

Destined To Be His wife by L.T. Marshall Chapter 81

“What?” Linlin turned, only half hearing him and not sure he said what she thought he said. A moment of pause in her already chaotic mind.

“Date me. Exclusively. I can do that. I want to do that.” He locked eyes on her, deadly serious and knowing that it was the only way she was going to stay. It wasn’t a hard ask given that with work lately he only had minimal time to socialize and Linlin was the only girl he had touched since he met her. He had no desire to hook up with anyone else since he met her.

“You don’t date people that way.” She pointed out, knowing she didn’t either, but for him.....

“I will for you. And if you think lack of sex is because I don’t think you’re sexy or beautiful, then come on.... let’s go to my place right now. I’ll fix that in one night.” He was rambling on instinct and saying and doing whatever impulsive thought came to his head to keep Linlin in his grasp. Right now he would strip naked and walk over hot coals if she asked him to.

Linlin hesitated, wiped her eyes with her fingers and stared at him while digesting what he proposed. Not sure if he was being serious or if he was drunk. She knew she wasn’t exactly in her right mind and had been drinking on and off all day.

“You’ll change your mind when you’re sober.” Linlin sniffed as ZhengLi moved cautiously closer to her, aware she might still flip to normal Linlin mode and maul him if he wasn’t careful. This version of her had him cautious. He had never seen tearful and wounded Linlin, and it was screwing with his emotions. His fierce tiger was a wounded kitted and it was yanking out a crazy protective need in him to wrap her up in his arms and promise to make it all okay for her. Desperate to physically touch her when this close, dying to give her a hug and cure that sad look on her face.

“I haven’t drunk anything at all yet. Stone cold sober, I swear. Unlike you, Miss swaying where she stands and slurring every word.” ZhengLi caught her fingertips of her left hand and gently pulled her to him, afraid of moving too fast when he didn’t really feel like he had her yet.

Linlin lifted her chin and studied his face, leaning in on tiptoes to sniff him and see if he was lying. There was only shower scent and aftershave lingering around him and no hints of alcohol. She screwed up her face and yet stayed close.

“I don’t believe you. Anyway, I’m too drunk for sex. I don’t want to have sex.” She sniffed again, becoming more emotionally fragile as this conversation sunk in. Aware that he might be sober, but she was at the stage where she would make a fool of herself and probably pass out before he got her clothes off. Still not sure if he was playing some kind of joke and serious about dating properly. Her head was a mess, and she

didn't trust if this was real. ZhengLi made it clear from day one he would never settle for a relationship, as did she.

"Okay. No sex. How about we go to my place and eat and get you sober. Hang out, just the two of us and sleep over. We can talk some more, watch a movie, eat cake." ZhengLi caught her hand fully, pulled her in against him and managed to slide his arm around her waist without rejection. Sighing with relief at being able to get close to her and bent down to one side to be able to look her in the eye again. His nerves simmering to normal now he felt like he was winning her over. Able to cool his panic and breathe normally.

This was a Linlin he had never met. Coy, vulnerable and almost regressing to being extremely young as she looked away from him to hide her tears on her now smudged face. A hint of shyness about her that didn't align with her normally brazen self and he bit on his lip still with lingering uncertainty. His hellcat was missing, and this version made him feel like an utter asshole.

"Do you mean it... That we'll be exclusive? You're not messing with me. Making fun of me?" She eventually flicked her eyes up to him to confirm and he nodded. Leaning in closer to bridge the gap so his nose brushed hers. Helpless when she was being this way and unaware of how tightly he was being wound around Linlin's little finger.

"I mean it. I'm sorry I've hurt you. I'm not messing, I swear. We can start over. Forgive me?" ZhengLi tilted his head to the side and delivered a gentle peck on her lips, coaxing her out of her sad mood and eager to make her smile. He would even settle for a stropy tantrum and her normally bitchy backhanders, to this.

"That wasn't a real kiss." She pouted, crossing her arms over her chest, a hint of her diva self-coming back as she caved for him. Not satisfied that he was displaying enough regret with that platonic peck. ZhengLi broke into a grin and leaned in for a second one, harder than before and for a longer connection, savoring her cherry lip gloss and her general feel, before he pulled back. Focusing back on her pretty face with a raised brow.

"That better?"

"It was still a one on the kissing scale. I think you lost your touch or you're not really all that invested." She turned her face away, a glint of cheeky in her eye as her mood lifted and ZhengLi obliged again. Challenge accepted in showing her how invested he was exactly. Letting go of her so he could slide one hand on each side of her face, he pulled her into his. Tilting his head to accommodate her and sunk a kiss on her properly.

Soft lips meeting and pushing hers apart as he kissed her passionately and their tongues met in a seductive union, deepening it to intensity. Giving it all he could in terms of swooning her over, reducing her to a puddle of hormones and proving how

much he wanted her. He kissed her until his breathing and hers hitched in matching breathlessness and walked her back against the wall to further tease her with his skill.

Pressing every inch of his body into her tiny frame and enjoying every curve as his hands smoothed up her figure and wrapped her up tight against him. Pinning her, temperature soaring between them as they both got hot and heavy and devoured one another, losing sense of the room around them and only focused on one another. Linlin's arms slid up around his neck as she got lost in ZhengLi's seduction and surrendered to him. He finally pulled away, only enough to breathe as they lingered close, sharing air and he exhaled slowly.

"If we keep doing that then you might become the cake." He warned, smiling when Linlin blushed all the way from mouth to hairline and looked away, biting her lip in a bid to calm her crazy desires. Aware that she wanted him more than ever and this kiss somehow seemed more loaded than any they shared before. She may have said no to sex but with one real kiss ZhengLi had her crazy wound up. Maybe it was because this time they both kissed with emotion, and the knowledge that neither would be kissing anyone else, anytime soon.

"You have making up to do before I let you eat MY cake." She winked naughtily, shoved him in his left peck with a flat palm and pushed off the wall to slide away from him sexily. Full on playful Linlin back, only this time with a spring in her step. The promise of something more substantial between them had her mood soaring, all tears and doubts forgotten. "Come on, I'm ready to dance and get smashed until I pass out. We're not leaving because I don't trust what I'll do to you if we end up alone in your apartment."

ZhengLi couldn't disagree with that, also crazy turned on, he couldn't guarantee he wouldn't maul her if he got her alone and he knew he shouldn't while she was this drunk. He was a gentleman despite his playboy nature.

"Lead the way, Linnyboo, I'm all yours."

Linlin turned and flashed him a wicked look. One that translated to 'Damn right you are!' and now she was intent on having the night of her life to celebrate, with her favorite party buddy.

Linlin also had a bitch to warn off by flaunting her man had a girlfriend officially now. Ready to let the world know. She hadn't forgotten that hoe with her tongue in his ear when she spotted him, and her fire was back with a vengeance now she knew exactly whose man he was. Grabbing ZhengLi by the jacket lapel she strutted back towards the lounge area, hauling him along like an obedient puppy and he dutifully followed. Smiling to himself and besotted. Content that she was back with vavoom to being the little tornado that brought fun to his life. Returning to fiery Linnyboo once more and finding that sassy inner confidence.

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“You’re late!!” Aunt RuiZi snapped at TangShi as she wandered into the wedding dress boutique. TangShi distracted by gazing around the walls which were lined with gorgeous designer gowns and her face flushed at the haughty tone.

“She’s late because of me. My meeting ran over, and I had her wait for me.” YuZhi strolled in behind her, catching her hand as he caught up and led the way to the center seating area where couches sat in a sunken circle. Aunt RuiZi scowling at his instant defense of her least favorite person and getting his cheeky smile in response. As if that covered all misdemeanors.

“We’re sorry.” TangShi cut in, bowing her head, trying to smooth it out before it escalated and tugged YuZhi towards the couch facing Aunt, by the hand and sat down. Sometimes YuZhi reverted to naughty teen and got a kick out of winding up his aunt.

They were here to pick outfits for the obligatory bridal photos which would also be the engagement outfits and then go collect rings to be worn at their party. The date of their engagement had been set and preparations were underway for the event where they would be introduced officially as betrothed. In typical Shanghai fashion, they were holding their ceremony in a five-star function hall where the entire associate list of Leng and Lei would attend. TangShi knew one more step after this would see them as married and she would no longer have to watch what she said or how she referred to him in future or keep jumping through hoops for the PR department. Life could then tick on with some semblance of normalcy.

“I have chosen three dresses for you to look over. Based on your height and body shape I believe they will be the best style for you. Here.” Aunt handed over a booklet with fabric samples and photographs of wedding dresses that could pass as ball gowns and she obediently flicked through, YuZhi sitting beside her leaned over to look. They were all pretty and even though it should be a special day for her, this felt like another preparation for a public outing and not meaningful at all. She didn’t really have a strong opinion.

