhancer and a ray of sunshine on the darkest of days. All these years she knew that Linlin was the reason she kept going, kept reaching for something better and never lost her optimism.

Linlin motioned for them to get up glad they had not yet ordered anything and led TangShi out of the restaurant in search of a hotpot café they could walk to from here. She hauled out her phone and hooked TangShi’s arm in hers as they hit the street into the dazzling sunshine and went searching.

“Oh, look before I forget. I found this last night while scrolling our old pictures on Weibo. It was taken eight years ago, right before your trip to Beijing. We look so young.” Linlin turned her phone to show the saved picture. It was a photograph of a polaroid photograph held in Linlin’s hand. A little blurry but still easy identifiable as both of them hugging and smiling. They looked like two different girls entirely in terms of fashion and beauty style.

“Oh my god, why is my face so round?” TangShi squealed and grabbed the phone, pushing it almost to her nose to scrutinize the baby face staring back at her.

"I know right, you look like you lived on a diet of instant noodles. Little puffy face. And your hair is so dark and flat. Did we even know how to beautify back then?"

The girls both laughed and poked fun at one another by pointing out a few other things in the picture, about their appearance, their weight, their general look, passing it back and forth to giggle at the memory.

"It makes sense though, that YuZhi didn't recognize you now. I mean he has his green eyes and that jawline he's had since he was a kid so you couldn't mistake him. You slimmed down, your face became more defined and delicate. You got some decent eyebrows and you lightened and styled your hair way different. I honestly couldn't pick you out if I was him, especially if you wore a mask that entire night."

"Hmmm, I guess." TangShi was reflective and took the phone one more time to give it a last look. She had to agree, even though she didn't think she had changed all these years, she had lost her puppy fat and childlike cuteness and grown into a woman in the past eight years. It made her feel a little less devastated that he had no idea she was the same girl.

"Maybe you should just tell him?" Linlin offered with a shrug and then hauled TangShi to the left at the opening alleyway to a café. A hotpot favorite in sight.

"There's no point. It's the past and if it mattered, he would have shown up or found me all these years. He didn't. Maybe I held onto it a lot more than he ever did and it's nothing but a blip in his littered history of girls."

"TangShi?" A voice interrupted them from behind and cut into the conversation before Linlin could argue the point. She still felt YuZhi should know.

TangShi turned to see Rhea walking out of a nearby boutique, waving her way with a genuine and warm smile, beaming across that pretty face and felt Linlin stiffen up beside her as she tightened her grip on her arm.

"Aye, aye, it's the love rival" Linlin hissed mischievously and TangShi elbowed her in the ribs.

"Rhea. Hello. How are you today?" TangShi was pleasantly surprised to see her out here, especially unescorted but wasn't unhappy. She liked the girl genuinely and didn't have any issues with her. Even if Linlin did.

"Out getting air and picking up a dress. Where are you off to?" She closed the gap between them and nodded a smile at Linlin.

"Oh, this is my best friend Linlin Choi. Eldest daughter of Anux Travel." TangShi gave a brief introduction and leaned back as the two women shook hands. Linlin instantly reserved and cool towards the other woman and yet remained polite.

“Pleasure.” Linlin smiled.

“Anux Travel? The holiday agency? I know where to come when booking my next trip. You’re listed among the most known and respected. It’s lovely to meet you.” As always that kind and warm persona you expected from Rhea shone through, enveloping Linlin’s hand and smothering her with friendliness.

“The one and only. If you need a hook up, we do great discounts for friends of friends.” Linlin laid on the charm thicker than honey and TangShi tried to remain impassive and not react. She could feel Linlin’s dislike and the sarcastic tone was subtle but still there. She wanted to strangle her for being so obvious.

“Where are you off to?” Rhea was oblivious to the hostility.

“To eat. The hotpot place behind us is the best in Pudong and we’re starving.”

“Oooh, Hotpot. I haven’t had it in forever. YuZhi never eats it so never wants to take me for it! Can I join you?” Rhea’s enthusiasm was infectious, but Linlin squeezed TangShi’s arm in objection getting a silent rebuff as she shook her arm free.

“Sure. It’ll be nice to spend more time together and get to know one another a little better.” TangShi turned to lead the way, throwing Linlin a quick and hidden warning scowl to behave and getting a cross eyed tongue stick out in response. Shielded by TangShi’s body so Rhea didn’t catch it. She had zero chance of controlling her best friend.

“Yahhhh, sure, let’s eat.” Linlin spun on her heel and followed with a trot and a wiggle, her brain calculating what mischief she could pull off through lunch and kept her guard up. Her bestie was maybe a soft touch and all too willing to let people in to become ‘friends’, but Linlin was made of sterner stuff. She didn’t like that subtle dig from Miss Rhea ‘I am too good for the common folks’, bringing up YuZhi’s name and eating preferences like she wasn’t trying to rub salt in. She didn’t trust this wench as far as she could toss her, and no one was going to mess with TangShi while she was around.

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TangShi put down her brushes and arched her back to work out the kinks from scooping over for too long. Leaning back to admire her handywork on the canvas in front of her and smiled at the results. Watercolors were her favorite medium, and she loved the way the colors subtly blended into soft hues in the pond scene she had created like a beautiful harmony. Gentle white and orange Koi meandering under a rippling blue surface and bringing peace to her as she worked.

It had been a quiet few days of getting used to the workings of this family and settling into a life she didn’t want. And things didn’t seem as terrible as the first couple of days here if today was anything to go by. Now that a lot of her appearance demands had

been met, her wardrobe changed and her body primped and preened to Hollywood standards, Auntie was leaving her to find her own busy.

She had been to the clinic twice now this week, both times as soul destroying and shameful to her, making her glad the next trip was a month away as long as her periods showed. Even though she knew the point of this was to fall pregnant, a part of her was reluctant to have it happen and she hoped her body would give her a little time, even if she did have to endure those procedures.

YuZhi had gone out of the city for a couple of days on business and left her alone to her own devices too. Although he hadn't changed any and was still finding every possible way to get to her and spark reactions. It seemed like he was even beginning to enjoy making her angry or upset. She was still torn about her feelings towards him despite how much of a jerk he was being.

