

TMBA 1181

CHAPTER 1181 KNOCKED DOWN SOMEONE

Debbie looked at Erica with a smile. "I just have this one hobby in my life. Everyone knows about it! In fact, that's why people are always sending me lipsticks. It's just so hard to resist some shades, so I try to collect them. Is there anything you'd like for yourself? You can pick whichever you like."

Erica shook her head. "No, thanks. I don't really use lipsticks a lot." As a young girl, Erica had hardly bothered with make-up as her youth made her beautiful enough. Eventually, due to her lack of interest in cosmetics, she ended up never wearing makeup or lipstick.

In fact, the only times she had a full-on makeup were when she had to take pre-wedding photos with Matthew and on the day of their wedding. However, on both occasions, Erica could neither find any noticeable changes with her face, nor could tell if she looked beautiful or not.

"Really? I don't believe you! You're a girl, aren't you? Girls like to be beautiful. Applying lipstick not only makes women look spirited, it also makes them feel more beautiful!" Debbie said.

"Mom, I hardly use cosmetics... I don't even know how to apply a lipstick properly," Erica said honestly.

Debbie looked at her sympathetically. "Alas! It's all Matthew's fault. He should take you out shopping more often. Don't worry, I will teach him a good lesson when he's back!" Perhaps when Erica was a little girl, the fact that she hid her femininity was defensible. However, she was now a married woman, and Matthew, as her husband, should have done more to help her embrace her feminine side.

The two most important attributes a woman had to have was a kind heart and a pretty face. Erica already had a kind heart, all she needed to do was take better care of her face, dress better and she would become even more delightful.

"No, no. It's not his fault. It's really my problem." Erica was different from most of the other girls in her class who cared only about beauty and desirability.

Debbie held her arm, took the lipstick from her hand and put it back in its place. "Since you don't seem to like the ones here, I'm taking you to the mall. We just need to find you the color that suits you best. I know just the person for that. Let's go!"

"Oh, that's very sweet of you!" Erica realized that resistance was futile, so she followed Debbie out of the collection room first.

The two of them happily dropped by a spa first and then went to the shopping mall.

Debbie picked the lipstick stores and outlets first. Most of the store managers and sales-clerks knew her.

In a popular lipstick store, she sat Erica down in the VIP lounge and gestured at the person in the

counter with her hands. Before long, a sales-clerk waltzed in with a tray lined up with lipstick shades that would be suitable for the young girl.

Despite her initial reluctance, Erica wore some light make-up and tried on a few different shades of lipsticks. Soon enough, she found a few she actually liked.

All thanks to Debbie's encouragement, Erica walked out of that store with six new lipsticks just for herself.

In the evening, after having dinner at the Hilton family's manor, Erica went back to the Pearl Villa District. On the way, she secretly applied the lipstick on her lips because she had wiped them out for dinner earlier on.

The car was going 60 miles per hours on the motorway when suddenly a person, came out of nowhere and stood in front of the car.

The brakes screeched and the engines shuddered to a halt.

Erica hit her head on the back of the front seat. 'Ouch!'

"Mrs. Erica, did you see that? Someone jumped in front of me out of nowhere!" The driver's voice was trembling in fear. After all, this was the first time something that had happened in his twenty years of driving.

Erica's heart skipped a beat. She quickly opened the door and got out of the car with the driver.

Sitting on his knees, in front of the car, was a man, clutching at his left arm and squinting his eyes in agony. He looked like he was in a lot of pain.

Erica walked over and squatted down in front of him. Then she saw the man's face clearly.

'Wow! What a handsome man!' His skin was fair and he had delicate facial features. His lips were reddish-pink and his teeth were white.

His reddish-brown hair fell over his forehead; he was dressed in a green casual coat over a thin black sweater. He seemed like the energetic type.

Erica called out to him, "Hello!"

The man slowly opened his eyes. The moment he saw the girl in front of him, his dull eyes widened. "Eri... Erica?"

Erica was surprised to find that the man knew her name, but she didn't seem to recognize him at all. "I'm sorry, have we met before?" she asked.

When did she become so famous? How would an unknown person that bumped into her car on the street know her name?

The man's eyes squinted up in pain as he barely managed to form a smile on his lips. "Yes. I was a high school senior at the Askor Bilingual School!"

'Askor Bilingual School?' Erica had spent her junior high and senior high school years there, but she had never seen this person before.

Logically speaking, she should have noticed such a handsome boy. How could she not know him?

However, as she realized that there were far more pressing matters than figuring out the man's identity, Erica changed the topic immediately. "Did you get hit by our car? Are you hurt?" she asked with concern.

"Don't worry, your car didn't do this to me. I'm being chased by someone. Could you please give me a ride? Thank you!"

As soon as the man finished his words, a group of people rushed out of the bushes on the side of the road and started running towards him.

"Get in the car first!" Without wasting another second, Erica helped the man off the ground and into the car with the driver's help.

Soon after, the driver turned the car around and drove past the people, speeding until he couldn't see anyone behind him through the rear-view mirror.

Erica asked the man next to her, "What's your name? We have to take you to the hospital."

The man opened his eyes wide and his red lips were pale as chalk. "My name is Watkins Cruz. Please don't take me to the hospital. If it's not too much trouble, could you please take me to your home first? I'll have someone pick me up from there later."

"But you are bleeding and we need to get that arm of yours looked at..."

Watkins shook his head and said, "It doesn't matter. My friends will come to get me very soon. If it's too much trouble, then never mind..."

Erica hesitated for a while. 'It shouldn't take too long. I guess it will be okay.' So she said, "All right then. You'd better call your friends now and ask them to pick you up at the Pearl Villa District."

"Thank you very much."

"You're welcome!"

Hoping to put her doubts to rest, Erica stifled all the thoughts inside her heart and stared out the window to keep herself distracted.

At the Pearl Villa District

Erica and the driver helped Watkins into the villa and sat him down on the sofa in the living room.

Since Matthew wasn't at home, Erica knew that she would have to be more vigilant. She left the driver to look after the injured man while she went upstairs to look for the first aid kit.

It took Erica a while to find the first aid kit as she had never used the one in the villa before. Fortunately, it had everything she needed.

When she came downstairs with the first aid kit, Watkins' face was as pale as death now. Wasting no more time, Erica asked the driver to take off the man's coat.

Then she took out a scissor from the box and carefully cut off the long sleeve of his sweater so that it would be more convenient to clean the wound.

She took out a new bottle of disinfectant spray and reminded him, "I can only disinfect your wound. I can't do anything more than that. Please make do with this now, but you need to get professional help eventually."

Erica knew her way around a first aid kit because she'd always find some way to get injured as child.

Every time she got hurt, Wesley treated her wounds with disinfectant spray first, then he'd apply the medicine or wrap it up with medical gauze.

Much to her surprise, Erica had managed to pick up some useful skills from her father.

Watkins smiled with trembling lips and said, "Thank you very much for your help!"

With his permission, Erica shook the bottle and aimed the spray at his wound. Before her fingers could press down the top of the bottle, the door of the villa was pushed open abruptly from the outside.

CHAPTER 1182 THE DESCENDENT OF THE CAMPBELL FAMILY

The matter of disinfecting Watkins' wound absorbed Erica's attention entirely. When she heard the front door open and then shut, she thought nothing of it, supposing the driver had gone out.

Little did she know that she was wrong; in fact, it was her husband coming in.

As soon as Matthew had finished his business trip, he'd rushed straight home without even visiting the

office.

He was unpleasantly surprised when he opened the door, for the first thing he saw was his wife, squatting in front of a strange man and dealing with his wound.

Matthew's face darkened at this eyesore. When he was in a mood like this, he seemed to give off an uncanny aura that lowered the temperature in the room.

The driver, who was still inside the house, turned at the sound of the door. Seeing Matthew approach, he nodded respectfully. "Mr. Matthew!"

Only then did Erica realize that her husband was back.

Joy flashed through her eyes, but when she saw the man's cold expression, her memory of the unhappiness between them a few days ago came rushing back. Sobered at once, she silently went back to spraying Watkins' wound with the disinfectant.

Just steps away, Matthew came to a stop and took in the exceptionally unhappy scene before him.

When the two men's eyes met, Watkins spoke first and awkwardly extended his hand, smiling. "Hello."

He was quite embarrassed when Matthew ignored him entirely, neither responding nor shaking his hand.

Erica left off with the disinfectant and said, "Well, it's no good to spray any more. Your wound is too deep, and you really need to go to the hospital."

"Well, thanks anyway." As soon as Watkins said this, his phone rang and he answered it. "Hello? Yeah, I'm here. Yes, I'm on my way now."