“Your coffees.” A young girl appeared with a tray and deposited white mugs on the table in front of them, before bowing and leaving and YuZhi pointed at the second dress on the page.

“This one seems like something you would wear.” He tapped on the simplest of the three. It was a princess style, not too dissimilar to what she wore to the charity event, only it was white all over with a spattering of tiny diamonds on both bodice and skirt. Longer mid length lace sleeves in a very classic shape of dress with a boat neck. It was pretty but also modest.

“I like it. Let’s go with that one.” TangShi smiled with genuine agreement, enamored with how pretty it was and really happy with any of the three dresses. Aunt may be a mean and cold person, but her job was fashion, and she had a great eye for it. She wouldn’t want TangShi to embarrass the Leng family so had chosen something to

complement TangShi's small frame and natural looks. It was a fairytale dress that no girl could hate.

"That was easy. And quick. We will get you measured today, and they can begin prepping the dress. YuZhi I picked out a black tux for you. Classic, in a modern cut with a red sash and bow tie. TangShi's corsage flowers will be red to keep the traditional Chinese wedding color. You can choose shoes yourself."

"Fine by me." YuZhi was in an agreeable mood and had no opinion on this either, it's not like it was real. He was used to red carpet events and functions and to him this was another one of those. A big show to convince the public of something happy and glamorous and fool them into believing whatever they wanted. It made no difference what he wore as he looked good in anything anyway.

Work was slowing down again and affording him some leisure time lately and life seemed to be going smoothly at home which was a relief. Rhea had left on a trip to the UK that was work related for five weeks which meant she would miss the engagement party and he could relax knowing no drama would ensue. It also gave them an alibi for the public raising questions about her lack of attending what was supposed to be an important day for him. They needed time to cool off apart if they were ever to be able to greet one another amicably in the future.

"The rings..." Aunt started but YuZhi cut her off, being the one detail he did have an opinion on.

"We'll pick them. I have to wear it every day, so I at least want something I like. I'm sure Tang feels the same." He felt TangShi glancing his way seemingly surprised with that fact.

"Fine. The appointment for the jeweler's is at two pm, don't miss it. Custom bands for the wedding, but you will need to choose stock pieces for the engagement, with it being so soon." Aunt pulled out a card from her bag with the business address and slid it towards him. It was a notable design company in China with a name for making exquisite jewelry for celebrities. "The party is two weeks from Saturday. Don't miss any fittings as we're on a tight schedule and I am fast tracking it all on Dad's insistence. He's getting impatient and the lack of happy news is frustrating." Aunt eyeballed TangShi with open accusation, glaring at her as though not announcing a pregnancy yet was entirely down to her alone and she was somehow a failure. YuZhi caught the look and fixed his undaunted gaze on his aunt.

"You can blame me for that too. Working all the hours I have been, not coming home, I've been neglecting my wife and my husbandly duties." He lied to appease her, winking in his naughty way, hating that still she had such prejudice against TangShi despite him asking her to back off and give her a chance. TangShi silently sipped her coffee, eyes down so as not to turn crimson with the shame of their conversation. She would never be a girl who openly talked about these things with anyone except Linlin.

“I suggest you make more time then. If needs be, go for a weekend somewhere and lock yourselves in a hotel room.” She snorted, blunt and not shy to discuss these things with a boy she considered her son. She was only looking forward to a child from this union and nothing else about it. If she couldn't have that then all of this was pointless.

TangShi wanted the ground to open up and swallow her as her cheeks reddened with heat and she tucked her chin down further to hide her embarrassment. Hearing YuZhi chuckle under his breath at his Aunts blatant rudeness.

“Sounds fun. I might just do that.” YuZhi mocked with a mischievous smile, sliding his arm around TangShi's shoulders and gave her a squeeze to loosen her up, before planking a quick kiss on her temple. Aunt RuiZi balked at the obvious affection, tutted loudly and turned away. Hating that her nephew who had been so against this girl at the start, was now publicly adoring her. It turned her stomach to think of poor Rhea's loss.

“Rhea is so easily forgotten I see.” She bitched, knowing fine well there was no more Rhea in the picture. YuZhi had never been one to share important details like that with his family, but Rhea had run crying to Auntie the day after the party. Sobbing about the unfairness of it all and how she was a brokenhearted victim for trying to fight for him. YuZhi had received his fair share of scolding telephone calls from aunt before she gave up, accusing him of being cruel and stubborn and forgetting his heart. He had pandered to her temper tantrum, tolerating her with kind words and let it go over his head. Knowing in time she would get over it.

“Not forgotten, just not relevant anymore. TangShi is my bride, maybe from now on you should focus on making friends with the future mother of my child.” YuZhi reminded her with a friendly tone and got another scowl in response which only made him smile. For all her cold and harsh ways, he did have genuine affection for her. She had raised him after his parents died and despite her outward heartless appearance, aunt could be loving in her own way. She was loyal to a fault and for now, Rhea was her focus.

“Why? She won't be relevant once she gives birth either.” She reminded him and got up, hauling her bag with her, a cold expression pasted on and stuck her nose in the air. Her words wounded TangShi, who tried to never think of the future in that way and tried not to openly react while YuZhi shook his head and stood up too.

“About that. I don't see a reason for TangShi to be cut out of our kid's life. Whether we stay married or not, I want my kid to be raised by its mother. If grandad wants that to be in the Leng family home, then TangShi stays too. Beyond the contract. Which.... might not end in two years, we just have to see how things go.” YuZhi stated it a little sterner in attitude and Aunt RuiZi's eyes widened in disbelief. TangShi choked on her coffee and snapped her head up to stare at YuZhi too. Silence growing heavy with the shocked atmosphere at his statement.

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YuZhi had given this a lot of thought these past weeks and even though he knew that divorce stipulated the Leng family would raise his child and set TangShi free, he didn't want to do that to her. He had seen other families exercise their right to take a child from a mother and raise them without her and he hated the thought of hurting Tang that way. His own mother had been important to him, close, and he loved her with his whole heart. He knew that no matter what gender they had, TangShi would be a beneficial and loving mother and raise them in the best way. He didn't need to divorce her for her to have a free and full life.

"We will talk about this at home on Sunday when you come for dinner." Aunt snapped, adjusting her jacket and waving him away with a fingertip gesture. Annoyed and yet unwilling to create a scene in this boutique. She had no agreement to this little fame chasing tramp staying in her family. In her mind Rhea would be coming back and it was only a lovers tiff. YuZhi could be a cold and cut off man when he was hurt, she knew this well, so she fully believed this was a temporary setback.

"Sure. We can make it this week; work is calmer and TangShi misses Xiaosu seeing as you forbade her to come work for me." He raised a brow knowing fine well the only reason she stopped it was to hurt TangShi.

"Xiaosu is an important part of the running of the house, of course she's needed where she is. Visit more often and you will see her." Aunt retorted not willing to admit it was purely spite and she would continue to play these games as long as YuZhi continued to shut Rhea out.

"Of course." YuZhi wasn't in the mood to argue and without further conversation they said their goodbyes and she left them to carry on with the fitting in peace.

YuZhi lounged in his seat and settled himself to watch TangShi when she was put on a podium and tended to by two women with a measuring tape. Urging her to then try on the gown to see what alterations it needed.

It was an hour or so of tweaks and fittings and he silently appreciated the view of his beautiful bride in a dress that seemed made for her. Proud of the woman who would stand alongside him and glad his family had chosen her out of all the women in Shanghai. He couldn't deny that despite their rocky start, TangShi made him happy without doing anything except being herself. Whether he needed a shoulder, a side kick, or someone to talk nonsense with, she adapted to fit the bill and they had found a companionship he never expected. Her being a natural beauty was the icing on the cake and he couldn't fault anything about her. He genuinely liked being with her and missed her when he wasn't.

TangShi yawned covering her mouth as she came to him, task finally done and YuZhi had tried on his suit without it needing much. He was a regular fit and only required the minor of alterations.

“We should head to the ring shop, or we might be late. That address is across the other side of the city.” TangShi pointed out, lifting the card from the table and sliding it into YuZhi’s pocket before sliding her arm into his.

“Come on then, Mrs. Leng.” YuZhi led the way, pulling her in so she nestled against him on his arm, cuddled up and headed out. “You know you have to pick your own ring, right? Something you like. Don’t just okay with the first one that I point out.” YuZhi nudged her gently as they walked, and she glanced up at him.

“You think I okayed the dress because you chose it?” She smiled softly, seeing how he might think that.