The media was milking the public announcement of the breakup for all it was worth and hashing up articles from the past three years to paw over what could have gone wrong between them. The golden couple claimed to have stopped being in love, while still loving one another as best friends and the public weren't buying it yet. There were speculations, gossip, and way too much interest in something TangShi found ridiculous. She had never really followed social media, the news or anything of the entertainment rags and yet now she had been flooded with snippets thanks to Xiaosu. Netziens seemed obsessed, angry, and even broken hearted over the news.

"So pretty, Miss Lei." On cue the young girl wandered behind her with a cup of saffron tea and laid it beside her as carefully as she could so as not to disturb the painting supplies. Admiring the finished piece. "You are very talented; I can see why you have so many online sales of your prints."

TangShi smiled at her, pride swelling at her words and laid down her brush with a swell of warmth in her heart. Nothing made her feel better than someone appreciating her hard work. This piece would be sent off to the company who dealt with scanning her art, producing prints to order and shipping them off while she was paid her commission in profits every month. It was a good system that had paid her well all these years and she had a growing fanbase under the artist's name Alice Lin. Koi art was her best seller so she was sure this one would be popular too.

She found this room the best place to be to pass the day and focus on getting back to her art and revitalizing her mojo. It helped her accept things as they were now and not pine for the school she left in California quite so much. She missed the students and the teachers, but she knew she had no chance of going back there. This was her life for now.

The sunroom annex off the back of the mansion was never used much, where the view was over the gardens and ponds were gorgeous and she could watch the day slowly go by. In a peaceful quiet glass room, where Xiaosu brought tea and food on demand. The

Leng family probably used to fill every room in this house, but now they were sparse, and the members left behind spent their working hours elsewhere. Even grandfather.

Rhea was the only constant daily visitor who stopped by for an hour a day to drink tea and chat with TangShi the last few days. To solidify the bond they would be showing publicly soon enough and convince the world their friendship was to come before the matchmaking. The ruse that TangShi and Rhea met through the Lei, Leng collaboration of the announced shopping mall build that hit the news this morning, and would be the driving force to setting up her ex-boyfriend with her new best friend. Rhea would be the one to take credit for their falling in love, so as to appease the public that she was supportive of YuZhi moving on.

It was a ridiculous story, one thought up by suited PR experts in YuZhi's business. It abhorred TangShi that they had to go to this extent just to protect their precious family name and their stocks.

"Thank you. Painting fish are my favorite thing. I find it therapeutic and somehow helps me relax and ease away all my stress."

"Mr Lei is the one who bought all the Koi for the large pond over there by the waterfall. He seems to like them too and often buys special fabric prints of Koi for his aunt when he goes on long trips. Maybe you two have that in common?" Xiaosu was never ending in her eagerness to warm TangShi to YuZhi. Having spent years as this family's house maid she saw a side to him that TangShi didn't and hoped in time they would at least find a common ground and be less harsh to one another.

"What are our plans today?" TangShi ignored any kind of compliments towards YuZhi, disinterested in talking about him. The clinic situation was making her even more resistant to trying to get along with him and the undertones of constant sarcasm between them was tiring.

"The house is empty. Grandfather Leng has taken Auntie, Uncle and his brother to watch an opera. Rhea called to say she couldn't come today as she has a full schedule in prepping for a runway show for Aunt's magazine. So, it's us, a quiet night and there's a new drama starting that I want to watch after we catch up with our ongoing one."

"Let me guess? Another romance featuring Zhang Mingen." TangShi grinned at Xiaosu as her face turned a darker shade and her cheeks flushed pink. The girl had the worst kind of crush on the Chinese actor. She had made TangShi sit through a dozen episodes already of a show called 'Nice to meet you' and didn't seem to be willing to let her pass up the rest of it.

"He's simply the cutest man alive." Xiaosu flushed even darker, clasped her hands by her chest and fluttered dreamy eyes as she was lost in her own head. "You know... ZhengLi Kim is a dead ringer for him and just about the only man alive I would seriously switch out my crush for." She beamed gleefully.

“Who?” TangShi stopped arranging her brushes and glanced at Xiaosu, wondering if this was another famous Chinese man she had proclaimed her undying love to. Xiaosu had a list of handsome celebrities.

“Young master Leng’s best friend, his whole life.... And his assistant at work. Here, I’ll show you. I thought you would have met him by now.” Xiaosu quickly pulled her phone from inside the apron she was wearing and scrolled it. Pulling up a Weibo account, she turned it to TangShi to show her a handsome man posing for some event. It was enlarged on the screen and gave her a very good view of his face and shoulders.

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She stared at it for a long moment, not denying he was very good looking and did look strikingly like the actor Xiaosu was crazy for. Yet there was something else in his face that was familiar about him, and it made her take the mobile in her hand and look at him closely. Scrolling through a few of his more natural images that were selfies to compare and one of him surfing with YuZhi before it struck her like a lightning bolt. It was seeing them together like that which did it.

“Oh my god. He was...” she trailed off, realizing what she was about to say out loud and quickly slid the phone back into Xiaosu hand. She recognized him, the only person at the ball that night who didn’t seem to care about wearing a mask. The ‘friend’ that YuZhi said bet him he couldn’t dance with her. This solidified everything. YuZhi really was Yoonie and ZhengLi was there that night too. It sent a strange sensation through the pit of her stomach and her blood turned cold.

“I know, right? They could be sexy brothers. He’s even better in the flesh too. So handsome, and so charming. Very tall and he has a nice physique.” Xiaosu was off on a dreamy tangent and oblivious to TangShi’s sober expression.

“Yes, he’s cute.” She answered emptily and went back to trying to pick up her brushes in a bid to shake this from her head.

“He’s rich too. Son of Yutian Corp but as he’s fifth in line then he chose to work with YuZhi rather than waste his days with menial jobs in his own family company. I heard it caused so much drama to start with.” She giggled like a child, somewhat enamored with the bold move.

“Yutian Corp?” TangShi was shocked to know exactly who that family were as they were of the same social standing as the Lengs. Even someone like her knew exactly who they were. It’s no wonder there was scandal if the fifth son opted to work as YuZhi’s assistant instead of take his rightful place with his brothers. It was practically unheard of.