With that, he put the phone away and got up. "Erica, thank you very much," he said emphatically. "I'm sure you've saved my life, and I will repay you someday. But my friend is here, so I'll be going now."

Erica waved her hand. "You don't need to repay me. Just get going. And please, don't delay in going to the hospital."

"All right."

Saying this, Watkins turned toward the door, but just then a spasm went through him, and his knees wobbled. Without thinking, Erica caught him by the arm. "Are you okay?"

The atmosphere in the living room was thick with awkwardness as Matthew stood by, silent and ignored.

Despite doing nothing, his presence was enough to put a lot of pressure on Watkins.

The injured man quickly freed himself from Erica's grip, his face frozen in a nervous parody of a smile. "I'll be fine. I'm sorry to disturb you at this late hour. Goodbye!"

With a perfunctory nod at Matthew, he gritted his teeth and marched out toward the gate of the villa. In his haste, he left his coat behind, though neither of his hosts noticed this.

Matthew's voice stopped him. "Wait!"

Even more on edge than before, Watkins stopped in the doorway and turned.

As Erica watched uneasily, her husband went on, "My wife saved your life today, but you don't have to pay her back in the future. It's just a small favor. And for that matter, you don't need to see her in the future, either."

Watkins' smile splintered and fell in ruins. There was no mistaking the man's hostility to him now. "Yes, I got it. Thank you, sir and madam. I'm leaving now."

Matthew watched him go, and Erica went to pack up the first aid kit.

At the first sight of Matthew, the driver had sensed that something was wrong with him. Now that he had the chance to leave, he immediately took Watkins' coat and followed him out of the villa.

For a brief moment, Erica looked through the window at Watkins, pretending to be strong as he left, and she shook her head helplessly.

Her husband was so heartless. This man had been injured and he was trying to be polite and gracious, but Matthew showed him no sympathy or warmth. 'He's got one hell of a bad temper!' she cursed silently.

As she went to put the first aid kit away, she passed in front of Matthew, who sneered in a low voice, "I didn't know that my wife is a doctor." In fact, he was genuinely a bit surprised at the patience she had shown, taking care of a stranger.

Erica snorted. "There are many things that you don't know about me!" Not wanting to actually start an argument, she headed for the stairs.

But Matthew grabbed her by the wrist. "Who is that man?"

"He has nothing to do with you," Erica retorted. Normally she might not have been difficult about it, but she definitely didn't want to talk to Matthew while he was in this mood.

Matthew gave her a jerk, and Erica fell into his arms. Chest-to-chest with her, Matthew said in a low

voice, "Of course it has something to do with me. Shouldn't I ask why you brought another man into our house?"

It was then that he noticed she was wearing makeup and lipstick, which was not something she ever liked putting on. Matthew's face hardened with fury—it must have had something to do with that stranger.

Irritated by her husband's inexplicable temper, Erica matched his glare. "It's none of your business! Have I ever meddled in your affairs with other women? What, are you blind? Didn't you see that he was hurt?"

Did he think she would take care of some stranger without a serious reason? She had hit Watkins with her car. Surely that was serious enough!

"So his injury is the reason you took him into our home?" Matthew demanded.

"Yes! If you have a problem with that, you can always bring a few women home yourself! You could get a lot in here, I'm sure—not that any of them will be able to stand you for long!"

The way Erica saw it, there was no way that the women who seemed to like Matthew could deal with his temper, no matter how handsome and rich he was.

Matthew abruptly let go of her, took out his phone, and dialed a number. "There's a man who just walked out of the villa. Get rid of him!" His tone was as cold and ruthless as someone from hell.

Erica's heart was in her throat when she heard that. As Matthew turned and started to walk away, she tried to block him.

"You can't do this!" she cried as he went past her.

"Matthew, if you dare to hurt him, I swear I'll go tie up Phoebe right now, and hang her at the school gate for three days and three nights!"

"Whatever! See if I care!" Her husband disappeared into the kitchen without looking back.

Erica was even more shocked than before. 'Whatever? How could this man say this? Isn't Phoebe supposed to be the woman who really has his heart? Or is he just this cruel to all his women?'

Clenching her teeth, she dropped the first aid kit and stormed after him. "Don't forget that Phoebe is pregnant. She might lose her baby after being hung at the school gate for one day, let alone being hung for three days. What if you lost her and the baby?"

Matthew turned on her with flames in his eyes. "Then I'll use your child to make up for her!" he retorted.

Erica squinted at him, uncertain. 'My child? Does he mean Ethan? Ha, why not? Ethan is in fact the descendant of the Campbell family!' "Okay, deal," she said savagely. "I'll go tie up Phoebe right now!"

More than ever, she was becoming aware of what sort of man she was dealing with. Matthew would be just as cruel to his goddess as he was to his actual lawful wife. He'd actually asked her to use Ethan to make up for Phoebe if she lost her baby.

"Stop!" Matthew yelled as she turned away.

With a snort, Erica did as she was told and faced him again.

Expressionless, Matthew walked up and looked into her eyes. "Are you sure you are Ethan's biological mother?"

'Huh? Why would he suddenly ask that? Does he suspect something?' Vigilance flashed in Erica's eyes. "Of... Of course I am."

Matthew didn't fail to notice his wife's hesitation. In his opinion, any normal red-blooded person wouldn't give away even a pet, let alone a baby, after having them for more than half a year. But Erica was such a simple, soft-hearted girl. How could she possibly have parted with Ethan so willingly?

CHAPTER 1183 I'LL BITE YOU AGAIN

Hearing how readily Erica had agreed to hand Ethan over to Phoebe, Matthew wondered if Ethan's birth mother was one of the Campbell family.

There was no way the kid's mother was Phoebe.

He knew the Campbell family had three daughters. Camille Campbell was the oldest, and the favorite. Then there was Tessie, the youngest, who was not well-liked. Phoebe was the middle child.

Phoebe had mentioned her sister Tessie spent her senior year of high school studying in Askor. She attended university there as well.

Erica was from that very same region. Erica and Tessie were about the same age, so it made sense that they were friends.

Matthew had a sly glint in his eyes as he thought about all this. He was close to figuring out Ethan's ancestry.

He didn't have to launch a formal investigation to figure this out. He listened to Erica carefully, and step by step he started to listen more to what she didn't say.

Silly girl! Erica was really smart sometimes. Yet, at other times she was so simple-minded that Matthew

was afraid that one day someone would sell her off and she'd still be helping him count the money.

Thinking of this, he said deliberately, "I've never seen a mother willing to give her own child away to someone else for revenge."

Erica knew Matthew was right. 'Did I give anything away? How did he figure it out?' "I...I... You...I...I..." Despite her struggle to find an excuse, she failed to find any. Desperate, she blamed Matthew for it. "It's all your fault. You forced me to!"

The man suddenly burst into laughter. "You're really good at passing the buck!"

Looking at his half smile and enigmatic expression, she became even more enraged. "Are you laughing at me?"

Matthew didn't deny it, nor did he answer her question. He raised his hand and took her delicate chin between two fingers. "Remember, from now on, only you and I are allowed in this house. You can't have anyone else over!"

This was his house. Of course, she had to do what he said. Reluctantly, Erica nodded, "Fine!"

Meanwhile, she grumbled inwardly, 'Did he have to grab my jaw while he said that? What a jerk!'

"Tell me what's going on!" Matthew demanded.

She took a different tack. She tried bargaining with him. "Want to know? Fine. Let him leave! Watkins has nothing to do with this." Watkins was innocent. She couldn't get him into trouble.

Matthew cast a cold glance at her and asked, "So where did you go with him?" 'She even put on makeup before she went out, ' he thought sullenly.

"No more questions till I know he's safe and sound!"

"If I hadn't come back tonight, where were you going to let him sleep?"

"I mean it. I'm not telling you a thing. Let him go!"

she refused stubbornly. Matthew did a perfect facepalm. He felt a headache coming on. The man wondered if Erica would piss him off so much that he would suffer an aneurysm and die.

Letting go of her chin, he suddenly stepped forward and drew closer to her. "Will you answer me or not?"

Erica took a step back vigilantly and said stubbornly, "No."

"Really?" He stepped forward again!

She took another step back, and bumped into the table behind her. She was trapped! The edge of the table was digging into the small of her back. "Really!"

Matthew put his slender fingers on her collar, and with a slight movement of his hand, one button of her pink shirt was unbuttoned.

Blushing, Erica covered her exposed flesh. "What are you doing?"