“You’re too accommodating and willing to agree. You could have refused all three and looked through the entire catalogue.”

“I really did like it and you’re right, it’s something I would wear. Don’t overthink it. I honestly wouldn’t have agreed to something I hated.” Even though he chose it, she already liked it. And even though he was sure TangShi was completely meek and a pushover, she knew she stood up for herself when it mattered.

“Hmmm, just make sure from now on in, you choose for you and not to please me or bow to pressure from Aunt RuiZi, don’t let her bully you.”

“I know, you told me this already.” TangShi went back to leaning against him, exhausted from being prodded and poked and maneuvered in the fitting. Hungry but knowing they didn’t have time for a pit stop.

“Well, remember it. Anyone gives you a hard time I’ll kick their ass.” He sighed, opening a door to let her through first and switching to taking her hand, lifting it impulsively and kissing her on the wrist gently. “I’ll be your protector.”

TangShi blushed, giggling and turned away to hide her reaction and squeezed his hand with an impulsive lurch of happiness. YuZhi had become more affectionate in the last few days, pushing more intimacy since they shared a bed again and she couldn’t help but hope that maybe he was beginning to feel about her, the way she did for him. He seemed more relaxed and carefree now Rhea and he had cut contact and he knew she had left China for a short while.

“Did you mean what you said about our future?” She probed quietly, thinking back to what he said to his Aunt and wondering if it was to annoy her or absolute honesty. The thought of being allowed to stay with the baby she would give birth to was something she had never allowed herself to hope for.

“Sure. We get on, we’re close, why couldn’t we stick this out and see how it goes? It would be healthier for our future kid to have both parents raising it. Being married doesn’t mean being trapped for eternity, it has its benefits for us both.” He smiled,

swinging her hand in his as they headed into the carpark. "Unless you meant shacking up in a hotel for a weekend? In that case, let's go!" he winked, being funny but TangShi's heart skipped a beat, and she widened her eyes in surprise not sure if it was or wasn't a joke. "Don't look so scared. I'm kidding." He shrugged assuming she was worried about it not being humor and carried on pulling her with him, not really thinking more on it. TangShi however answered in impulse, her heart hammering and she bravely said what she had been thinking since that night. It hadn't been the intention of her question, but now they were on the topic.

"What if I did?" She blurted it out and YuZhi stopped dead in his tracks, snapping his head to his shoulder to look at her and his mind went blank, swallowing hard. Bringing them to face one another without letting go of fingers.

"As in going to a hotel together? You want to.....? If we cross that line, Tang..... We....." YuZhi faltered. Instantly nervous as a wave of heat swept over him from head to toe. Knowing he should impulsively refuse what she might be suggesting but not able to really find a good reason. It's not that he hadn't thought of it in brief moments and then shook it off. It would mean no more clinic, but he couldn't bring himself to cross a line with her like that. Sex was a big deal with someone like her.

"If I'm going to have a baby, shouldn't I have at least done 'it' once." She blushed, crazily shy about saying it out loud, admitting she was a virgin, and couldn't look him in the eye. Hot all over from sheer uncomfiness and mortification about this topic. Knowing that it couldn't be worse than going to that horrid place and enduring what they did there. She had been depressed for a long time about the fact that she could legitimately become a virgin mother if she fell pregnant. Even if he didn't love her, she would give herself to him willingly because she was a hundred percent sure he had all of her heart now and she couldn't change it. Eight years ago and now, she was in love with him.

"Tang, we're friends. It could really mess that up." YuZhi faltered, panic setting in and rubbing a hand through his hair so he messed its style slightly. He was scared that if he followed an urge to take TangShi to bed, he may lose what they had now, and he still didn't know where his heart was concerning Rhea. It had only been days and he had filed all that mess in the darkest corner of his brain for now while they had more pressing things. Faced with this, he didn't know how to react.

TangShi squirmed under his scrutiny and then waved a hand airily. Aware he seemed unwilling, and this was becoming increasingly awkward.

"Can we go. And just forget this. I'm being silly. We're going to be late." She walked away from him at speed to give herself space and inhaled deeply to calm her crazy nerves and fluttering heart. Blushing all the way to her roots as YuZhi followed her in silence at a slower pace. His own head stuck in a freeze frame as he turned over the possibility and tried not to overthink it.

Watching her as she headed to the car in front of him and tried to get his head around what she just implied. His own heartrate sped up and a strange stirring in the pit of his stomach made him antsy as he tried to shake it free. He wasn't immune to her as a woman, he wasn't against sex considering they were now both free agents in terms of love. She was his legal wife, and they did have to produce an heir one way or the other, so it's not like it was outrageous. It wouldn't be a casual fling or playing around given he wouldn't be misleading her. It would change the dynamic between them for sure but maybe not in a bad way. He already knew he had undefined feelings for her.

YuZhi shook his head, swallowing loudly and rubbed his face. He couldn't believe he was even contemplating the what if's and pros and cons of taking TangShi to bed.

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"Come on, baby!!! You know you want to!" Linlin was bouncing up and down, tugging at TangShi's sleeve as she tried to finish washing up after dinner. "Zhengy promised me that when he got off work he would take me out, and you two should totally come. A double date to celebrate your best friend's first serious boyfriend! This is a big deal."

"I know it is, and I'm really happy for both of you. I love you two together. It's not that I don't want to. It's just YuZhi has been tired the last few days with work and the arrangements for the engagement announcement. I don't want to pressure him into a night out when he already seems exhausted." TangShi defended, not entirely being truthful. Since the awkwardness of a few days ago things seemed a little off between them and he was being distant and overly subdued. Like he was overthinking again, the same as the time they kissed.

They got home in relative silence that night and he worked in his study, barely spending two minutes of conversation the whole night and she had gone to bed depressed. He had his driver take her to school every morning this week and Linlin had been collecting her due to their work Rota at the moment. She really felt like he was avoiding her again only, still being nice enough when passing at home. It was strange. She couldn't read his mind over it.

"Fine, leave him here then, although I can almost guarantee he'll come. He's YuZhi Leng, do you know what kind of mad party animal he's been all these years? You only see the tamed version since you got married but that boy has been a headliner since he was too young to drink." Linlin pointed out, hand on her hip and way too sassy for a late Friday evening.

"If he was that bad there's no way he would have been approved as CEO by the board of directors. They would rather not have someone like that representing Leng group. Stop exaggerating." TangShi eyerolled at Linlin's dramatics and carried on with her chores. Shaking her head and sighing at her.

“He was that bad! We just paid lots of money to keep his reputation untarnished!” ZhengLi strolled into the kitchen and surprised them both with his stealth approach of showing up without them hearing the door. Linlin broke into a happy grin at his appearance, visually melting into goo at her handsome boyfriend and rushed to slide into his open arms.

“That’s only half true.” YuZhi popped up behind him, sliding his jacket and tie off and TangShi swallowed her nerves, trying to act normal around him and hoped he was back to his usual self. “It took way more than money to keep my antics quiet.” He grinned, high fiving ZhengLi for what TangShi assumed was shared guilty memories of two wild boys pasts. She really didn’t want to know and tarnish how she thought of him.

“Well, we also romanced many female reporters to write nicer things about us.” ZhengLi grinned, full on mischievous reminiscing with a wistful look and Linlin smacked him in the shoulder. Jealous fury on show and then jabbed him in the abdomen to snap him out of it.

“Yah!!!!” She pouted, ready to cause bodily harm and ZhengLi pulled her into his chest so he could hug her from behind. Pinning her arms down and resting his chin on top of her head to keep her prisoner and save himself injury. Crooning at her and swaying in time to her wriggles.

“Are you in denial about my previous littered dating history? How do you think I got so good at” He ducked in, nuzzling against her ear and whispered the remainder of the sentence, turning Linlin’s face scarlet as she spun in his arm and slapped a hand over his mouth. Shocked he would be so brazen about something so personal as that in front of their friends. Aware he wasn’t exactly wrong but still, what happened between them at night should stay in the bedroom. TangShi pretended not to hear and YuZhi shook his head at them, not even shocked at his besties shameless behavior after years of living it with him.

“What are we discussing anyway?” YuZhi slid into the kitchen to bypass the public display of affection and lifted the dish out of TangShi’s hand she was drying. Taking over for her and moving her aside. They had been sharing chores and cooking since moving here but he always felt like he didn’t do enough because of his long hours at the office.

“Going out to play, the four of us. A great nightclub, music, atmosphere, and lots of booze! Providing my boyfriend doesn’t piss me off more.” Linlin sulked and then beamed at being able to call him that, snuggling up in ZhengLi’s arms once more as he lassoed her around the neck in a weird almost aggressive looking choke hold but softened it with a kiss on her cheek. He had her purring like a kitten at being back in his arms.