Thinking back, she remembered the almost rebellious and mischievous young man who was all smiles and winks and seemed to goad YuZhi on that night. He did seem the type

to make his own rules and shrug off the importance of a decision like that. He had disappeared with a young pretty girl in a leather jacket after YuZhi made it clear TangShi and he were leaving to go find an adventure in the streets of Beijing. ZhengLi was a rich playboy type at that age, and she wondered what he was like now. Surely he wasn't still as wild and carefree as he seemed back then.

"Xiaosu, stay away from men like that. They can only lead to trouble and heartbreak. I've met ZhengLi Kim, and he seemed like a complete womanizer."

"Oh no, no.... you have him all wrong. He's such a sweet gentleman when he comes here and never been inappropriate towards me at all. He barely notices me." She made a finger cross motion as if promising she wasn't being dishonest and TangShi sighed. Xiaosu was naïve and blinded by a crush. TangShi had become so protective of this girl in such a short time and didn't want to see her pulled down by a rich spoiled jerk that hung around with the likes of YuZhi, playing with girl's hearts. Similar types always flew together and encouraged bad behavior.

"Just be wary of wolves in sheep's clothing. Not all 'nice' men are actually so. ZhengLi is a fifth generation rich boy and he has all the flaws of being one."

"Yes, Miss." Xiaosu knew when to back down and give up and even though she didn't agree she could tell TangShi was deflecting her feelings about young master YuZhi and tarring ZhengLi with the same brush.

"Can't argue with that!" YuZhi's smug, husky tone came at them from behind and startled both girls into snapping around to gawp at the figure standing in the doorway. He was smiling with amusement, one side of his mouth perked up with a dimple on show.

Unannounced and unexpected, TangShi's face colored with heat at realizing he could have been standing there for a while without either girl noticing. He might have heard more than he should.

"Although ZhengLi might not be all that happy to hear the home truths. Do you talk about trash me with the same tone, Miss Le?" He winked at TangShi and then pushed off from the doorway casually and meandered in to drop his coat on the nearest chair. He was still dressed in his favorite navy three-piece suit, minus the tie, and his shirt was open at the neck. His outer jacket discarded, and he followed by hauling off his suit jacket and throwing it on top of it with an easy movement.

"I'll go fetch more tea." Xiaosu made a quick exit, embarrassed at being caught and avoided his eye as she took off at speed and left them alone. Eager to escape.

"You're back early. I thought you said you would be in Japan for a few days." TangShi turned back to her artwork and pretended his presence didn't affect her heart rate, body temperature or focus. He only left yesterday evening.

“Did you miss me?” he walked up to her side, intruding on her space, ignoring her obvious stiffening of posture and picked up the now dry painting in front of her and holding it up to inspect. His aftershave and his own scent swirled around her, and she looked away from him to gaze at the windows to try and ignore how good he smelled.

“No. Did you have to come back early and disturb me?” TangShi answered curtly. Caught off guard and now feeling strange that he was so close.

“I was worried my wife might be crying alone in our big bed. I couldn’t stand being apart a minute longer.” He smirked, his tone heavy with sarcasm and he dropped her picture back in front of her and walked off to look at the garden.

“I guess business is done? Don’t you have somewhere else to be? Like work, as it’s the middle of the afternoon and I don’t recall you using this room much last week either so why wander in here?” TangShi wasn’t in the mood for his usual war of words or his presence. She couldn’t ignore the fact her hands were trembling at his surprise rerun and it was doing odd things to her stomach.

“All wrapped up and a cancellation. The paparazzi are out in the droves thanks to my public breakup and the announcement we are building a mall with Lei Enterprises. I have no energy to deal with them after flying home and my offices are swarming.”

“Great. Well, if you’re staying here then I’m leaving. Enjoy your quiet hiding time.” TangShi got up and picked up her case to start packing her supplies and jumped when body heat and the undeniable presence of a large male came right up behind her and made the hackles rise on her neck. His sudden calculated maneuver making her feel hemmed while simultaneously sending her body into overdrive.

“I don’t even get a welcome home kiss?” He whispered, so close to her shoulder that his breath tickled her neck and she shivered involuntarily, hating him for this childish crap he pulled all too often. She knew he did this for her reaction, and he was getting better at picking out the tactics that got to her the most.

“Can you not?” She pushed her ass out and shoved him in the groin, backing up to move him with force, before turning and swiping her brushes into the bag and pulling it from the table as she stepped away. She wasn’t planning on leaving her paints down here but she no longer had a desire to stick around to deal with him in this mood, and could get Xiaosu to fetch them later.

“Anyone would think you don’t like your own husband. I’m so heartbroken. I might cry.” He mocked her, moving back to the window at a casual unbothered pace where he leaned against the glass with his hip and shoulder and watched her with that predator like smug expression. Amused by sensing her change in mood.

“Not biting today. I have better things to do.” She snapped and avoided engaging his focus with hers.

“Running away? You’re no fun today.”

“I’m not running away from you. That would imply you intimidate me or affect me, and you don’t. I’m just busy. Go find some fun with Rhea or ZhengLi Kim!” TangShi brushed him off with a non-interested wave, hoping it sounded true and scowled at him as she zipped up her bag and turned on her heel to leave.

“Guess I’ll see you in bed, baby. Keep it warm for me.” YuZhi had to hold in his laughter as he let the words slide out in a honey thick tone. Eternally amused with the feisty and hateful reaction she gave him anytime he switched up his mood to the offensive like this. Arguing with her, combatting with words, or seeing her recoil and run when he added some sexual inuendo was becoming a hobby and toying with her wasn’t getting old yet.

He still disliked her, what and who she was, and this marriage, but at least the last few days had seen things begin to feel like some kind of livable situation where her presence no longer made him want to throw her out the window.

She was quiet, never really complained or got too emotional. She tried to stick to the house rules and seemed respectful of his family even while Aunt was trying to make life hell for her. She didn’t mention or moan about the god-awful diet Aunt had her on and she didn’t seem to be a creator of drama either. He knew it wasn’t as bad as he feared when he was first told this was happening, but he still wasn’t going to give her an inch. Her personality was bearable, but nothing more.

She was the singular reason he had to break up with Rhea and put his life on hold for two years and he wasn’t about to let her forget it.