"I think you know," he said in reply, maintaining a graceful manner. Then he suddenly lifted her up and put her on the table, keeping as close to her as possible.

He grasped her hands covering her chest, looked at her with dangerous eyes and announced word by word domineeringly, "If you don't tell me, I'll bang your brains out right here!"

Erica's face turned red as if it were aflame. "You do that and I'll bite you again!"

When she said that, Matthew raised his hand and showed her the tooth marks she left on his hand last time.

Then he took off his jacket, untied his tie, and unbuttoned his shirt.

He just stood in front of her like that. After he had unbuttoned a few shirt buttons, his shirt fell away to expose the deeper bite mark on his shoulder. "Do you know what I did when I was out of town? At night, I mean?" he asked.

Erica was forced to shift her gaze away from his perfect pecs. "If it's something gross, don't tell me," she joked, to cover up her anxiety. 'What is he getting at?' she wondered.

Matthew turned his head and slowly kissed the bite mark on his shoulder.

Erica looked at the man in astonishment. 'He can do that? It sounds impossible.' The next moment, she goofily tried to kiss herself on the shoulder like he did. It turned out she could do it too. It took some doing, and you had to come at it at a weird angle, but it was possible. The spot she kissed on her own shoulder matched where she had bitten Matthew. What a crazy coincidence.

'Well, that was weird. If he turns his head just right, he can kiss the spot where I bit him.'

Then, somehow, their eyes met. The mischievous look in Matthew's eyes brought Erica back to her senses. 'No, no, no. What am I thinking? This man is obviously flirting with me!'

Blushing, Erica grabbed his hand and put it to her lips, threatening to bite. "Put me down, or I'll bite you again!"

Matthew put his fingers on her soft lips and said, "Go ahead. Especially if it means I can sleep with you. In fact, bite me a lot so I can take you again and again!"

This man was really driving her nuts. She broke down and asked, "What the hell do you want, huh?"

"An answer to my question!" He needed to know who that man was!

Why did Erica put on makeup for him? Why did his wife just let him in, and treat his wound so willingly, to boot?

Taking a deep breath, Erica began telling him everything reluctantly. "His name's Watkins Cruz. He said we went to the same high school, and I hit him with my car. No, scratch that—I didn't hit him, he bumped into the car by himself..."

As she talked, she swore inwardly, 'Wow! That man really knows how to push my buttons! What a jerk! I'll pay him back one day! I'll have sex with him so many times a day that I'll make him cry and beg every time and he'll have to drink wolfberry tea and eat sea cucumbers to recover from it!'

"Why did you put on makeup?"

"I didn't. When Mom and I went shopping, the saleslady put it on for me," Erica explained. Why did he keep asking about the makeup? Did he think it was ugly?

Matthew nodded in satisfaction. He lowered his head and kissed the woman on the lips. Erica put her hands on his chest and gently reminded him, "Not now. I'm wearing lipstick." It would smear, and then his lips would be red, and she'd be doing her best clown impression. Not a good look for either of them.

Matthew glanced at her moving red lips, which were now more charming than before in that hue, his eyes darkening. This time, regardless of her objection, he kissed her gently and affectionately.

A few minutes later, someone opened the door to the villa. The man and woman in the dining room were still inseparably intimate.

Matthew heard the noise from the door opening. His senses were always sharp. He opened his eyes and looked at the girl who was still intoxicated from the passion.

Only members of the Hilton family could open the door to Matthew's villa.

Matthew knew exactly who walked in without even turning his head. His suspicions were confirmed a moment later.

Soon, a familiar voice came from the living room, "Matthew? Erica? Ah!" As soon as Debbie walked into the living room, she saw what was happening in the adjoining dining room.

Debbie turned around immediately and murmured, "I'm sorry. Amitabha!" 'Wow, these two certainly aren't keeping their hands to themselves. They're even doing it on the table...' she mused.

Erica was suddenly shocked out of her romantic moment by Debbie's voice. As soon as she opened her eyes, she met the man's snickering eyes.

'Oh my God! This is so embarrassing!'

She quickly got down from the table and put some distance between her and Matthew. She reflexively looked at Debbie. "Mom, it's not..." She meant to tell Debbie it was not what it looked like. They were just kissing.

CHAPTER 1184 MOM SHOULD BE EMBARRASSED

"Hey, hey," she said, putting her hands up. "I get it. I just came here to give you the hairpin you bought today. You left it at my place. Well, I'll leave you to it. Don't stop on my account!" Debbie said in embarrassment. She put the hairpin down carefully on a table, covering her eyes. She kept her back to them the whole time. Then she walked out as quickly as she could. If Erica's words reached her ears, she didn't acknowledge them.

"Clack!" The door of the villa was locked.

Erica looked sheepish. She knew how it looked, and it was exactly what it looked like. She had been sitting on the table, and Matthew stood close to her, holding her waist. His jacket was sloppily thrown into a chair. His tie was on the floor, and a few buttons of his shirt were unbuttoned...

"Ah!" Erica screamed hysterically when she pictured that.

Matthew still stood where he had been, in a partial state of undress. "You know, we did nothing wrong. Mom should be embarrassed, not us."

"Matthew, y-y-you—you—you go explain everything to Mom!" She was so flustered she could barely talk. A moment's indiscretion, and her reputation was ruined.

He casually started re-buttoning his shirt and asked, "Explain what?" In contrast to Erica, he was calm. He and Erica were married. What should he say to Mom?

Besides, he knew his mom, Debbie would love to see them being intimate like this every day.

"You know... tell her we were just kissing. Th-that's all," Erica stammered anxiously.

Matthew looked up at her and said indifferently, "I wanted more than kissing."

Erica brushed him aside and ran upstairs as fast as she could, as if there were a monster chasing her.

"I'm hungry. I'll whip something up. Want any?" Matthew asked behind her.

Erica refused without looking back, "No."

"Are you still angry?" The man was confused. Wasn't she fine just now?

Erica picked up the medical kit on the floor, stood on the stairs, turned around and glared at the man. "Yes! You dumped my macarons. You bet I'm still mad!"

Matthew was surprised that she was still not over that matter yet. Who told him women liked to dig up the past? 'Oh, it was Sheffield.

He was so right!

Half an hour later, lying on the bed and browsing Weibo, Erica received a message from Matthew. It was a picture. She looked at it more carefully and found out it was a picture of hot and sour rice noodles. She scratched her head. Why would he send that? Then she remembered he was going to fix dinner.

'So, Matthew is cooking hot and sour rice noodles downstairs?'

The food looked so tempting Erica could practically smell it. She swallowed to suppress her desire for the food.

She sat up on the bed and was about to head downstairs when Matthew sent her another message. "I've cooked enough for two. Want to come down and have a taste?"

Gritting her teeth, Erica paced back and forth in her room. Her stomach was growling loudly and telling her that she had to go downstairs now. It was only her dignity holding her back.

Two minutes later, Matthew sent another message. "It's pretty good, but it takes some getting used to. If you don't want it, I'll throw it out."

'Throw it out?' Erica grabbed her phone and hurriedly tapped out a reply. "I'll tell Dad you're wasting food!"

The man replied calmly, "I'm eating. You're not. Who's wasting food again?" He was kind of enjoying this. He had food, and he got to tease his wife.

For a moment, Erica sat there, staring at the message. How could he be such a jerk? She already had dinner! It wasn't her fault!

Grinning like a Cheshire cat, Matthew called up his dialer. He sent a screenshot to her. It was Wesley's phone number, ready to dial. All he'd need to do to call him was press "send." "If you're not down here

in 60 seconds, I'm calling Dad."

It didn't take her that long.

Erica came downstairs like a gust of wind and appeared in the dining room, panting slightly. She angrily scolded the man who was eating hot and sour rice noodles, "Tell me something; you're rich. Why are you eating hot and sour rice noodles? Isn't that a bit like slumming? I'll snap a pic of you eating it, so the whole world will know that you eat hot and sour rice noodles at home!"

Humph, she hadn't forgiven him yet. But he tricked her into coming downstairs. She had to have revenge!

As if he didn't hear what she said, Matthew pushed an untouched bowl of rice noodles to her and said, "This is really an acquired taste. You'd better cherish this opportunity. If you want me to make this again, you'll be waiting a long time!"

She resisted. She wanted it so much, and the fragrance of the meal was sheer torture. But she was still mad.

Pretending to be reluctant, Erica picked up her chopsticks and picked up some noodles.

HMM... Matthew was a really good cook. He could make even a snack taste like a fancy treat.

It was so delicious that she could almost cry. He was so good to her, sometimes. If she could have a can of cola right now...