Since they officially started dating they had spent most nights sleeping at his apartment and had consummated a solid relationship with an unplanned drunken night of wild sex

that neither had remembered. After vowing not to that night, it seemed alcohol had been the root of all evil, horniness, and amnesia. They had to have a do over aware that waking up naked in bed together, in a ransacked room, clothes hanging from the most unusual places, while covered in love bites, was probably evidence enough of a first time. Linlin had no complaints about her new lover and his skill, and always looked for a reason to end up back at his place at the end of the day to recreate it. In passion they were equally matched, and sex was mind blowing.

“Sounds fun. I could use a night to shake off the stress. How about it?” He leaned down to TangShi who was lost in thought and staring at his strong muscular shoulders and straight masculine back and blinked back to reality. Aware that since she admitted openly to wanting to be physical with him, she had caught herself lusting over him at the strangest times. She couldn’t seem to control it. It’s like she had opened a door inside her head and now all these naughty thoughts could no longer be contained.

“Yes.” She blurted out not sure what she was agreeing to as her mind had been miles away. Shame heating her skin in case he read her mind and caught her.

“Awesome. If we go to Cheng’s we don’t need to dress up. We can go as is!” Linlin cheered, always looking nightclub ready anyway so she was the only one who didn’t need to change. TangShi looked down at her daytime outfit of a summer dress and sandals which was pretty enough for a bar, and then at the two men who were in designer work suits. They were all decently dressed, and it would save time and effort.

“True. Let’s just go!” ZhengLi cut in, also not caring about getting smarted up as he had his girl for the night already on his arm. He only had to impress her and knew she was a sure thing.

“Not Cheng’s. How about somewhere new? We could go find a casual bar and still not need to get dressed up.” YuZhi cut in. Not in the mood for a place that was filled with mostly rich or famous people looking to escape the limelight. Cheng’s was good when they wanted specific entertainment but tonight he wanted relaxation and casual, like other normal groups of friends. Maybe a place that sold food too, so they didn’t get too drunk as he had work tomorrow.

“There’s a bar near TangShi’s school that opened up a few weeks ago. It seems lowkey and has a dancefloor area up back. I’ve seen good reviews from students online.” Linlin clicked her fingers with her lightbulb moment and hauled out her phone to find the exact address. Remembering an ad she spotted.

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“What are we waiting for? Let’s head.” ZhengLi smiled, tugging her with him to the door to put their shoes back on, and YuZhi picked up his jacket but left his tie discarded. Sliding an arm loosely around TangShi’s shoulder to lead the way and heading out with

her. They all looked presentable anyway and he definitely needed a night to unwind and get his head straight.

After TangShi told him she would sleep with him, sort of, he had become extra aware of how often he had the urge to hold her hand, touch or cuddle up to her, and yet now it seemed like the innocence in it had been stripped away. He couldn't stop evaluating it. He kept thinking of the possibility of them together, and what she would feel like to be naked with. How sex with TangShi would be, given he was aware he cared about her on a major level, and it had been screwing with his ability to focus. He needed a drink and a good night to clear the air between them. To stop focusing on it.

It took them a half hour to drive around looking for this place as Linlin couldn't find the name online and therefore couldn't remember where it was. Only a general idea of the area. Finally spotting glowing club lights down an alleyway from a neon sign, so close to the art school it was within walking distance.

It was a quaint little building, stuck between older traditional ones and yet was long and narrow so inside was split into a seated quiet bar for regular drinkers and had a rear area for dancing and louder music. It also had a back set of patio doors which led into a private garden area where seats sat out all night in a lit-up courtyard. They picked up a tray of drinks and headed to a corner that was as close to the dancefloor as possible so Linlin and TangShi could use it.

The bar wasn't overly crowded, was dark and foggy in atmosphere due to a smoke machine in the disco area, but also had a warm and fun environment with friendly staff. Seats were a mix of tables and booths, and it was modern and clean and pretty enjoyable.

YuZhi and ZhengLi got in about the drinks as though they had been deprived for a long time while the girls danced, and yet all four somehow ended up at a level of drunkenness that was equal due to tolerance. The happy stage, where they were still almost all in control of their faculties, only looser, and losing inhibition. ZhengLi and Linlin curled up together in one of the couch booths, always glued together and watched YuZhi and TangShi pouring some beer cocktails for a fun shot. Aware they had been sitting separately.

"Last one to down it has to kiss YuZhi." Linlin blurted out knowing TangShi was the only non-seasoned drinker here and already struggling to keep up. She had watched them all evening being flirty together but there was a clear barrier of properness between them that wasn't before, and she wondered if it was YuZhi being cautious.

TangShi seemed overly uptight too. Linlin was calling it extreme sexual tension and realized her friends had reached that crossroads dictated by feelings where they had to choose which direction they would go. Stay on the friend road by making an eternal decision of platonic or bite the bullet and get it on. She hoped booze was loosening them up enough to give in to their desires.

"I second that." ZhengLi cut in and raised his current drink in salute. Also reading the signs tonight.

"You know that'll be me! Stop bullying me!" TangShi giggled, too happy and swaying around, to feel offended, but YuZhi slid his arm around her and pulled her up against him on the seat. Alcohol blurring all his lines and boundaries, especially after the last two whiskey shots he did with ZhengLi. He was chilling and forgetting all his reasons to keep a distance.

"I'm not against it." He teased her and winked, his tone low and sultry, his eyes straying to her mouth impulsively and sighing at how pretty she always looked. Leaning in to angle his face at hers while smiling unintentionally sexily and she pushed him away with a reddening face. Losing her confidence when he was flirting so outrageously and obviously and missing the fact he wasn't joking. Her heart bumped out of time and her stomach churned up into knots.

The drunker he got tonight, the less he was able to keep thoughts about him and TangShi hooking up out of his head. He knew he was attracted to her physically and that had never been an issue, and he definitely wasn't grossed out about picturing her naked. The emotional side was holding him back. He had even looked through old online pictures of him and Rhea earlier today to try and douse the flickering flame in his gut, and yet alcohol was removing the doubts.

"I need to go to the bathroom." TangShi was aware that there was a weirdness between her and YuZhi this evening. A static, almost electric current between them and he had kept looking at her even when she was talking to Linlin, with a faraway look in his eye. Touches had been with restraint, and he hadn't been all too close and feely like normal and it was painfully obvious. Sliding her to him was the first move he had made all night in getting properly close and it was starting to aggravate her. She wanted to cuddle up and have him holding hands and letting her lean on him like usual. She missed that kind of interaction from him.

"I'm coming. Need to powder my nose and replace the lip gloss Zhengy keeps removing." Linlin shot up and followed her. Sticking her tongue out at her boyfriend as she darted out of his reach.

"Not my fault it tastes so good. If you don't want me to kiss it, then don't wear it." ZhengLi called after her and then raised a brow at YuZhi and nodded after them when they were out of earshot. "Dude, when are you going to stop with the restraint and kiss her already. It's been obvious all night she's angling for it, and you look like you're seriously suffering from trying not to act on it. Don't tell me you don't see it or feel it, you're hardly inexperienced in reading women and come ons. Even subtle ones from sweet innocents like TangShi."

YuZhi exhaled heavily and sank down in his seat, his head chaos over the signals and thoughts he was having and shook his head. He had been doubting if he was reading

her right all night and now ZhengLi was confirming it. She was shy, reserved, and had zero knowledge on how to flirt but he had still been picking up on it.

“Don’t please. I’m struggling as it is.”

“Stop overthinking. You’re married. You’re hosting an engagement in a week. She could be a real future for you if you just get over whatever is holding you back and grow a pair. Bro, we both know you’re crazy about her, just admit it and be done.”

YuZhi pressed his fingers into the bridge of his nose and massaged to relieve the growing tension from driving himself insane.

“I only really broke up with Rhea recently. I don’t want to be that asshole who jumps from one girl to another. What if this isn’t all that deep and some mental rebound?” YuZhi pointed out, knowing all his excuses about not trying with TangShi came down to lame reasons and only the Rhea issue held any water.

“You broke up months ago, your heart just gave in recently. There’s no reason to be held down by that or to think this is a reaction to it. TangShi likes you, it’s obvious and once upon a time, you were crazy about her too. Enough to keep looking for her after one night. I think it’s still in there, waiting to be let out.”