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“How are you holding up with this chaos?” ZhengLi perched his ass on the end of YuZhi’s huge desk and dropped a few folders in front of him that required signatures for ongoing projects.

“Hmmm” YuZhi didn’t lift his eyes from his laptop screen and carried on typing. Shrugging in a non-committal way.

“Still being followed and hounded by the press?”

“It’s dying down, but they are still lingering. The articles online seem to be less regular now too. We’ll be old news soon enough.”

It had been a full week since the announcements and despite the Leng and Lei collaboration being bigger news in the business world, the media were more interested in his breakup, and it was really starting to grate on him. He couldn’t go anywhere

without a mask, baseball cap and sunglasses as they were invading his life way worse than before.

“How’s Rhea holding up? She seemed distracted when I saw her yesterday at the fashion show rehearsal. She didn’t say much though but even she had a following paparazzi.”

“She’s used to the limelight, and trying to pretend this is all okay. I’m trying to see her less and make this easier for both of us. That way it will give them nothing to photograph.” Even though YuZhi knew that in two years when this was over, they would reunite, he didn’t want to complicate matters in keeping on dating secretly. The breakup was real, they had a tacit understanding of that, and they had both agreed that whatever happened in this time, they wouldn’t hold it against one another in the future. It didn’t make it easier even if they both knew it was temporary and were trying to navigate the situation.

“Did you see this today?” ZhengLi slid his cell out and pulled up a news article that popped up before lunch. It was a candid shot of Rhea and TangShi arm in arm on Huaihai Road, out shopping designer boutiques. “They are interested in this unknown daughter of the Lei Empire. Seems TangShi has caught the media’s attention too. They are questioning where she was hidden all these years and where this new sisterly friendship as Rhea ‘struggles’ through break up came from.”

YuZhi glanced up, seeing the image of the two women facing him and took the phone to inspect the story and picture.

“Well, it’s a good thing. If they seem like they’re best of friends and she’s memorable then the PR plan should work without a hitch. As of right now no one even knows I know TangShi. Make it seem genuine.” YuZhi stared at the two faces for a moment, comparing them in their similarities and contrasts.

Rhea was a born model with symmetrical and elegant features that could handle any angle, lighting, or make up. She had an unearthly flawlessness that sometimes looked airbrushed or photoshopped, but she had never undergone enhancements or surgery. She was beautiful, seductive, with thick straight brows, a tiny nose and cherry plumped lips that were suited to bold make up and high fashion style. Every guys dream girl. She looked wealthy and she had the mannerisms and presence of an international model.

TangShi however was the other kind of beautiful, and even if he hated to admit it, he could see it. Natural and earthy. She had an innocent and sweet quality and softer features like the girl next door type. Small nose, pouted lips, delicate cheek bones, but larger eyes that came off as doe like and cute. She had a youthful prettiness that looked good in natural make up and soft hair that hung gently to frame her face and curled at the ends. In pictures she sometimes looked shy and vulnerable rather than confident and sassy like Rhea and in this one, she seemed much younger and almost doll like compared to his ex-girlfriend.

For a second, there was a hint of protectiveness for her, as the picture was clearly shot from a distance, and she looked utterly unaware they had even been captured. Rhea on the other hand was in full pose mode and working her best angles, so had spotted the hidden camera man and made sure she looked good. TangShi was looking at Rhea with a wistful smile on her face, eyes locked onto the other woman talking and seemed way too trusting for a moment as she listened intently to whatever was being said.

Anger pricked up in his heart, proceeded by gnawing guilt and a heavy weight as he thought of the fact that he knew Rhea was only getting close to her because she was meant to. It was orchestrated by them, for the good of all of them, and Rhea was a grade A actress who could do her part well. She was pleasant to everyone and could charm whomever she set her sights on, so it didn't chock him to see them so close. He told her to keep TangShi sweet but looking at the picture now he was irritated by how genuine the look of affection from TangShi was and how oblivious and uninterested Rhea's true expression came off. He knew her well enough and could see from a glance she wasn't all that invested in her new shopping buddy. It was all an act.

Because of him he was forcing Rhea to lie, build relationships she didn't want, and still end up alone and hurt while he stayed married to another woman for two years. It made him sick to think about it. Souring his mood as he mulled over the unfairness of his life.

"You've gone awfully quiet" ZhengLi was watching his buddy zone out at the screen and got up to walk around and head to the hidden bar. The day was nearly over, and they had done enough overtime this week already.

"Just thinking about how much this situation sucks. Rhea doesn't deserve this." He put the phone down and slide it away before returning to his laptop. Not willing to waste more time making him feel worse about it.

"And TangShi does? Have you even read the file I got for you on her background? Pretty sure she never asked for this either." ZhengLi had made sure to get all the dirt he could on the Lei family when entering this merger and it had kicked up a lot of interesting titbits about the eldest daughter. Such as she was dragged home from abroad, ditching a prestigious art school and full scholarship only two days before the wedding. If she was so intent on having YuZhi, why even leave and start a semester, when talks about marriage were going on a month prior to that.

"I don't have the inclination or the time. She is low on my list of priorities."

"Really? Yet you spent more time staring at her image than Rhea's." ZhengLi nodded at his discarded phone and smiled in amusement as YuZhi's brow flickered in irritation, a tony frown forming as he pretended not to hear.

"Let's go to the gym. I have way too much tension in my shoulders. I need a good session in the ring with you." YuZhi answered in a bland tone.

ZhengLi laughed heartily.

“Did I touch a nerve? Boxing really translates to you wanting to kick my ass for making you mad.” He went about dumping ice in two glasses.

“It’s all in your head, buddy. Maybe you should get that checked out.” YuZhi closed his laptop with a heavy sigh and leaned back in his chair to stretch his legs out. It had been a long day and he was stiff and tense all over.

“Wouldn’t you rather go get drunk and see people we haven’t in a while. I heard the club has put up missing posters for you because it’s been so long.”

“Funny!”

ZhengLi chuckled at his partner in crime, finally poured them both a scotch on the rocks and brought it over to hand to him.

“Seriously though, Cheng has been asking us to come by and hang out. It’s been a month already. Work has been crazy and we deserve a night playing. We could take Rhea and TangShi and start leaving the breadcrumbs of how she introduces you two.”