The next moment, he set a can of coke near her bowl. Erica wondered if Matthew was a mind reader. How did he know exactly what she wanted?

"Thank you!" she said to him and took a few gulps of the coke.

WOW! This felt so great!

Life with Matthew was, at times, a slice of heaven.

When Erica was working up the motivation to wash the dishes, Matthew was one step ahead of her and began to clear the table and clean the kitchen.

Erica felt embarrassed. She placed the dishes in the dishwasher and asked her man, who was scrubbing down the counters, "Why don't we have servants to help us with housework?"

"We can do that ourselves."

Erica threw the empty bottle into the trash can. "Guess I need to learn how, then! I've always had

servants do it."

He was the one who cooked. It was only fair that she cleaned up after the meal. She hadn't done anything other than eat. Well, eat and complain, anyway.

Matthew looked up at her and refused her indifferently, "No."

"Why not? I see. You think I can't do it, huh? Just because I grew up in a well-off household... Don't worry. I'm sure I can. I'm over twenty. If I can't learn how, I'll be totally useless all my life!"

"That's not what I meant."

"Then what?"

Matthew didn't beat around the bush. "You won't have time."

"What do you mean?" she insisted. If others could do it, she could too.

"I mean, you shouldn't have to worry about it. You just need to be who you are. Your priority is your studies."

Thinking of something, Erica curled her lips and murmured, "That sounds good. But you don't help me with my studies!"

"What are you talking about? I support you as much as I can." Matthew couldn't believe his ears. He paid her tuition. Actually, he had paid for books, supplies, everything. He had bought her the camera she wanted. He had personally pulled strings and got her credits to transfer.

And now she was saying he didn't support her. What kind of crazy talk was that?

"Well, you don't help me with my homework. You don't allow me to take pictures of you, and then I had no choice but to use Hyatt as a model. That got me embroiled in a plagiarism scandal. If you had let me take some pics of you earlier, no one would have bothered me."

Even if Kaitlyn managed to steal her photos, Kaitlyn would have to explain everything to Matthew if he asked her to. Erica wouldn't have needed to be so anxious, and she wouldn't have had to bother Sheffield with it.

Another thing that made Erica angry was that Matthew didn't keep his promise. She did what he suggested, gave him what he wanted, but he still wouldn't let her take pictures of him.

Hearing her rant, Matthew smiled, probably because he was too angry.

"So, you think having your work stolen is my fault?"

The girl nodded affirmatively, "Yeah!" The man didn't want to talk to this unreasonable girl anymore.

When Erica was about to leave, she suddenly looked back at the man cleaning the table carefully. "Matthew," she suddenly called in a sweet voice.

Matthew paused for a second. She probably needed his help again, but he pretended not to hear her.

CHAPTER 1185 THE WARMEST MAN

Erica thought Matthew hadn't heard her, so she hurried over and stood in front of him. Donning a sweet smile, she began, "Matthew, I have a question for you."

The man was still silent.

But this time Erica was sure that he had heard her—he just didn't want to talk. All the same, she went on. "Matthew, do you care about three thousand dollars?"

Hearing this, Matthew tossed the rag into the sink and said, "I care."

She pulled a long face. "What? You care about three thousand dollars? Isn't it said that a CEO can make a hundred million dollars in a minute?"

Matthew was as curt as ever. "Yes."

"Then why do you still care about three thousand?" she pouted.

Matthew didn't mind talking nonsense with her for a while. "Because I still have to keep track of my money and take care of it. Do you mean that I should just take three thousand dollars and give it to some random stranger on the street, and think nothing of it?"

"No, no, of course not. I mean... You can't randomly give money to strangers, but you can give it to me!" Finally it was out in the open.

'So, she beat around the bush before asking for three thousand dollars?' Matthew thought. 'Is my wife so poor?' Pretending to be confused, he asked, "Why should I give three thousand dollars to you? Have you used up all your money already?"

Embarrassed, Erica lowered her head, but her lips held a trace of a smile. "Here is the thing... I went shopping with your mom today and bought some lipsticks. They cost three thousand dollars! And that's so expensive! Three thousand! It's just the cost of a breakfast for you, but for a poor student like me, that's my living expenses for a month! So, can you reimburse your dear wife for this, um, little mistake?"

With some effort, Matthew kept from snorting out loud. 'Is she the kind of poor student who lives on three thousand dollars a month? Does she really expect me to believe this?'

It took this for him to see that his wife really was a miser!

"What, have you used up all the money I gave you before?" he asked.

"No, I don't want to use that up at all." Erica was being entirely honest here.

She had bought the lipsticks with the money that Gifford had given her before. After this expenditure, there was only a little left over.

With a smile in his eyes, Matthew asked, "Ah, so you're saving up for your five sons in the future?" He hadn't forgotten her great wish to have five sons with him—and to leave him penniless.

'Five sons?' Erica shivered. "I can't afford to raise five sons!"

Matthew went to the bathroom to wash his hands. When he came out, Erica, who had given up asking him to reimburse her, was going upstairs.

He followed her.

Up in their room, Matthew found her playing with her phone on the bed. He took out a check, wrote on it for a minute, and went and offered it to her. He said, "Here. You can come to me for anything you buy in the future. I'll reimburse you."

Erica's eyes lit up, but she was not in a hurry to take the check. She tilted her head and squinted at the check, making sure she had read it right. "One, two, three... Three hundred thousand?" She gulped. "Matthew, I said I wanted three thousand dollars!"

Matthew tucked the check into her collar. "I heard what you said!" Three hundred thousand was pocket change to someone in his position.

'Wow!' thought Erica. 'It's great to have a husband who's silly and rich!' She covered her collar tightly with both hands, fearing that he would go back on his words and take the check back. "Do I need an invoice for reimbursement in the future?"

Feeling very generous, Matthew told her, "No. Just ask for the reimbursement anytime." With that, he turned and went to the walk-in closet.

Erica took the check out of her collar and kissed it again and again. "Matthew, I love you so much!" But, as was clear, she loved this check even more!

"What did you say just now?" her husband asked over his shoulder.

Now in a good mood, Erica didn't mind saying something nice to him. "I said, Matthew, you're the

warmest, most handsome, most generous and considerate man in the world!"

He raised an eyebrow. "If I hadn't given you this check today, would you still think so?"

"Of course..." '...not!' Erica had to be realistic. Money was much more important than her husband!

If Matthew abandoned her in the future, the only thing that could accompany her was money!

Knowing what she wanted to say, Matthew turned and disappeared into the closet.

A moment later, he emerged with a little brocade box in his hand. Pretending to be very casual, he tossed it onto the bed before his wife, saying, "A friend of mine just designed a pair of stud earrings. Have a look?"

Erica put down her phone and opened the box. Inside was a pair of very exquisite-looking cheetah-shaped earrings. The eyes were made of pink-colored diamonds, and the other materials looked to be platinum and transparent jewels. The style presented a combination of hardness and softness.

Matthew watched closely as her eyes lit up. She took one of the earrings out and examined it carefully. "Matthew, how much are these? Can you sell them to me?"

"No, just take them if you want. I'll ask my friend to design something else."

"Is the eye in the middle pink-colored diamond?" Erica asked absentmindedly, then shook her head.

"No, it must be very expensive. I can't just take these." Erica carefully put the ear stud back into the brocade box and brought it to him, her face serious. "They're so precious. Return them to your friend as soon as you can."

Matthew's face darkened. This woman had no idea of his romance at all! At times like this, he really wanted to just throw her out of the villa. "I don't have to return them. They're already mine," he explained.

"What? Did he just give them to you? Are you going to give them to your goddess?" That was what Erica said when she didn't want to mention Phoebe's name.

'My goddess...'

Matthew thought, not knowing how to answer. At last his impatience showed itself, and he glowered down at the box. "She doesn't want them. It's useless for me to take the earrings. If you don't want them either, I'll just throw them away!"

'So that's it, ' Erica realized with some disappointment. Matthew's beloved woman didn't want the earrings, so he thought to give them to her instead. Instantly, she found that she didn't like them so much anymore. "Well, then throw them away!" she told him.

Matthew blanched; his wife was so unpredictable that she was driving him crazy. 'Didn't she like them very much just a minute ago? And isn't she always frugal? She never likes me wasting things.' He asked, "Are you sure?"

"Yes." Erica was emphatic. "If you're going to give me something just because another woman didn't want it, then I don't want it either!"

So this was the problem. Matthew explained, "Well, I originally planned to give them to you."

"Then why you say your goddess didn't want them?" Erica asked. After all, he hadn't said this before; he'd just asked her to have a look at them.