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“I don’t know how I feel about her. It’s all a jumble of emotions with everything that’s happened recently. I don’t want to make a mistake and hurt her.” YuZhi sighed again, lifting a beer and took a drink of it, his head swimming with so many questions and options lately. He needed his mind to still. He had never been good at facing emotional issues and always run from them. Nowadays he was trying to face it head on but had opened a major can of mind worms and TangShi was right in the center of it.

YuZhi sat forward to continue, raising his palm to elaborate on some of these messy feelings he couldn’t quite untangle when he spotted a tall dark figure heading to the bathroom corridor that pulled his eyes after it and he sat upright in hostility. The familiar form and height of that man made him forget everything in the blink of an eye and pushed one dangerous emotion right to the forefront.

“What is it?” ZhengLi turned and stared after whatever he saw. Not sure what the sudden doom and gloom expression was and why he was now bristling like a psycho. Sensing the change in his normally aloof friend and wondering what heated him up in under a second to killer mode.

“Rong Cai. That asshole is here.” YuZhi snarled and got up to move around the seats to walk to the bathroom, knowing fine well Rong would stop TangShi if he ran into her. He wouldn’t bypass a chance to get up close and personal, and he hated the guy with a passion for even looking in her direction.

“The art school dude? The one that you think wants to bang, Tang?” ZhengLi stood up grinning and downed the rest of his beer. Smoothed his jacket with glee at the sniff of growing drama and wandered after YuZhi knowing this was going to be a show. If anything riled up the true emotions in one’s heart, it was the toxic stench of jealousy.

“Yeah, that asshole.” YuZhi spiked all over. His inner mood tightening, and a restless energy tensed up his insides as he headed after the guy.

TangShi and Linlin walked out of the bathroom into the dark hallway and TangShi collided with a tall man who was heading to the men’s room. Stumbling on unsteady feet and dizzy with drunkenness.

“I’m sorry.” She apologized politely, nodding her head and went to move by when the stranger caught her by the arm and tugged her back. Startling her so that she almost fell, and he caught her by the waist.

“TangShi? Hey... It’s me. Rong. Oh, and Miss Choi?” Rong beamed at Linlin and gave them both a curt nod before extending the hand from TangShi’s elbow to Linlin to shake and got nothing but a weird smile in response. Linlin eyeing up where his other hand was on TangShi’s hip and finding the atmosphere a little different to when she met him at the school. Suspicion spiking in her.

“Oh, hello. I didn’t expect to meet you here.” TangShi squirmed to get out of his hold, but he didn’t relent and instead placed his free hand on her opposite shoulder to pull her closer, so they were face to face. Trapping her securely. Only a foot at most in separation and TangShi pasted on a smile and threw Linlin a wary look. Rong Cai moved in, making it look crazy intimate and breathed his words almost into her ear. The stench of booze enough to make her choke, even in her own intoxicated state.

“You look pretty as always. I love this dress on you. TangShi why are you always such a head turner wherever you go? Such a naughty girl!” Rong was clearly drunk, and he swayed moving forward and almost head bumped TangShi in his efforts to look at her closely. Linlin reached out to shove him back, feeling this looked highly suspicious and knew the boys would get a wrong idea if they saw this. Her own warning signs going off that Rong wasn’t the nice guy she first met at the school.

“Yeah, she does, like always but that doesn’t mean you get to touch her. And the dress was from me. How about getting your fucking hands off my fiancée?” YuZhi’s aggressive tone and harsh words snapped TangShi to the right as she was yanked free of Rong Cai, shame washing over her and coloring her face as though she had done something wrong. YuZhi marched in and pulled her into his arm with anger and crushed against him possessively in a manor she wasn’t used to. She put her head down and looked at her feet, feeling guilty even though she hadn’t done anything wrong. Aware she couldn’t move or breathe properly and YuZhi was radiating furious energy.

“Mr. Leng... what a shock to see you wherever she is. Didn't realize she needed your permission to talk to her friends. Why so mad?” Rong slurred, sarcasm evident and ZhengLi interjected before either YuZhi or Linlin said anything further. The air static and sparking around them.

“Mr. Cai, hi, heard a lot about you. I'm Linlin's boyfriend and TangShi's friend. Her fiancée's best mate. How do you do?” ZhengLi pushed himself between them all, so he faced Rong and tried to cool things down. He was here for the drama for sure, but he also knew his friend was a trained boxer and likely to throw a few punches in his current green-eyed state of drunk.

“I'm TangShi's friend too. A close one. In fact, we are working very, very, closely right now on a gallery show, isn't that right, TangShi? We often eat together, chat.... What's wrong with a little affection between good friends? It's no issue when we're alone, right TangShi?” Rong smugly grinned and reached out to stroke her hair with an obvious move to piss them off and YuZhi smacked his hand away in mid-air. A hard thwack that left a sting. The tension crackling around them as even Linlin recoiled behind ZhengLi and TangShi held her breath.

“Friend's respect women who are about to marry their boyfriends. Don't touch what isn't yours!” YuZhi stepped forward, letting go of TangShi and shoved ZhengLi aside to square up to Rong's face. Nose to nose, equal in height and figure and the corridor seemed to shrink to a suffocating level.

“Possessive. Thinking of her as an object, rich boy? I find it interesting how much of a threat you see me as. If you're all happy and in love, why does my friendship with her bother you so much? Always bristling and intervening like you don't trust her. Doubting what I mean to her? Maybe your gut has finally clicked onto something, huh?” Rong laughed in YuZhi's face, spitting out any words he could to rile this bastard and hoping to god he threw a punch and showed TangShi what kind of silver spooned spoiled prick he was.

YuZhi bristled up, his body moving into rage mode, and he clenched his fists. All the signs ZhengLi needed to know that this was about to get physical, and he tugged YuZhi back and pushed him into TangShi and Linlin to catch hold of him. TangShi didn't need to be told twice, shocked at Rong Cai's lies, and slid her arms around his waist and began to tug him away. Tears brimming that this was escalating, and her only focus was getting YuZhi out of here unharmed. She couldn't bear the thought of him fighting. Linlin stepped in front of him, catching his wrist and helping her to move him.

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“We've all had a lot to drink, and things don't need to get personal. How about I call you a cab, Mr Cai?” ZhengLi was motioning them to go, and he wasn't in the mood for a drunken brawl with some jerk. YuZhi knew this was a bad idea and the last thing he needed was a headline about a bar brawl a week before the engagement. Especially

not with the schools proprietor where his fiancée studied. This would cause TangShi so much drama and maybe even get her kicked out and he couldn't do it to her.

"Come on, we're leaving. This asshole can go back to whatever hole he crawled from. While I take my girlfriend back to OUR home." YuZhi snarled and slid TangShi's hand into his, unable to deny the look of fear on her face and the way she was clinging to him like a scared kitten. He hauled her with him, not waiting for ZhengLi, shaking Linlin off too and instead marching at a pace that TangShi struggled to keep up with. He was boiling up inside with venom and jealousy and his heart was pounding a hundred times a minute as that asshole's words clawed at his fuddled brain.

"YuZhi? Wait!" TangShi stumbled behind him, aware he had changed mood completely to hostile levels and almost fell when he spun on her.

"Why? You wanna go back and see him? Are you mad I pulled you away?" YuZhi knew he was drunk and being unreasonable, but he had this surging angry energy inside of him that was choking the life out of him at seeing Cai touching her. Breathing near her. Irrational thoughts piling in because he knew he had no rights over TangShi's heart, and it was driving him crazy. What that bastard said and his smug hints there was something there between them.

"I... what?... No!" TangShi was confused at his accusations and shook her head, her face paling as she started to sober up with this turn of events. Unsure why he swiftly changed from happy go lucky and having a good time, to this. He surely couldn't believe anything that Rong said when he himself witnessed her trying to get away from him at school before. Her lip trembled as emotions strangled her and she hated the way he was glaring at her with accusation. It reminded her of the hatred he had for her when they first married, and her eyes misted over with genuine hurt. "Don't be stupid. It's not like that." She whimpered.

"Do you like him? What he said, is it true? Do you eat with him? Hang out? Are you closer than you made out to me you were? Is something going on with him and you?" YuZhi rambled, spewing questions as they ripped through his head and heart and caused him crazy pain. His chest aching because he knew she spent every day at the school with him and had this art thing coming up, so they must at least have formed some kind of friendship from close proximity while he was neglecting her for work. That maybe he was telling the truth and TangShi had developed feelings for this asshole while YuZhi was keeping his distance to preserve their friendship. Why else would he think he had the right to lay hands on her?

"What do you mean? As a tutor, or a friend?" TangShi furrowed her brow, confused with the interrogation and too naïve to understand what he was implying. Her voice wavering because he had her uptight and upset and genuinely about to cry with his behavior.