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YuZhi exhaled in an ‘argh’, loudly, expressing frustration and dislike and picked up a rubber stress ball from his desk and threw it at ZhengLi’s head. ZhengLi dodged expertly and laughed at the attempt to assault him.

“I spend every night with her, I don’t want to have her invade my hangouts before I’m even publicly dating her. I really do not want to be all cosy on threesome outings with her and Rhea.”

YuZhi wanted one night of normal, where he could forget everything to do with this situation, to do with work, wives, and just kick back with his friends. A couple of mergers were giving him headaches this month and he had been working like a dog.

“I’m taking a date, so don’t get all pissy with me for lack of one for you. Invite Rhea or be the sad single for the night. You know Cheng will have multiple women on his arm.”

“You know, I heard it on good authority you were a spoiled, rich boy, womaniser. Maybe you should consider a reform of your personality and leave women off the list for one night.” YuZhi drolled at him in pretend disdain.

ZhengLi clutched his heart in mock shock, looking dramatically offended. Opening his mouth in a gasp motion.

“Who would say such a thing?”

“The one person you keep trying to champion and warm me to. Maybe you should take note of that. She thinks you’re to be avoided at all costs and not all that nice.”

“Damn, our little TangShi is harsh. I wonder if I wronged her in another life. Little miss needs me to set her straight and win her over.” ZhengLi laughed at this proclamation and wasn’t really insulted at all. He was no stranger to the opinion that he was a wild womaniser who had yet to settle down.

“Good luck with that. She’s an impenetrable wall of hostility. She doesn’t appear to like men.” YuZhi sighed.

“No, baby cakes. She doesn’t like you. There’s a world of difference and I can fully empathise with her. She doesn’t have to work and play with you the way I do.” ZhengLi dodged another flying object that YuZhi aimed at his head and stuck his middle finger up in retaliation. The normal banter between them in full swing.

“I second my suggestion that we go to the ring tonight.” YuZhi raised his brows, his expression serious and tone heavy with intent.

“Admit you just want to get up close and personal with me and it’s nothing to do with boxing me to death.” ZhengLi winked saucily, blew him a kiss and then picked up the scotch bottle to top up his drink as he wandered past it.

“I suddenly have the urge to repeatedly roundhouse kick someone in the head, so maybe you do have a point.”

YuZhi and ZhengLi had been kick boxing buddies most of their life and were equally skilled, but this was an ongoing joke between them. They used it for exercise, stress relief, sometimes to settle disputes between them, and a way to spend time together outside of work and away from nightclubs. They had gone through their crazy young years together, done some wild things that should have made headlines and created so many scandals, but they had managed to avoid it somehow.

About three years ago they both settled down a little, trying to be more mindful of their images and the possibility they would create news if they didn’t behave. Thanks to becoming prominent in the Leng Group running’s. It didn’t kill all the urges in them though.

“You know, it really bothers me that my new sister-in-law is biased against me. I am so heartbroken and can only assume you have told her the worst about me.”

YuZhi gave him a flat look as if to say, ‘I don’t even talk to her so why would I?’

“Why don’t you romance her and become friends. That way you can keep her out of my hair.”

"I don't want to make you jealous. As much as you deny it, I think a little part of you likes her being around. She comes up in conversation way too much for you to be indifferent." ZhengLi cocked his eyebrow and gave YuZhi a knowing look.

"You're the one who brings her up. Every single time." YuZhi pointed out, cocking one brow in return and adding a wry smirk. ZhengLi stared back at him for a long thoughtful moment, thinking back to how this conversation started and shook his head.

"Whatever. I am still not convinced that you dislike her as much as you say. There's that for one." He motioned to a brown envelope in the tray on the desk, knowing fine well what was inside. YuZhi glanced at it, picked it up and immediately slid it in his drawer out of sight with a shrug.

"Xiaosu gave it to me as a gift. I like Koi." He stood up and hauled his suit jacket from his chair and began putting it on. Pretending that it was no big deal but ZhengLi could see through his deflection technique.

"You asked Xiaosu about TangShi's painting and if she had done anymore, and two days later she gave you that print. I know you definitely asked her to get it for you, even if you deny it. Don't think I don't know you then searched up the website from the back and looked through the rest. I saw you. Pretty sure we are expecting a package of more."

"I like art, especially watercolours, and fish. She's talented, which I didn't expect, and her paintings are peaceful and nice enough to hang." He dodged the implication that it was because it was TangShi's art, denying it had any relation.

He had been surprised to see her work a few days ago when he got back from Japan. He never knew she was an artist, and she had a nice style that made him want to see more. Not that he would ever tell her that or that he bought three pieces to be framed in large sizes for some business acquaintances. The website had the pieces listed as Author A.Lin, but he could tell right away they were all her.

"Fine. Let's move, I'm tired of this infernal denial you're in. Where to? Gym then Cheng's place? I think we could pull an all nighter and work hungover tomorrow like the good old days. I am ready to take that beating if it puts you in a better mood."

"How about no? My grandfather would kill me if I rocked into the stockholders annual meeting tomorrow like that. He almost disowned me that one time I went from the club to the press release for our fifth shopping mall a few years ago."

Both of them grinned at the memories of that debacle and the fact grandfather almost skinned both of them alive right after.

"Good times, brother. Good times." ZhengLi patted him on the back as they both walked out towards the reception area, leaving work behind and transitioning to boys at play.

Casting off mature and shrewd wolves of the commercial world and regaining easy boyishness.

“Shouldn’t you call home and tell the wife you won’t be home till late?” ZhengLi poked fun at him with a finger prod in his shoulder. Knowing he was skating on thin ice if he kept pushing the topic like this.

“The wife is right here.” YuZhi grabbed ZhengLi’s hand and grasped it tight before picking it up to pretend to kiss the back of it with a cheeky smile. ZhengLi was quick to haul it out of his grip and lasso him around the neck with one arm instead. Casually leaning on him and matching his stride with his best friends. Being equal height and build meant it was a comfy way to walk.

“Babes, I didn’t realise we had finally gone public.” He laughed heartily as they made their way out to go kick back and cause mayhem.