"So, do you want them or not?" sighed Matthew.

"Well, if they are not for another woman, of course I will take them. I'm not a fool." Erica spoke slowly, holding the box tightly as if it was her own.

Matthew shook his head slightly, then held out a hand and said, "Give the box to me!"

"Why are you going back on your words already?"

For a second he actually looked hurt, wondering if that was really the sort of person his wife thought he was. "No, I mean, I'll help you put them on," he said.

"Oh, okay!" Erica replied, flushing just a bit.

She opened the box.

With a gentleness that seemed unlike him, Matthew put the ear studs on her. Taking in the close-up view of his face, Erica snickered in her heart, 'Wow, my husband is so handsome!'

"All right, have a look in the mirror," he said.

First, though, Erica asked, "Do you think they look good on me?"

He gave her a tender look. "Not bad!"

As he saw it, Erica was a delicate and lovely girl, and this style of earrings matched her very well.

CHAPTER 1186 SHE WAS FLATTERED

After getting his praise, Erica seemed delighted. She ran to look at herself in the mirror happily.

"Matthew, are these stud earrings too eye-catching?" It was true. From their very appearance, they

seemed precious. One could tell at a glance that these jewels were worth a lot.

Matthew didn't seem to think so. "No, they aren't," he said.

"Well, what if I lose them?" She had lost a lot of things owing to her rash and careless character in the past. And with that in mind, even the thought of wearing the huge diamond ring Matthew had given was too much for her.

He replied indifferently, "If you lose something, then you get something new."

"Won't you blame me for losing something so valuable?"

"No, I won't."

"Matthew. Are you really not going to give these to your goddess instead of me?" He was being so good to her that she was both flattered and confused!

He cast a cold glance at the inquisitive girl in front of him and replied shortly, "You have too many questions. I'm busy right now." Then he turned around and walked into the bathroom.

Erica looked at her image in the mirror in confusion. Was she really asking too many questions? She had only asked four or five questions.

This man was way too impatient!

'Yes! He's such an impatient man!'

That night, as usual, Erica went to sleep with the Wuba doll in her arms, and was fast asleep before Matthew had finished his work in the study.

At about eleven o'clock, his phone rang. It was Phoebe. "Hello."

"Matthew, I need a favor from you," she said; there was a hint of expectation in her voice. And that expectation was justified at least to her; he was the only one in the world who could satisfy all her requirements.

"Okay. What's it?"

"I heard that Maestro GL recently released a new pair of ear studs. They were limited edition but I saw the photos online and really liked the element of cheetah. Sadly, they were bought by some mysterious person so they're out of my hands. Could you...?" She paused.

Matthew frowned as he heard her words. If Phoebe had asked for something else tonight, he would have agreed without hesitation.

However, Erica really liked what Phoebe wanted.

"That mysterious person is me."

"Oh, I see! So you bought them. That's great. Matthew, can you give the earrings to me if you don't need them?" Phoebe knew that Matthew didn't care about the money. Looking back, more than half of the money she had spent on herself as well as the baby in her womb had come from Matthew's pocket. Therefore, she now took whatever Matthew had for granted.

After a moment's silence, Matthew confessed, "I've already given them to someone else."

"What? Oh. I see..." Phoebe's tone was full of disappointment, but she still wanted to make some efforts. Maybe he'd change his mind. "Can't you give something else to that person?"

"No. She likes them very much as well..." Matthew had always been a straightforward person in front of outsiders.

Phoebe was at a loss for words. She was disappointed and embarrassed, but she had no choice. "I see. Can I ask who you gave them to?"

"My wife."

That meant there was no hope for Phoebe anymore. There was silence on the phone. After a long time, she managed to find her voice and replied, "Oh, okay, then I won't disturb you anymore. Good night."

"Night."

After hanging up the phone, Matthew didn't go back to work. Instead, he turned off his computer and shuffled towards his bedroom.

The girl was fast asleep, and he again had to maneuver her into his arms before falling asleep together.

The next afternoon, Erica completed her class and then decided to abandon Hyatt and go find her husband.

Perhaps she would have a chance to take a few pictures of that handsome man while he was working, so that she could deal with Professor Faulkner's assignment next time.

She told Hyatt before leaving school, "Listen. You can go and read something in the dormitory by yourself. If you have nothing else to do, try and find a girl, go talk to her, and enjoy a bit. I think your mother also wants you to date a girl. I need to go find my husband, so I can't accompany you."

Hyatt nodded and then shyly told her, "I've already been talking to a girl in our school recently. She's in

the department of broadcasting. I've seen her pictures and she's quite beautiful."

"Really? Let me have a look! But hurry up!" Hyatt talking to a girl other than herself was a rarity much harder to witness than winning the lottery.

Hyatt, who never hid anything from her, took out his phone and showed a photo to Erica. "That's her..."

The girl in the photo was about the same age as them. Her skin was fair and she did look quite pretty.

But why was such a beautiful girl interested in Hyatt? The guy was basically a nerd! Erica was confused.

She cautioned him, "She looks nice, but be careful. Don't be cheated. Talk to her, chat with her, but don't fall in love with her before you know her well, okay?"

People were always like this. When it came to advising and educating others, they would sound and act so experienced. But they would instantly become foolish and naive children when it came to their own affairs.

"Yes I know. See you soon." Hyatt waved at her.

The two separated and with a heavy camera slung on her back, Erica went to Hilton Group.

On the floor of the CEO's office, Erica greeted the people in the special assistant area and finally found Paige. "Is Matthew inside?"

"Mr. Matthew is there," she confirmed. 'But there is already someone else inside, ' Paige thought.

"That's good. I'll go in myself! Please continue your work!" Then she walked towards Matthew's office. Without knocking at the door, she pushed the door open and walked in. "Matthew, it's me—" Her voice trailed off.

Besides Matthew, there was a familiar figure in the office.

It was Phoebe.

She was wearing a loose dress over her swollen belly; her pregnancy was visible now. Her feet were covered by a pair of soft flat shoes. She was looking out the window and chatting with the man sitting at the desk. She stopped talking upon seeing Erica.

Embarrassed, Erica looked at Matthew and asked, "Did I disturb you?"

"No," he replied indifferently.

But her arrival had instantly dissipated the smile on Phoebe's face.

And on the other hand, even if the man said she wasn't disturbing them, Erica still didn't know if it was appropriate for her to enter or not. If she went inside, then she would feel a little embarrassed since she had come in second.

But if she didn't go inside... From the very bottom of her heart, she didn't want Matthew to stay with Phoebe alone.

But Matthew made her struggle easy when he said, "Come in!"

"Okay!" 'Huh! I have the surveillance video at the door as my proof! It was Matthew who asked me to come in. It wouldn't be my fault if the atmosphere ever became awkward!' she thought happily in her mind.

And yet, her arrival didn't make Phoebe take her leave. She continued chatting with Matthew, ignoring his wife. "They only have eyes for Camille. I don't want to go back home anymore."

Matthew simply replied, "Then don't go back."

Erica thought to herself, 'Wow, he spoils her that much?'

Phoebe still kept her eyes on the man and protested, "But now they have been coming to me recently. My mother has been trying very hard to persuade me. At the same time, my father's words are very unpleasant to hear. He blamed me, saying that I had hooked up with you and that I had abandoned my family. I really don't know what to do!" Her tone sounded very helpless.

Glancing at the girl who was playing with her phone on the sofa, Matthew replied shortly, "Let me handle it."

'Humph! He's indeed doting on Phoebe,' Erica thought, angrily. She turned to catch a glimpse of the man, but she didn't expect to meet his eyes.

In order to hide her eavesdropping, Erica quickly looked away and tapped on a voice message her instructor had sent. "We'll be checking the student dormitories tomorrow morning..."

Phoebe noticed what was going on between them, but she just ignored it and continued to complain, "Tessie has been in some financial troubles recently. Her money tends to run out faster than her time, and she comes to me to borrow some. How could the Campbell family have so many troubles?"

"Who did you say has financial troubles?" This time, it was Erica who had spoken up.

She had suddenly raised her voice and asked the woman standing in front of the French window.

Phoebe glanced at her indifferently and answered her question for Matthew's sake, "I said Tessie!" Then

she sneered, "Mrs. Erica, do you still remember once having a good relationship with Tessie?"

But then, her eyes happened to fall on the studs on Erica's earlobes. They were the same pair that she had asked Matthew for last night!

CHAPTER 1187 THE MYSTERY OF TESSIE

So Matthew had given the ear studs to Erica.