"As a possible boyfriend? Do you want to date him?" The words hurt like razor blades to say, and his heart expanded to the point of almost imploding, making it impossible to

breathe at the thought she might actually like someone that wasn't him. While he had been preoccupied these months with Rhea and that issue, he had never thought of the possibility TangShi might find someone too. It would explain why Rong kept fawning over her, getting too close, and in his drunken head mess it made sense.

"Why are you asking me that?" TangShi blanched, becoming more upset with how furious YuZhi seemed when she didn't know where this was all coming from or why. She thought he knew her well enough and trusted her. Her whole body trembling as she tried to self-calm and not let this break her down.

YuZhi let go of her and turned away to try and curb his temper. Knowing he was blowing this out of proportion and acting like a crazy person, but he was running on sheer agony. He couldn't help the way he erupted inside at seeing that jerk. Or the way his throat and chest were clawing with his own stupid questions, aware that if she said yes right now, he would flip the fuck out.

He ran a hand through his hair, rubbed his face and lifted a beer to take a long drink from their table in a bid to get a grip and stop throwing all this at TangShi. He could see how close she was to tears and it made him feel shitty for being this way. His brain firing off so many things and overwhelming him.

"YuZhi." TangShi uttered his name softly, reached out and touched his arm, uptight at his weirdness. She knew he hated Rong but even for him, this was an unnatural reaction. She didn't know how to make him stop or how to comfort him.

YuZhi slammed down his bottle and spun back to her, eyes ablaze with his own misted vision and close to breaking down. He had never felt like this in his entire life and his words came from a deep black hole of agony.

"Do you have feelings for me? Or am I just a friend you got stuck with thanks to our parents? Is that all you want from me?" he leaned into her, eyes locked on hers, frowning and holding back a million different feelings inside which were threatening to break out like a tidal wave. Seeing that idiot walking back into the room with ZhengLi and Linlin behind him, he gritted his teeth. His eyes over the top of TangShi's head as the guy scanned the space seemingly looking for her and then headed this way. It made his panic soar and his hysterical need for an answer all that worse. "Tell me now! So I know if I should walk the fuck away and leave you here with him." YuZhi's hands were trembling, and his soul was clenched tight in fear.

TangShi gawped at him like he had two heads. Her brain shifting into gear, and she shook her head at his own dumb stupidity and lack of awareness. Amazed he hadn't figured it out these past months with how she was towards him.

"You're an idiot. Look at me." She found that inner fire and pulled herself together, reaching up, grabbing his face with a palm on each cheek and tugged his chin down. Looking him straight in the eye as a tear escaped her own and ran down her cheek as

she began to shake. TangShi realized what it was that he needed to hear and even if it messed everything up, she was tired of keeping it locked up inside like it was a sinful emotion. "I love you. Even before you told Rhea it was over. My heart beats for you and I live for the times we spend together. I'm in love with you. Rong Cai was lying."

YuZhi's expression crumbled, and tears hit his eyes like a side kick he never saw coming. Stabbing pain sucker punching him at her words and he pressed his forehead to hers, cupping her face clumsily to pull her close and share air, while sniffing back his emotions. Overwhelmed with a confession he didn't know he needed so badly to hear until now, to unlock all the mess he had been contemplating for days. Her words somehow yanking out the chaos and leaving a relative calmness to his mind. He physically ached all over from head to foot but in a good way and he exhaled heavily to then breathe her in with an inhale. Trembling all over with adrenaline but utter relief at not having his heart ripped out by the one girl who had ever controlled him this way.

"TangShi? Over here." Rong Cai's voice drifted their way and YuZhi snapped his head up to glare at him over her shorter height. Seeing the audacity in him thinking he was welcome over here, to interrupt what they were doing, he let instinct take over. Pulling TangShi into his arms forcefully and startling her with how aggressive he could be. His posture returning to fighter and his hatred increasing with venomous speed.

"You're mine. That asshole doesn't get a look in, do you understand? You love me....and I love you, Tang. You hear me... I love you..... this fucker can go to hell." The words were husky and low, something he had never said to any woman, and TangShi's eyes widened. Her heart racing as he slid a hand up her back and into the nape of her neck and hairline before tugging her the last inches to his face. YuZhi tilted his head and kissed her hard, full on forceful, but not a peck like that day in the carpark. Instead this was a loaded kiss with intent, and he pushed her lips apart to devour her with intense passion. She couldn't react to his words while instead he was knocking the wind out of her and turning her to mush.

TangShi crumbled with the assault. Allowing him to hold her and kissed him back with a vengeance rooted in longing she had harbored for so long. Unleashing all that wanton energy and desire she had for him all this time. Finding technique in French kissing and giving it her all with no reservations. Allowing her heart to soar and hope that this wasn't just alcohol and tomorrow he would take it all back. TangShi slid her arms around his neck tightly and let him kiss her anyway he wanted. Meeting his mouth, following him and accommodating his tongue when it explored hers. Adjusting to his movements, nibbles and exploration.

Her temperature soared, her body responding in every way, and she became breathless with need, aware her inner body was pulsing and aching for more as she experienced real sexual turn on. Clinging to him like he was a lifeboat, and she was set adrift in a stormy sea.

ZhengLi Smirked at them from their distance and stopped to give his friend a round of applause, with a huge grin, patting Rong Cai on the back with a cheeky wink and then catching Linlin's hand and tugging her off in search of another drink. Linlin was dumbstruck at what she was witnessing, but she too broke into a smile and followed her man, tossing Mr. Cai a haughty side eye as they walked away.

YuZhi pulled away after several minutes of claiming her and pushed his forehead to hers again. Both breathless, eyes heavy with lust and intoxication and he rubbed his nose against hers savoring the moment between them. Eyes locked, his head finally straighter than it had been in months and he could only see his future reflected back at him with certainty. He would throw caution to the wind and take this step to make their relationship real from here on in. He wasn't confused anymore. Tonight had set it all out for him and he had a twinge of regret and remorse at hurting Rhea all these years for not even being comparable to how he felt about TangShi.

"Let's go home. You wanted to sleep with me? There's no backing out now. My bed is yours; we're not sleeping apart from here on in so get used to it." YuZhi warned, his entire body and mind on fire and consumed with this intense need to have her completely, even though he knew he shouldn't do this when they were both drunk. He couldn't help it though. He wanted to safeguard what was his. Possessive over a woman for the first time in his life and yet he stroked her face gently, cradled her softly as he loosened his grip and nuzzled in against her ear. "We don't need a clinic anymore. We'll have a baby the old-fashioned way."

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YuZhi kicked open the apartment door and hauled TangShi inside by the hand, not giving her a second to slide her shoes off after a strained ride home in an Uber. They had behaved, sat side by side holding hands, and counted the miles until they could be alone again, reserved and respectful of their driver. YuZhi had been tapping his thumb on his thigh like a mad man, riled up, and impatient about getting TangShi home.

He pushed her against the wall hard and began kissing her mercilessly. Letting out everything he had held back while counting the seconds to getting her here after they left the bar and then some. Unleashing everything that had pent up with not being able to devour her after the explosion of emotions. Pinning her, sliding her hands up to hold by her head and exploring the taste and feel of her as though he couldn't get enough.

TangShi responded, moaning under her breath when he released her lips and began nibbling and sucking her jawline and neck. Inching his way down and setting her body on fire. No longer doubting anything anymore and completely zone din on picking up where they left off so he could wipe that asshole Rong Cai out of mind for eternity.

It was clear that each was sobering up but not completely and inhibitions had been tossed aside the second they confessed their feelings. YuZhi let her go and instead started sliding off his jacket without tearing his mouth from her skin. TangShi clung to

him, her fingers tracing that broad chest and eagerly pulled at his buttons to encourage him to undress. Aware of what she wanted him to do and no longer shy about it. She was consumed by this need to finally let him have all of her. Surging with her love for him.

She liked this liquid bravery the drinks had given her, and she succumbed to the way his hands searched out and caressed her body, skimming her ass and pulling her tight into him as they continued their hot make out session. Lost in passion and consumed by need.

YuZhi peeled her from the wall after a few minutes of groping and grinding on each other, arms wrapped around one another with TangShi's fingers running through his hair to entangle him to her. She was getting bolder by the second, even initiating further kisses and copying his way of moving from mouth to throat to deliver seductive pecks and nibbles as she undid his clothes. Winding him up so he couldn't think straight, and sheer instinct was taking over.

YuZhi leaned down, slipping both palms under her butt and picked her up, squeezing her in against his body as she automatically lifted her legs and wrapped them around him to hold on. Stuck together bodily and by the lips, neither aware of anything else around them as they pushed their heated hormones further on.