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TangShi held her breath as the sound of the familiar and confident steps of YuZhi strolled in, her skin goose bumping all over at his presence. Even if she didn’t like him, her body could still differentiate between him and others in the house like a weird sixth sense, his looming aura of being nearby. She sunk down under the sheets and closed her eyes tight. She wanted to be asleep before he came up tonight and now, she would have to pretend given it was early for him to be up here.

She lay as still as a statue as she listened to him wander into his study, right across from the bed, after he entered the room but he left the door open and didn’t seem intent on settling in there to work. Not that he used it much anyway. He came back out a moment later, seemed to dump something like a file on the dresser, and then proceeded into the bathroom by walking past her side of the bed and shut the door.

TangShi peeked her head out and squinted at the glimmer of light under the bathroom door and it made her heart sink. The sound of the shower causing her to swallow heavily in dread. It could only mean he was getting ready for bed and had no intention of leaving again. He always showered last, no matter what, as he liked to be clean before going to sleep. She had thought, like always, he would come up here later as for now it wasn’t even nine Pm yet and he was already washing in readiness. YuZhi never slept before eleven normally.

TangShi cursed him under her breath and turned on her side to will herself to sleep quickly and ended up staring at the smooth wall in front of her like a blank listless being. Her body tense and her heart hammering as she began to count the shadows that crisscrossed across the pale décor filtering from the window coverings. She flinched with every noise that came from the bathroom, well aware she was building herself up into a nervous mess. Counting the seconds until he came in here and feeling stupid that he affected her this much.

Today had been a weird one and his attitude seemed off, more moody than normal and had set her on edge. He had been testy at dinner, picking her apart while she ate and looking for things to criticise. He seemed to be all over her, nagging that she ate too little, then too fast, then too much, and it was oppressive as hell to eat like that. He bickered with her over dessert because he could. Unhappy with everything from how she held her spoon, to her clinking her water glass, and then coldly told her to leave when Rhea showed up to visit and have tea with the Lengs. His tone all evening had been snappish and harsh, and no one dared to mention it, not even grandfather who threw him questioning glances every so often. Rhea even stayed silent when she was chased away with a grim expression. It was like a major row was building between them for no apparent reason, just when she was beginning to think life here was settling into a routine she could deal with.

He had a bug in his ass, and she didn't want to know why. She just wanted him to leave her alone, but him coming up at this hour could only spell trouble. Her gut said he was looking to find his torture toy to irritate her more. That his only reason for an early night was to carry on and have that row with her.

YuZhi didn't take long to shower and dress in light sleeping attire and headed out to the bedroom with damp hair and a towel draped around his shoulders casually. TangShi screwed her eyes shut and kept as still as possible to fool him into thinking she truly was asleep, but he didn't seem to care. He glanced towards the body in the huge bed and smirked to himself. He was not in the mood for her today at all and just the sight of her at dinner had pissed him off.

He normally wasn't one to take his pissy feelings out on other people, but she was an easy target and today he couldn't get over how much he hated being married to her. He had enough reminders all day.

He picked up the dryer and tended his hair as noisily as he could, knocking his brush on the counter, seemingly intent on bashing it repeatedly. Not concerned if the racket disturbed her, and then proceeded to turn on lamps around the space as he wandered and illuminated the room in an unnecessary way. TangShi honestly felt like he was purposely trying to wake or disturb her and fought the will to turn and glare at him. Instead, she held still, didn't move a muscle, and gritted her teeth in stubbornness as if she was sound asleep and so far into dreamland that his presence wasn't felt. Her fury rising with every bump and thud he made around her.

"I know you're awake. I can tell by how you're lying. After a few weeks in my bed, I know the difference." YuZhi pointed out with a blank expression and no kind of emotion to his words, while TangShi tensed and clenched her fists into balls under the sheets. Her anger spiking because he just admitted he was goading her.

She had no idea what was eating him today, but it was clear he was honing in for her and wouldn't be happy until he had her bite back.

“How anyone could sleep with all that noise and storming around? Don’t you know how to behave when someone is already in bed? You’re so ignorant!” She turned around snappily, forgetting her act of being asleep and locked her eyes on his arrogant face. Her face pinched and her expression sour as dislike beamed his way. YuZhi only shrugged with one shoulder, seemingly pleased with her instant fury and relaxed his posture into a casual lounge.

“Why pretend then? Are you avoiding me?” He smirked, pulling off the towel from his shoulder and threw it across the bed into the hamper by the other corner with perfect aim. Missing her by inches. Acting like Mr Control and owning the bedroom, which annoyed her further. TangShi shook her head in disbelief at this man’s manner, at a loss for words, and turned her back on him again.

“It’s not like I have reason to not avoid you. You have been like a bear with a sore head from the minute you walked in and it seems I have somehow offended you!” She huffed to herself, her voice muffled as she pulled up the covers over her face and tried to settle back down into a comfortable position. She was going to ignore him and not show he was riling her. After all, she knew it’s what he wanted.

“You’re my wife. You should be waiting up to see if I need anything before bed... maybe take care of me a little. Tend to my mood..... or sleep elsewhere and leave me alone. Either is fine.” YuZhi mocked, in a tight tone that barely disguised his underlying sarcasm and brimming bad temper. He was in a weirder mood tonight after she left the dinner table, unable to shake his irritation, and yet again, couldn’t stop himself from seeking her out and trying to rile his little woman even though he told her to leave. It was becoming a really annoying urge that he didn’t understand and had no control over. When she was there he wanted her gone, but when she was gone he needed to follow her and create conflict.

Two contracts fell through today and problems arose with the Lei collaboration that gave him a migraine and would take weeks to resolve. Dealing with TangShi’s father for three hours of his day reminded him of every reason he abhorred this forced fucking marriage. The man was unbearable. It drove home how sordid and shit this contract between their families was and how he was basically held hostage to produce an heir before he could get his life back. That he got no say in who the mother of his first born would be, when he would become a father, or how he wanted to live his own god damn life. He had never felt real resentment towards his position or family for this until today, and now he was simmering and hateful and looking to rage it out. She was to blame in his eyes and here he was.

“You sent me to bed ...To sleep! To get away from you!” TangShi turned on him once more, stating it as an accusation, blanching at his words. Never understanding this push and pull thing he did with her. Over these past weeks she really felt like sometimes he was warming to her, starting to accept their fate and give her a little breathing space. He improved, mellowed, and let her alone sometimes. Then other days, like today, that venom of their first encounter returned and he treated her like the enemy. She could

feel his dislike and disdain for her like it was pulsing in the room between them and it wounded her to the core.