Even though Phoebe had expected this to happen, seeing it was something else, and she clenched her fists as jealousy ate away at her. She had never hated anyone so much!

"Of course I do," Erica was saying. "But why did you say that Tessie was short of money in school?" Hastily she put down her camera and phone, then drew closer. The shock in her eyes was obvious.

Phoebe was a bit confused as well. "I was just telling Matthew something about our Campbell family. Is there anything wrong with that?"

Indeed, Phoebe's only intention had been to complain to Matthew about family matters. She had no idea how her remarks could provoke such astonishment in Erica's heart. "But... Isn't Tessie dead? Why did you say she was—"

"Erica!" Phoebe interrupted. Her voice was as harsh as a gunshot.

Unable to ignore this exchange, Matthew frowned and got up from his chair. He drew near, and the three people stood face to face there in the office.

Erica was taken aback by Phoebe's unfriendly attitude. "You don't need to shout," she said awkwardly. "I can hear you just fine."

The flame in Phoebe's eyes didn't die down. "What nonsense are you talking about?! Erica, how can you be so vicious?"

"You..." Erica was too flustered to go on. 'How dare this woman yell at me in front of Matthew?' she thought. 'Just because Matthew loves her doesn't mean she can be so rude to me! I have to maintain my own dignity in front of my husband.'

"Phoebe!" Matthew's tone was cold; he was warning her to mind her manners.

Taking a deep breath, Phoebe said, "Matthew, you heard her too. She started it. She is so heartless that she even cursed my sister and said she was dead!"

"But Tessie is dead..." Erica insisted, more perplexed now than ever. The doctor had told her so.

"Erica, what did Tessie do to deserve this from you?" Phoebe demanded, shaking with rage. "Why are

you cursing her like that?"

At this moment, it began to dawn on Erica; Phoebe must not have come to terms with what had happened to Tessie. Was it so painful that she was still in denial?

Thinking of this, Erica softened her tone. "Tessie was my best friend. Why would I curse her? I was there when she died—"

"Shut up!" Phoebe raised a trembling hand and pointed at the door to Matthew's office. "How could you say something so terrible? Get out of here! I can't stand to even look at your face!"

'This is my husband's office and she is kicking me out?' Erica thought. She wasn't without sympathy for Phoebe's pain, but she simply could not stand for this kind of humiliation. She gritted her teeth. "What right do you have to kick me out?"

As she said this, Matthew put an arm around Erica's waist, and the two faced Phoebe together.

"Phoebe, you are pregnant," he cautioned. "You need to calm down. Think about the baby."

"I can't calm down. Tessie was so good to Erica!" cried Phoebe. "But Erica mistreated her, and here she is saying that she's dead! I really feel sorry for you that you married such a woman as Erica. She has always been a liar..."

"Phoebe!" Matthew snapped, his face darkening. "For the last time, watch your language!"

Faced with Matthew's anger, Phoebe flinched as though struck. Having no more stomach for arguing, she turned her back to them and sobbed, "I don't want to see her anymore. Please ask her to leave."

Afraid that Matthew would drive her away, Erica spoke before he could, desperate to maintain a shred of dignity. "I'm sorry that I came here without your permission. I'm leaving now!"

With that, she pried herself out of Matthew's hold, gathered up her phone and camera, and trotted away.

Matthew reached out to stop her, but the girl ran too fast.

When she was gone, a horribly uncomfortable moment passed. Phoebe stood framed before the window, miserable and still. Unable to stand the silence, Matthew said, "Phoebe, you've gone too far!"

Phoebe squeezed her red eyes shut for a long time. After finally opening them she choked, "Matthew, did you know about what sort of things Erica did on campus?"

Matthew kept silent. He hadn't known.

"My sister is one of the victims of Erica's violence," Phoebe went on. "They used to be good friends. But

later, because of a man, Erica bullied her many times! Tessie was forced to transfer to another school just to get away from her!"

Matthew's eyes narrowed. "One cannot speak and make claims like that without having any evidence to present. You should understand such a simple thing!"

Tears stained Phoebe's cheeks, but she didn't wipe them away. "I didn't want to talk about this. But I was afraid that you fell for the wrong person!"

Matthew seemed emotionless, as usual. "Who told you that I fell for Erica?"

She ignored the question. "Did you?"

The warning in Matthew's tone was obvious. "She is already my wife. If you say anything bad about her again, it means you have a problem with me!"

"Matthew," Phoebe stammered, "how can I possibly have a problem with you? Back then, I married Nathan because of your words. Now that he's dead and I've fallen out with my family because of him, my child and I can only rely on you..."

"For Nathan's sake, I will give you everything you need. On the other hand, I won't give you anything that I shouldn't give you!" The man hardly raised his voice, but he didn't need to. The chilly aura that he gave off was menacing enough.

Phoebe knew what he meant by things he shouldn't give her. She knew that this man's heart had always been far beyond her reach.

Meanwhile, Erica hadn't gone anywhere after leaving Hilton Group. She merely sat on the curb, deep in thought, ignoring the busy strangers passing up and down the street. After a while, she took out her phone and called Rhea. She didn't waste time with small talk. "Rhea, Phoebe said Tessie is still alive..."

Rhea sounded shocked. "What? How is that possible? Weren't you there when she died?"

"Yes," Erica confirmed. The doctor had told her personally that Tessie died in childbirth.

After an unpleasant pause, Rhea asked, "Have you seen Tessie?"

"Not yet... Rhea, Phoebe is really the woman my husband likes. She is even pregnant with my husband's child..." Erica trailed off, feeling desolate and empty.

She didn't know why, but she just couldn't be happy.

Rhea sounded shocked—again. "That sounds like a real roller-coaster."

"Yes! It does!" cried Erica. She hadn't expected that her relationship with Matthew would turn out to be so dramatic either.

Her thoughts wandered again, and she touched the ear studs Matthew had given her. Part of her wanted to return them to him, but another part did not.

She didn't know if it was because she liked them too much or because she just loved money, considering how expensive they were.

Rhea broke the silence. "Listen, you need to get to the bottom of this. If Tessie is still alive, you need to ask her face to face what really happened." If Tessie was still alive, it meant that they had all been deceived by her.

Rhea didn't want to believe that her good friend would treat them like this.

"That's why I'm calling you," Erica explained, coming back to herself. "Do you know the Campbell family's address?" Naturally, she had to verify Phoebe's words. She couldn't trust her so easily.

"No, sorry," Rhea replied. "You know that Tessie never dared to take her friends to the Campbell family's house."

Erica had known that, actually. Tessie was not loved in the Campbell family. They had visited Tessie in Alorith once or twice, but every time they stayed in a hotel. There had always been a distance between her and all of her relatives.

"I think Julianna knows the address," Erica said, thinking out loud. "Her home is also in Alorith."

There was a problem, though: she hadn't spoken with Julianna in a long time. They'd had a falling-out some years ago, over a hooligan that Julianna had been involved with.

CHAPTER 1188 WHERE IS SHE

Early on, Erica had been able to see that the guy Julianna was seeing was a punk. Repeatedly, Erica had tried to convince her friend to break things off with him. But Julianna hadn't listened, and after they'd had one too many arguments over it, she and Erica fell out.

Later, Tam moved back to Alorith because of his career, taking Julianna with him, and the two women hadn't seen each other since.

Still on the phone with her friend Rhea, Erica thought back on those old wounds until it twisted her stomach into a knot. Finally she said, "Forget it. I'll just ask for my brother's help!" Gifford was good at locating people, just as much as Wesley.

But Rhea suggested, "Why don't you just ask your husband for help? It will be quicker that way."

"No, Phoebe is still in his office," said Erica quickly. "I guess he is busy comforting her. I'd better not disturb them." The more she thought about it, the more wretched she felt. Here she was, stuck in a marriage that, more often than not, seemed loveless. Yet in some ways this man actually was very good to her. Not to mention, he was a source of financial stability, so Erica was reluctant to leave him.

She was a bit startled by what Rhea said next. "What nonsense! Have you forgotten you're the legal wife here? Why are you acting like you're the mistress? Stand up for yourself! You should go back to that office right now and kick Phoebe out of it. No matter how good their relationship was before, he is your husband—not hers! There's no reason at all for you to be accommodating yourself to them."

Erica winced, and her fingers tightened around her cell phone. Deep down, she thought her friend was right. But Matthew didn't even like her, let alone love her, and her feelings toward him were no warmer. Why should she go back there and make a scene over Phoebe?

"No, forget it," she declared. "I'm going to try Gifford. Besides, we haven't talked in a while. I should see if he has found a girlfriend and forgotten his little sister."