YuZhi backed up, and without opening his eyes or stopping their kissing he managed to carry her into the nearest bedroom which was his. Kicking off his shoes, while tending to her mouth, and then feeling out the bed with his foot before kneeling on it and managing to lay her down on it without breaking away. He climbed carefully over the top of her and started undoing his own shirt fully, dipping his head to lick and kiss her throat and clavicles, his caresses moving down to search out her cleavage.

TangShi wriggled under his touch, her eyes closed so she could savor his touch, her body exploding with heat and insane aching, and she impatiently pulled at his belt to help him undress faster. Scraping her nails down his exposed abs and savoring the perfection of his physique. YuZhi caught her hand, stopping her, and moved back so he could bodily flip her over with a firm maneuver, unzipping her dress before leaning back down and tasting every inch of exposed skin as he pulled it. Igniting goosebumps all over and electrifying her senses.

He helped her slide it down from her curvy figure, exposing her light colored lace underwear and she mentally high fived Linlin for being the one to force her into buying and wearing only the nicest of lingerie under her clothes. Telling her it was like an invisible confidence booster and now she was glad this was how he got to see her undressing. Turning back to him as he visually devoured every part of her with appreciation. His fingers skimming the edge of her lace panties, up her stomach and cupping her breast before sliding a hand under her to unclip the bra.

He leaned back in and began kissing her once more. Softer, slowly peeling her out of her last layers of clothing as he shed his and they ended up completely naked while pressed together, tasting one another anywhere they could reach. No sense of embarrassment or awkwardness when caught in the throes of passion. Motivated by intense lust and the darkness of the room meant TangShi wasn't reserved at all.

YuZhi was aware that this would be her first time and despite every part of his logic telling him they should wait until he could make it special, he couldn't. At least be sober, but he couldn't get his hormones to listen or obey and his hands had a mind of their own. Unable to stop himself while she was pushing him on and making it clear she wouldn't want him to stop.

TangShi was clinging to him, pushing all his buttons by kissing and feeling him out without restraint and even though she wasn't experienced, and her touch was exploration rather than deliberate seduction, he was going insane with the need to make her his. Aware of how many times she skimmed his arousal and didn't seem to withdraw. All his pent up and repressed feelings for her these past months were now raging in all their glory, unleashed, and flooding him with feel good vibes and zero regrets. Crazy about her and still fueled from his jealous fit over that asshole.

"Are you sure you want to do this? I don't think I'll be able to stop if we keep going. You're making me crazy." YuZhi warned her, trying his hardest to be a gentleman even to the last second, while TangShi slid her thighs up against his and edged herself to him. Nudging him with her pelvis in a provocative move that made him groan, knowing he was at her mercy.

"I'm sure. Don't stop." She ran her fingers down his jawline and strained up to press her lips to his before catching him around the back of his neck and tugging him down on top of her.

"You're going to be the death of me."

YuZhi didn't need to be told twice as his erection slid against her warm core and sprung to a harder attention as it met with silky wetness and a sign she was more than ready. His brain was screaming at him to delay, have more foreplay and show her all the good things that could happen before penetrative sex, but his body was verging on climax before starting and he didn't know how he could hold out. Sex had been something he hadn't been having since they married, and he was aware this might be quick and frenzied if he didn't get a move on. Inhaling slowly and pushing himself up on his forearms to cool and calm himself down.

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He couldn't take it anymore. The way she looked up at him, with wide open eyes that were also heavy with longing and seemed to be begging him, so much trust and yet devotion held within them, her lips kiss swollen and irresistible. Her skin flushed and

glowing and her hair swept over the pillow somehow framing a serene beauty that made his heart skip a beat. YuZhi edged his hand between them to help guide his body into hers and slid in slowly and firmly, never tearing his eyes from hers to watch for any rejection. Slowing his breathing to savor every tiny inch he moved into her warm body and closed his eyes as ecstasy overtook him as he entered.

TangShi held her breath as he first pressed against the entranceway to her most precious part and then arched her back in pleasure when a hot and stretching sensation rocked all kinds of intensity between her thighs. Grabbing onto his shoulder as he pushed into her slowly and she started to moan under her breath as he filled her up.

YuZhi was barely holding onto his sanity, palming his hands against hers and pushing his fingers between every one of hers so he could hold her down to the pillow. He slid back and forth slowly at first, finding the rhythm with her, being careful and cautious and tuning into her breathing and noises to figure out what she was enjoying. Wanting this to be as good for her as it was for him and yet unable to keep himself in check.

TangShi got lost in how it felt. Blown away that sex was nothing like she thought it would be, not even painful as she expected, and instead was better than good. Unable to control herself from pulling at him and squirming with every thrust which only made him unable to keep himself in check. Clinging on, digging her nails into his shoulders and then upper back as he increased pressure and speed and started to really move with her passionately. She was making him wild with how she was responding.

It started slow and deliberate and yet progressed to intense thrusting as they started to adjust to one another in mere minutes. He let go of one of her hands and hitched her thigh up on his hip, angling slightly and screwing her with intent. Forgetting gentle when her gasps and claws were making him horny as hell and looking for something rougher.

Heavy breathing as they upped the momentum, the crescendo of bodies reaching a higher point of pleasure together as he edged her closer to climax. It wasn't the romantic and sweet lovemaking he intended as they lost control, but it got them both to cum fast and furious as they rocked in moans and pants together and YuZhi spilled his load inside of her with one extra hard thrust.

TangShi cried out, letting loose as her body spasmed, and she dug her nails into his upper arm unintentionally. Her brain scattered with tingles and her body exploding with extreme pleasure sensations that rippled up and down every nerve ending and then left her weak and unable to move as she collapsed in the aftermath.

"God." YuZhi exhaled, grunting and collapsing on top of her, spent even though this wasn't a long and satisfying session that he had mentally planned on the trip home. A little disappointed with himself for what was essentially a fast first time, but he knew this wasn't the last. He had the taste of her now and already he knew it wouldn't be long after recovery before he wanted her again. Addicted to her kiss, and to how this felt between them. It maybe wasn't his longest or wildest experience in sex, but it blew

every other time out of the water in terms of emotional connection and euphoria. YuZhi had never known sex to feel this way even if they didn't do anything spectacular or unusual. His head spinning with lightheaded happiness and yet it felt like the most memorable sex he had ever had.

TangShi was dazed, her body tingling and ringing from her first ever orgasm and she lay sated underneath him, trying to regulate her breathing and find some calm in the chaos of sensations zapping all over. Overwhelmed and yet also completely relaxed, thanking her lucky stars that her first time was amazing, and holding him close. Inhaling his unique scent and rejoicing in how his body felt all over and still inside hers. If this was how sex was, TangShi knew she wanted to do it a million more times with him.

"Are you okay? Did I hurt you?" YuZhi lifted himself up on one elbow and traced her lips with his free hand, caressing her cheek as he moved back over her and locked eyes on hers. Scanning her face in the semi low light and yet completely mesmerized by everything about her. With the sexual tension fading away he found himself instead, utterly intoxicated with her and knew that this wasn't just booze. He really was infatuated with this woman to the point that he never wanted to be apart ever again.

TangShi fluttered her lashes open, focusing on his handsome face and smiled shyly. Her heart and stomach fluttering with unleashed euphoria.

"It didn't hurt. It felt good." She blushed, glancing away from him to hide her newfound embarrassment now they were done, and he dipped down and kissed her lips gently. Staring at her for the longest time and wondering why the hell he waited so long to figure this out. He couldn't understand how he didn't figure out his feelings before tonight given how they were clear as day and he felt like an idiot.

"You don't regret it?" TangShi whispered, nerves starting to rise up inside of her and clenching her stomach, that much like the first time they kissed he would back track and go weird on her. Doubts starting to move in and plague her because she just wasn't someone who came by happiness easily. This was way more serious, and the reality was after he sobered he may freak out. Her stomach tightened with nervousness, but he shook his head.

"Not even a tiny bit." He brushed her hair away from her face and rolled to his side to get off of her, instead pulling her with him to nestle in the crook of his arm and he nuzzled his face against hers. "I wish we had done this a lot sooner. I don't think I've felt this content in a long time." He cuddled against her, closing his eyes as extreme tiredness washed over him. Pulling every part of her against him so they touched in all ways and wrapped his ankles around hers to draw them in. She was cocooned in his embrace.

"What about" TangShi's words died on her lips as she went to mention Rhea then scolded herself for ruining this by even trying to bring her up, but YuZhi seemed to understand what she was asking.

“It’s nothing to do with her. We’re done and I’m in love with someone else. You and I, we need to focus on our future together and forget everything that’s happened. This is a fresh start for us, nothing else matters anymore. It’s real now and we should carry on as such.”