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“I changed my mind. I need my wife to massage my shoulders a little, because I’m tense. Today’s workload was heavy, and I can’t unwind.” YuZhi had no idea why this was the first thing that came to mind and could only conclude that making her touch him would infuriate her in a whole new way. At times he couldn’t understand his own head or the way his mouth said words he didn’t pre-plan or even mean. Last thing he wanted was her touching him, in any kind of way, but he’d said it now. If he didn’t have physical outlets to blow off steam, then massage did help and she was the only person around who he could ask to do it without it being weird. He sighed internally, shaking his head at himself for wherever his brain had gone.

“Are you kidding?” TangShi sat upright fast and scowled at him through lowered lashes of a sneer. The last thing she had the urge to do was massage him. If he wanted one, he could go ask his girlfriend and leave her be.

“We’ll do more than that tomorrow night, so maybe you should get used to being physical in other ways. After all, as your husband it’s my right to have you touch me when I need it.” He shrugged like he really didn’t care at all, like tomorrow night wasn’t a big deal either and sat down on his side of the bed. Truth be told, he was stressed about that too, resented it also, and this act was getting to him on a whole other level. He would be glad when they didn’t have to stick to a script and play at stupid set ups.

Now that Rhea had been publicly making their relationship as best friends obvious, and the scandal of their breakup was old news, there was an official double date planned for the three of them and an actor friend. Stage two of transitioning to a new woman to avoid a new outcry from his fans.

Je Hyun was popular right now as a drama actor and he was a good enough friend to pretend to date Rhea without actually doing it. Notable enough to be remembered and with the acting ability to pull it off. It wasn’t YuZhi’s idea of fun. To be out with TangShi for the first time making it obvious romance was blooming between them, while the woman he loved cuddled up to one of his closest friends to prove there was no love left. The thought of it made him sick to his stomach.

He turned and pulled his night shirt off in one even swoop, aggravated at reminding himself about the damn date. Annoyed that he had nowhere to vent tonight except here as ZhengLi had prior arrangements elsewhere and he couldn’t be bothered with anyone else’s company. Seeing Rhea was too risky, and he didn’t have the energy for it either. All she did nowadays was get emotional, question his time with TangShi, get more insecure and cry at the stupidest thing. He was finding it hard on his own and she was making it harder.

TangShi's face burned with heat as she turned her eyes away from his naked upper torso. Outraged yet also mortified he would take his clothes off in front of her again. Her heart rate escalating, and her body temperature soaring, making her feel breathless all in one go. She had given up trying to deny that she still found him attractive, because in all honesty YuZhi was gorgeous. There was something about him that no other man had ever compared to.

"I don't want to. I'm tired, go to sleep." She stammered out, hiding her crimson face by pulling the sheet up to her upright position, but YuZhi was persistent. He could sense her anger and knew the coy act wasn't fake. This girl was not one to spend her time with half naked men if this is how she reacted, and despite himself, it eased his mood a little. Weird stuff like this was becoming common between them and he stopped trying to analyse it when he realised she always pulled contradictory feelings out of him.

"You're refusing to give your husband some much needed stress relief. What kind of cold and heartless woman are you? Come here... it's the least you can do. We're already married, so come touch me, there has to be some perk to living with you." YuZhi turned to her, intent on a massage now he pushed it this far and leaned over, catching her wrist to pull her closer to him. His strong hand enveloping her delicate small limb too easily and his tug was harsh for someone of her size. He overestimated her weight, strength, and position and pulled her like he would a heavy man resisting.

TangShi lurched forward with momentum, a little too easily given how small she was compared to him and somehow ended up on her knees in a flash, which boosted her up and over clumsily. She lost her balance, arms flailing wide as he let go of her and fell completely on top of YuZhi in an awkward fashion that sent both tumbling backwards. He hadn't expected this weird manoeuvre or her sudden collapse on top of him, so was unprepared to have his bride suddenly jerk up and come tumbling down with speed.

He grappled his arms out to counteract the uneven weight load on how he was bent over. Instinct had him throw his hands to her waist to grab onto an anchor as she knocked him over like a ten pin.

They ended up falling from the bed, his arms encircling the small frame of the woman coming with him and they landed on the polished wood floor with a heavy thud. Him shielding her and taking the full brunt on his back while grasping her tightly to make sure she wouldn't go flying away on her own and injure herself. It wasn't his mind that chose this way of falling with her, but a deep instinct to protect someone smaller and delicate. YuZhi had always been a man who had strong protective reactions.

TangShi's nose bumped YuZhi's cheek firmly as he grunted with the oomph of being landed on. They both exhaled with an impacted 'Ugh' and came face to face in a compromising moulding of two bodies. Eye to eye, lips an inch apart, and noses side by side when everything stilled. Stunned into silence at this unexpected accident. It was intimate as hell and rendered both mute. TangShi and YuZhi's heart rates accelerated in union although neither was aware.

TangShi froze, her eyes stuck on YuZhi's as his widened in shock and realized he was restricted under her slight frame while her limbs were hanging around him in the least innocent way. Body parts pressed against one another suggestively, her knees on either side of his thighs, her palms stuck to his naked shoulders, while wearing a skimpy silk nightdress and he wasn't wearing much in the way of clothes. Right under his chin was an impressive view of her cleavage that was boosted by being on his pecks and he was aware it was in his line of vision. Every inch of her was glued to every inch of him and only separated by thin layers of satin.

His build dwarfed her slender curves and even as a cold man with no sexual urges for her, he still had a heated reaction in his pants to feeling her this way. His hands had somehow made their way from her lower back to the upper curve of her ass in the tumble and he removed them fast, in slight panic, as though she burned him.

TangShi's face reddened to the colour of beetroot. She cringed at the contact, pulled back to untangle herself while inwardly freaking out and dying of shame at the same time. This was so not what she had in mind when she came up here tonight. YuZhi seemed rooted to the spot, motionless apart from letting her go and holding his hands up by his sides in a surrender pose as he stared at her with a strange expression.