"Okay. Call me if you need anything," Rhea said.

"Okay. Bye!"

Still sitting on the curb, Erica took a few minutes to let her mood get back to normal before calling Gifford. The phone rang for almost a full minute before he finally answered. Gifford took the first word—and sure enough, it was a barb. "Matthew doesn't strike me as a stingy man. Why are you calling?"

Erica rolled her eyes. It seemed like his opinion of her hadn't changed much. "Brother, do you think I would only call you to ask for money?"

Gifford didn't miss a beat. "Yes, that's exactly what I think."

"Oh, come on! I don't need money. I'm calling for something else."

His tone softened just a tiny bit. "Well, go ahead. I'm all ears."

"Can you help me find out where Tessie's home is?" Gifford and Tessie had met several times, so Erica thought he should remember her.

"Why do you want to know?"

Erica bit her lip, then decided to just go with the truth. "Tessie's sister said that she's not dead. I want to see for myself if it's true or not."

"She's not dead?" Gifford hesitated; he sounded genuinely surprised. "Why don't you ask Matthew for

help instead? He should know more about this than I do..."

After all, Matthew was friends with Tessie's sister, Phoebe. And the way Gifford saw it, Matthew would be faster than him in investigation.

But now Erica was annoyed. This day had already turned into enough of an emotional ordeal. She wasn't happy about having to tell Rhea that her husband was with Phoebe; she didn't want her brother to know about it too. She decided to show some teeth. "Hey, Brother, why are you acting like a sissy? Will you help me or not?"

Gifford was caught off-guard by her tone. "Erica, I'll remember what you just said," he snarled. "You'd better not call me again!" Erica was definitely the first and only person who dared to call him a sissy!

"Bye!" she said sweetly, then immediately hung up. She never doubted that she'd get what she wanted; she knew how to push Gifford's buttons.

Sure enough, within a few minutes, Gifford sent her an address.

Without wasting any time, Erica called a taxi and headed to the Campbell family's house.

She didn't bother small-talking with the driver; she was too wrapped up in the unpleasant questions that haunted her. If Tessie was really alive, then why had the doctor said that she died of difficult labor? Had Tessie run away from her whole life—and from her own son, Ethan? If so, why? If she'd been in trouble, why hadn't she gone to Erica, her best friend?

It was all too much to puzzle out, and she had no answers.

Half an hour later she was there.

Erica stepped out of the taxi at the entrance of a detached villa. She double-checked the number on the mailbox with the address her brother had provided. They matched—Number 36.

A thick stone wall surrounded the property. Spying a sturdy-looking iron gate, Erica went up to it, found the buzzer, and rang it.

Presently there were footsteps, the rattling of a lock, and the gate half-opened with a creak, revealing a clean, prim figure who was obviously a maid. "Hello. What can I do for you?"

Erica had thought about what to say on the way there. "Hello. Is Mrs. Fanya home?"

"Madam is not here. Who are you?"

"I'm Tessie's friend. Is Tessie home?"

Before the maid could answer, there was the low hum of an approaching car engine, followed by the blare of a horn.

Erica turned around to see a black Benz coming to a stop behind her.

Inside, she could just barely make out the silhouettes of the driver and of a lone passenger in the back seat.

"Excuse me, miss," said the maid, pulling the gate open all the way to admit the vehicle.

Erica stepped out of the way and the car started to glide past.

To her surprise, it stopped beside her. The back window rolled down, revealing a well-dressed, middle-aged woman. Her delicate face regarded Erica with guarded dispassion. "Mrs. Hilton?"

Although Erica had never met this woman before, she recognized her at a glance—Phoebe and Tessie looked so much like her. "Hello, Mrs. Fanya. I'm Erica Leonard."

Fanya Dawson nodded slightly, and her next words were dripping with sarcasm. "There's no need to introduce yourself. Everyone in Alorith knows that you're Mrs. Hilton now."

Erica didn't take the bait; she hadn't come here for an argument. Not wanting to wait for answers, she simply blurted out the question in her heart. "Mrs. Fanya, is Tessie still alive? Where is she now?"

Fanya's reaction to this subject was remarkably similar to Phoebe's—the look on her face changed immediately. "Mrs. Hilton, are you here to make trouble just because you think your husband will back you up?"

Although she had never liked Tessie very much, the girl was still her own daughter. Having this woman show up, asking these questions, instantly kindled her anger.

"Of course not. Please understand. Back then, Tessie—" Erica stopped herself before she could say that Tessie had died in childbirth; she had promised her friend not to tell anyone about the child. Taking a breath, Erica started over. "Something happened to Tessie in Askor. Some medical complication—the doctor told me that she died because of it, so I came to find out the truth."

"Which quack dared to talk nonsense like that—spreading rumors about my family?" Fanya snarled. "Who did you hear this from? Tell me so I can sue him into oblivion!" She was a strong woman who had spent half a lifetime in the business world. It was a frightening thing when she lost her temper!

However, Erica was not intimidated. All she cared about was learning what had happened to her friend. However rich she might be, Fanya meant nothing to her.

"So is it true?" Erica pressed. "Tessie is really alive? Where is she now? Is she home? I want to see her!"

Had her life been saved? If Tessie was really alive, why hadn't she contacted her and Ethan?

To Erica's surprise, Fanya seemed to get even angrier. "Mrs. Hilton, don't you know better than anyone else why Tessie was transferred back from Askor?" If Erica weren't a member of the powerful Leonard family, and if she hadn't married into the even more powerful Hiltons, the Campbell family wouldn't have let go of her!

"I?" Erica hesitated, not sure what to say. She guessed then that Tessie had transferred to another school because she was afraid of what would happen if anyone found out she'd had a child.

"Mrs. Fanya," Erica said. "Can you give me Tessie's phone number? Or at least tell me which school she goes to?" She just wanted to see Tessie and get the truth for herself.

Fanya's face didn't soften a bit. "Why should I tell you anything? Haven't you made Tessie suffer enough?" With that, she turned to the driver. "Take me inside!"

CHAPTER 1189 YOU'VE MARRIED THE WRONG PERSON

Suddenly, the engine revved up and the car proceeded as slowly as possible, seemingly engaged on first gear. Erica immediately caught up to the car and continued pursuit. "What do you mean? Speak clearly! What did you mean by I made Tessie suffer?"

After all, Erica wasn't the one who introduced Tessie to Tam. Moreover, Erica even tried to persuade Tessie to give up waiting on a married man, but she didn't listen to her and insisted on giving birth to Ethan.

Why was she being accused of hurting Tessie?

However, Fanya's silence was clear indication of her indifference and she rolled up the car window.

Erica stopped in her tracks when she saw the car drive in through the gates of the Campbell family residence. She didn't see the point in carrying on because it was obvious that Tessie's mother didn't want to talk to her.

Instead, she took her phone out and put it close to her left ear. "Hello, Tam? Have you even tried to look for Tessie?"

Tam, who was in the middle of an important meeting, politely asked to be excused when he heard Tessie's name. He found a quiet corner and answered, "I met Tessie's mother at a dinner party. I found out from her that Tessie had transferred to Alorith University and majored in fashion design. I have a question for you! Why did you say that she was dead when I asked you the last time?"

Erica was dumbstruck by his words. Why did she say that Tessie was dead? Why? The reason why she thought Tessie was dead was that the doctor gave her the bad news in person, even though she didn't

see her body with her own eyes.

When Erica asked to go into the delivery room to see Tessie one last time, the doctor insisted that she leave at once, saying that it was the mother's dying wish that she leave that place with the baby as soon as possible.

Soon after, to honor her friend's last wish, Erica sent someone to inform the Campbell family of Tessie's death and ran away with the baby.

If Tessie had been alive, she would have chosen to take a major in fashion design at the Alorith University. It was only when she met Tam that her dreams of becoming a fashion designer had replaced her aspirations of becoming a photographer. She had planned to work at Tam's company after graduation.

Erica took a deep breath and again said, "Have you tried to contact her?"

"Yes, but I've been very busy lately. Are you going to meet her?"

"Yes!" Erica had to see Tessie with her own eyes and touch her with her own hands. More importantly, she needed to find out what exactly had happened.

Tam paused to think for a while and said, "I'm free around ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Shall we go together?"

"All right!"

After making an appointment with Tam, Erica didn't rush back to the villa. Instead, she had dinner outside as she needed some time on her own to contemplate.

As soon as she finished eating a bowl of wontons, she received a message from Matthew. "The chef has arrived at the villa. Where are you?"

Erica was reluctant to reply, but she didn't want to waste the chef's time. "I've already had dinner outside. There's no need to have the chef come by."