TangShi exhaled slowly, comforted by his words and the lack of any dishonesty. Knowing she was being insecure, and he had already told her before that he didn’t think he ever loved Rhea the right way and she shouldn’t dwell on it. Happy and bubbling up internally that this was real and not a dream as reality finally caught up with her laying there in his arms. Her face heating with the memories of tonight and then smiling to herself that she could stop hoping he would ever care for her and instead squeal with joy he told her he loved her.

“I love you.” TangShi whispered it quietly, bubbling with excitement at what the future held for them, still nervous of saying it out loud but liking how it felt to say it to him. Rolling it around in her mouth and her heart and then blushing profusely after.

“I love you too, Tang. Now sleep. It’s late and I need to sober up to be able to wake you up in the morning to give you a better second time. Trust me, this isn’t half as mind blowing as it can be. Plus, I gotta work.” YuZhi tugged her chin to his face and kissed her lightly, Grazing his lips across hers so softly it ignited goosebumps. Rubbing his nose against hers for a second as he committed her pretty face to memory and then pulled her into his neck, under his chin to curl up with her to sleep. Satisfied and happier than he had felt in a long time.

TangShi wrapped her arm around him and closed her eyes as she snuggled in. Feeling safe and cherished for the first time in her life, knowing this is where she always belonged and hated that they lost eight years by being separated by tragedy. She relaxed into his body, excited to see what tomorrow morning would bring and filled with a new light kind of fluttery hope that maybe her future life would be so much better than she ever hoped for.

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TangShi was nestled between YuZhi’s legs on the couch, with her back against his chest as they cuddled up together to work. Him with a document in hand leaning up on the back of the rest so he could read it, while she had a sketch pad on her lap to work on her class assignment for the coming week. Soft music playing on the surround sound, the digital fire on, and warm and cozy while it rained outside and added to the feeling of a blissful home. Her head nestled against his throat while his chin lightly sat on top of her head. Lost in a world of happy contentment as they relaxed together.

This morning he had woken her up and made love to her for a longer session, showing her how good sex could be, all over again. No longer worried he would regret it and solidified the fact this was real, and they were now properly together. YuZhi had fully immersed himself into this new dynamic and was happy.

He then introduced her to the embarrassment of sharing a shower, laughing at her mortified expression and shyness, having to coax her to stop hiding herself before they cooked breakfast together. They had discovered domestic bliss in finding a way to cohabit while being touchy feely doing every day tasks. He had decided to work from home to savor their first day of official coupledom. He didn't want to leave her home alone in case this was all a dream, and he would wake up from it.

YuZhi was now stone cold sober and any fears that he would wake up and go back to confusion and doubts about his feelings for TangShi had lost weight. The first thing that popped into his head when he woke up in the morning was her, he blinked his eyes open in anticipation to see her sleeping soundly in his arms. Causing a huge grin to spread across his face. He had intended to leave her asleep, but he couldn't contain himself and had kissed her awake, unable to keep his hands to himself.

TangShi was tired today, mildly hungover, and a little tender down below, but she had never known this kind of extreme happiness or contentment. If she thought she had found joy in living with YuZhi as friends, then this was a whole other level of euphoria and she wanted to glue herself to him twenty-four seven. Addicted to his touch and kisses. His affections had increased a hundred-fold. Stroking her hair, hugging her, even taking her hand to walk her from the bedroom to the kitchen. Throughout prepping food he had kept wrapping his arms around her from behind, so they worked together while cuddling. It felt like a honeymoon.

"You hungry?" YuZhi leaned down, resting his cheek on top of her head and slid his arm around her shoulders to give her a squeeze. It was nearing lunch time already since they had both been engrossed in work.

"A little." TangShi yawned, admiring her sketches of the view outside their penthouse windows and wriggled back against him, flopping her arms down and abandoning her pad on her lap. "Too tired to get up and move though. I'm comfy here." She slid one hand up to cover his and wiggled her fingers in between his.

"I can order something in. What do you fancy?" YuZhi was in agreement about not moving from this spot. He didn't want to let her get up unless he desperately needed to go to the bathroom. Enjoying having to no longer find reasons to touch her.

"Hotpot!" TangShi blurted out with glee, craving it lately and then faltered when she remembered Rhea had once said he refused to eat it with her because he didn't like it. "Oh, wait. You don't eat it, how about Sashimi then?" She tried to think of an alternative.

"Hotpot's fine. Who said I don't eat it?" YuZhi chuckled, unaware of whoever gave her that wrong info as it was one thing they had eaten together eight years ago at a street vendor in Beijing.

"Rhea said..." TangShi hesitated, cursing herself for bringing her up and flushed all over. YuZhi frowned and thought for a second before nodding and shrugging.

“I wasn’t aware I had refused to eat it with her all these years, but I guess she’s right. I always said no and then she stopped asking. It’s been years though. Weird she remembered.” He smirked to himself and tried to think back to when and how often he refused and the only thing he could think of was seven years prior as the last time. When his heart still ached for that missing girl, and he couldn’t bear to eat hotpot without it bringing up those memories of his most perfect night.

“So we can order it?” TangShi brimmed with renewed happiness and beamed when he nodded and slid out his cell to place an order.

“Sure.” It somehow felt weirdly sentimental to him now she had highlighted its importance. “You’ll be the only woman I ever eat it with.” He joked. Brushing a hand over her hair, tugging her head in so he could plant a kiss on her crown.

“How romantic.” TangShi laughed but was interrupted with YuZhi’s phone ringing on the coffee table beside them, breaking into their calm atmosphere with its harsh buzzing. He glanced over and stiffened at the sight of a name that had left him alone for over a week and exhaled heavily, reaching out to scoop it up and held it in front of TangShi so she could see it. Not wanting to hide anything from her that might make her doubt him.

“I was dreading this coming. I can’t avoid it forever.” He pointed out and TangShi’s eyes slid to Rhea’s name and face as it flashed in front of her. Her heart sinking and a sense of guilt and jealousy rising together to make her uneasy. “I should answer it and clarify things. It’s different now and she’s going to find out sooner or later.” He tensed, his own mood dipping.

YuZhi slid out from under TangShi carefully, trailing his hand across her head gently to reassure her before getting up and bracing himself for dramatics. Answering his cell and walking to the window overlooking their view of the Huangpu river. Needing space to deal with this.

“Hello, Rhea. How can I help you?” He tried to sound casual and friendly even though it had been a week of refusing to take her calls and then a wall of silence for a few days. His chest tightening with knowing he was going to have to admit to something that would break her heart and confirm her suspicions. He knew she would assume this was what had gone on all along and probably flip out like she did that night.

“YuZhi. . . . Hey. I’m in London, which you probably know as I told ZhengLi. I just wanted to reach out and clear things between us. I know I was stupid and crazy the last time I saw you and I’m sorry.” Rhea bit on her lip, picking at her nails where she was sat in her hotel suite. Nervous about trying to make amends now she had so long to sit and think everything through. She had been sober since coming here and it had helped her clear her head. Returned some sense to her.

“Look, I’m kind of glad you called because there is something we need to talk about. I just don’t know if it should wait until I see you face to face.” YuZhi cast a glance back at

TangShi to see how she was reacting, but she had pulled her sketch pad up and was furiously drawing in a bid to try and ignore all her crazy emotions and give him space. She looked uneasy and he knew this was probably bothering her.

“Just tell me. Whatever it is I would rather you just came out with it and got it over with. I know you and that tone, and I feel like this isn’t good.” Rhea’s heart raced but she couldn’t deny that this past week or so it had finally sunk in that they were truly over. She had felt it coming a long time ago, knew what she did was wrong, and it had contributed to her spiraling out of control and drinking almost daily. He had been slipping through her fingers long before Grandfather Leng announced a wedding and she had broken down and turned into someone she no longer recognized. Ashamed now with a clear mind and a heart full of sorrow.

YuZhi closed his eyes and let out a long slow breath to cool his own nerves. Despite everything that had gone on he still cared about her. Was weighed down by this situation and felt like an absolute asshole for how things had turned out between them. She had been his friend since infancy and hurting her this way pained him deeply. He knew he held the blame, and all of this happened because of his own inability to understand love or really feel it before now.

“TangShi and I, we’re together now. It only happened yesterday but I guess you were right, and feelings were growing from the start. I’m sorry. I don’t want to lie to you or hide it. I’m really, really sorry, rhea. I never intended things to go this way.” He swallowed hard, hands trembling and heart heavy as the silence stretched out, but he could make out a slight change in her breathing. He knew she heard him.