He had lost all thoughts of anything else when her body and his collided, yet a sense of familiar stirred inside of him, just like once before. Her lips so close, her pretty eyes on his which seemed to somehow silence him. The unique scent of this woman that was more alluring than any expensive perfume had had ever smelled on Rhea and brought back aching longing of the past. Once again Alice strayed into his head without invitation and set off the pangs of regret.

Destined To Be His wife by L.T. Marshall Chapter 30

It stirred that strange painful emotion in his chest and he felt like he'd been here before, all over again. A long-forgotten faded memory that held him still and quiet while his brain tried to rack through and pinpoint why TangShi was the one that made him feel this way. Pressed to her, breathing her air, it knocked him for six for just a second. He forgot his need to bully her, forgot to move, and even forgot how to breathe when she was this close.

TangShi hit hysterical panic and thrust herself up in a bid to escape. Her body on fire and her mind running haywire at all the inappropriate ways they were touching. She was mortified, and her face crimson. She pulled herself into a crawl position to get her body off his, sliding legs up onto his thighs, pushing against his strong chest to lever her weight and somehow managed to kneel on his groin with force. It almost killed him in the process with the unexpected and non-deliberate assault.

YuZhi reacted like a wounded animal, crunching up with a yelp, suddenly tensing all over like she stabbed him in the balls. Grunting as he curled up and tossed her sideways from his body with a groan. He sent her flying off him at speed, ungraciously.

TangShi rolling with a bounce onto the hardwood and banging bones and limbs while he crumpled up and covered his genitals with two cupped hands.

“You!... Why are you such an asshole?” TangShi burst out because of wincing pain. Anger and embarrassment colouring her tone snappishly. She sounded haughty and upset as tears filled her eyes because of sharp shooting spasms up her elbow and hip. The thud of her exposed skin on the hardwood floor had hurt and winded her, giving her a painful shock.

She pushed her body up from the place he had deposited her like unwanted trash, clambering to her feet, and pulled her nightdress straight while stomping away from him. Not willing to let him see she was starting to cry even though crying wasn't something she often did. Her eyes misted over because it had not only hurt bones when he dropped her onto the wooden floor so coldly, but her pride. In that one throw she had felt like he was tossing away disgusting garbage and it wounded her heart. Even though she should expect it from him.

She had no idea it was a pain reaction from squashing his genitals with her knee and he hadn't meant to be so aggressive in moving her off. YuZhi actually felt guilty about shoving her, but he was in too much discomfort to say anything yet. He needed a moment for the burning ache to subside and to be able to catch his breath for a moment before he could make words work. She had no idea how excruciatingly painful this was. TangShi was maybe small and light, but not when she pushed a knee into his baby making tackle.

YuZhi was temporarily stunned and blinked her way through watery eyes as she stormed off and got into bed like a petulant kitten who had been scolded. Unable to do very much about it except pray it would pass quickly.

“You threw yourself at me, and yet I'm the asshole?” He responded finally, breathless, his voice croaking. That cool manner of his slicing in to get the last word and even he knew that isn't what happened. He was still too lost in his own head, his throbbing injury, and trying to figure out why this girl screwed up all his reactions. Why his body hadn't rejected her, and his heart was hammering from having her on top of him. He couldn't get the scent of her skin out of his nostrils, and it was trying to drag him back to something lingering in his mind.

YuZhi pushed it away with irritation at his own weakness and got up carefully. Rolling to his side while being slow and precise about standing up and taking a much-needed deep breath. She had no idea how sore that was and how ZhengLi would be nursing a broken face had it been him to knee him in the balls.

YuZhi started walking off what she just did to him, returning to aloof and controlled on the outer appearance before stopping by the bed to look at her. Pushing all other emotions away to regain the upper hand in this, he didn't want to lose face more than he had already.

"I have nothing to say to you." TangShi mumbled like a weak and scolded child from her wrapped up place in the bed where she was now hiding in the sheets. She was stiff as a board on the far edge of her side and making herself as small as possible. Making it clear he should stay away.

She too was suffering from the effects of his familiar touch and began to cry softly as the vivid and clear memories of five years ago started to gnaw at her mind. They brought her only pain and remembrance that once upon a time he had held her close, kissed her lips swollen, and gazed at her like she was his only. She had never believed in love at first sight until she had met YuZhi Leng that fateful night and never imagined he could treat her with the contempt he did nowadays. He made her feel alone in this house, more so than she ever was in her own.

YuZhi felt uncomfortable standing watching her obvious despair and the encounter didn't bring him any sense of entertainment like he had expected when he began to tease her. Instead, he felt weird and awkward, and her body heat and weight still clung to his skin like he hadn't pushed her away. He didn't like this uncertain and confusing feeling, and his manner dropped completely to his famed deadpan as he pushed it away and didn't let it show. The mask coming up to shield the war of inner feelings. He was unhappy that he had made her cry, even if she was trying to act like she wasn't.

"I have work to do so go to sleep. I won't be in bed until I'm done. Don't disturb me..... I'm sorry I pushed you, I didn't mean it. It was a reaction. I'm sorry I hurt you." YuZhi didn't wait for a reply, his apology brisk and quick in a rush of words but marched off towards his office and glanced back despite himself as he got to the door. A slight hesitation in his normally decisive behaviours.

She didn't move from her little cave of covers and for the first time since he met her, YuZhi felt shitty about hurting her. He wasn't a guy who got a kick out of pushing women around and he would never hit one. A flicker of guilt that teasing her wasn't all that fun if she responded to him with tears instead of rage. He knew it was probably because he physically hurt her, not a mental or emotional kind of upset and yet, it bothered him a lot. He could deal with her glares, her temper, or her sarcasm, but he didn't like hearing her cry. He was human after all. And she was a girl.

He walked off into his study, deciding tonight he would sleep in there on the pull-out couch instead and give her some space, hating himself that when he turned to shut the door, he lingered again. Staring at the mound in the bed and cursing himself out for being soft all because she turned on the waterworks. He always was a sucker for girls crying. He exhaled slowly, forced himself to shut the door and turned around to rest the back of his skull against the flat wooden surface.

He really needed to get a grip where she was concerned because this wasn't him at all and he needed to remind himself that TangShi was not someone he should ever care about.