Matthew didn't reply to her message, and Erica didn't care. She had a lot on her mind and as far as she was concerned, a little bit of wandering around was the only remedy that could ease her tension.

At around ten o'clock in the evening, Matthew walked into the villa. He was welcomed into the living room by a deafening silence and his wife wasn't in her usual spot watching a horror movie like she always did.

Meanwhile, in the bedroom on the third floor, Erica was already in bed, playing games on her cellphone. When Matthew walked in, she didn't even move, let alone turn around to greet him, as if she had no

idea he was standing there.

He loosened his tie, walked to the bedside and looked down at the busy girl. "I have a question to ask you."

"Sure." Erica had her eyes glued to the screen of her phone.

"Did something happen between you and Phoebe in the past?"

The question took away Erica's attention from her phone, but only for a moment. "No." Indeed, they didn't have any problems with each other before she married Matthew.

However, ever since she became Matthew's wife, Erica had become Phoebe's rival in love.

"Do you have someone you like?"

"Yes!" Erica liked a lot of people. Such as her parents; her siblings and baby Ethan.

Matthew kept silent and then he muttered in a low voice, "You and Tessie fell in love with the same man? Ethan's father?"

Matthew recalled the phone call Erica made on their wedding night.

Erica once said that she wanted to marry Hyatt, but she already had a baby with another man and on top of that, she was now married to Matthew. Matthew could no longer tell which part of her story was true and which wasn't.

Erica was speechless, but she finally looked him in the eye. 'I liked Tam? The man who was old enough to be my father?' She stifled her disgust behind a fake smile. "Matthew, what are you trying to say?"

Could this be the early signs of a divorce? Did his goddess finally lose her temper in front of him?

The two of them stared at each other for a few minutes before Matthew broke the silence and spoke first. "There is no way you two are going to be together in this lifetime, so I suggest you give up on that silly dream!"

"Anything else?" She looked at him indifferently.

"Yes! Is Tessie really dead or was she forced to transfer to another school?"

Erica, who had been calm this whole time, couldn't keep her cool after hearing this. She threw her phone aside, stood on the bed and looked down at the man with a burning rage. "Do you have a problem with me? I want to know the truth more than you do! Why does everyone imply that I hurt Tessie?"

Matthew raised his head and said, "Sit down first!"

"No! Why do I have to listen to you? I'm sorry, Matthew, if you want a wife who'll sit and stand on your word, then you've married the wrong person! Go and find your goddess! She's obedient, gentle and considerate! I can't compare with her. I'll be like this all my life and I don't intend to change myself for another man!"

Matthew pressed his lips in a grim line, meeting Erica's cold green eyes. "Did I say that you hurt Tessie?"

"Isn't that what you mean? I thought she was dead! Dead! The doctor told me that she was dead! Who knew she would come back to life later! Besides, even if she had died, it would have been for labor. Why should I be the one to blame? What does it have to do with me?"

'Died of labor?' These words caught Matthew's attention. "So, who on earth is Ethan's biological mother?"

"Te—I... I mean, Ethan is my baby!" Erica had almost blurted out the truth. She was so frightened that her anger was almost gone and she knelt down on the bed as her legs felt weak.

Erica felt that it would be better not to tell Matthew about Ethan's identity before she found out the whole story from Tessie in person.

However, little did she know that the unfinished word "Te" she had just mistakenly uttered, confirmed all of Matthew's doubts about Tessie being Ethan's actual biological mother.

"You should go to bed early." He walked towards the closet.

"Wait!" Erica stopped him.

He turned around and looked at her with an expectant expression.

"What did Phoebe say to you? I don't need to hear about the sweet words or how you were making out in the office. I'm asking about what she said about me!"

Matthew frowned at her words. 'What the hell is she talking about?' "There were no sweet words, nor was there any making out. But she did say something about you."

Although the two women didn't seem to get along well with each other, it was not the reason for him to lie to Erica. What Phoebe said to him about Erica forced him to ask the girl, "What do you think of campus violence?"

'Campus violence? So Phoebe told Matthew that I was a hot-headed person in campus?' Erica thought for a while and said, "You mean in primary school? Junior middle school? Or in university?"

"All," he said curtly.

"When I was in primary school, I punched a boy in the face. When I was in junior middle school, I asked a boy in the other classroom to run around the playground and shout, 'I won't wet the bed anymore.' When I was in senior high school, I locked a girl in the bathroom. When I was in university, I took a video of a girl and a boy making out in the car, and uploaded it on the Internet after having it pixelated. Is that enough?" Erica had a lot more stories to share if he was willing to hear them.

Matthew's lips twitched. After all, his wife had such an illustrious life! "Is Tessie in one of these stories?" he asked.

CHAPTER 1190 I'M THE HOSTESS

Matthew's absurd question made Erica want to laugh, but she didn't quite manage it. "Of course not," she said. "Tessie is my good friend. How could I do anything to bully her?"

Her husband studied her carefully. "Didn't you two fall in love with the same man?"

"Who gave you that idea? Well, let me tell you something. Tessie has good taste in many things—sometimes better than mine. But when it comes to taste in men, hers is really not as good as mine!" Erica said proudly.

Matthew arched an eyebrow. "Oh? Now, why is that?"

The girl was immersed in complacency as she explained, "She likes a man who is in his forties. But my husband is rich, handsome and powerful. And most important of all he is still young! Now, don't you think I have better taste than her?" She left off with a satisfied wink.

Her playfulness had a way of reducing the tension in the room. Matthew nodded in agreement, but there was something else that he couldn't help but say. "You know, I seem to recall you marrying me because of your father's taste, rather than your own. Not to mention that you lied to me, saying that you were pregnant again, all in the hopes of getting out of marrying me. Does my memory serve me right?"

Erica's chuckle was ruthless, and her answer was the same. "If I could turn back time, I still wouldn't want to marry you." After all, who would be stupid enough to willingly marry a man who didn't like her and who she didn't like?

Truth be told, though, she had never regretted marrying Matthew except when she was angry.

Matthew's smile fled in an instant. Despite himself, he was a bit hurt by her words. His wife really could be heartless sometimes.

Unwilling to continue the conversation, he disappeared back into the closet.

Some minutes later he emerged, now in his pajamas. It was only then that Erica thought she understood the point of their conversation. "Did Phoebe tell you that I bullied Tessie back in school?" she asked at length.

Matthew didn't answer her.

In her eyes, his silence was an admission. "So, you believe it's true?"

"Not yet." He wouldn't turn against his own wife just because of Phoebe's words. Phoebe didn't have that much influence on him.

"What do you mean by 'not yet'?" Erica asked, her heart beginning to sink.

"Because she's given me no evidence except for her word."

The girl continued, "So if she shows you some evidence, then you'll believe her?"

Matthew answered with a question of his own. "If there is solid evidence of something, shouldn't I believe it?"

Erica was speechless at first. He was right, of course. She didn't believe a person's word was enough to prove a case; nobody did.

"Well, you're going to be disappointed," she told him. "Phoebe can spend her life scouring the campus, and she'll never find evidence of any violence, let alone anything bad to do with me. Besides, I'm telling you the truth. I have never bullied Tessie. Phoebe was just jealous that I've become your wife, so she wanted to drive a wedge between us. So next time you see her, remember to tell her that if she has a problem with me, she can just come straight to me; she doesn't need to go tattling to you. Tell her to be brave, not a coward!"

'Humph!' Erica snorted in her mind. Even the mere mention of Phoebe could bring out her rebellious side like nothing else.

Her mind was made up that they would be enemies in the future! But to be exact, they were rivals in love!

'Matthew, you can just wait and see how I trample on this meddler,' thought Erica.

She had no doubt that Phoebe also wanted to marry Matthew and to have him to herself. But Erica wouldn't let that woman's wish come true; she was Mrs. Hilton, and she would not let that status go for anything.

Matthew gracefully rolled up his sleeves, revealing one of his arms, the blue veins on which were partly

visible. "She indeed is not a brave woman," he remarked casually.

He meant it literally, but he didn't realize that Erica had a different way of thinking from normal people. She misunderstood him, thinking that he was saying that to protect Phoebe.

To be precise, she thought his meaning was, 'Phoebe is a weak woman that needs to be protected, so you don't have to go fight her.'

Erica spoke through gritted teeth. "Don't forget to bring her over for dinner sometime."

"What?" Matthew was very confused by this. Didn't she dislike Phoebe? Why did she want her to come to the house at all, let alone for dinner?

Erica saw no reason to hide her thoughts. "I want to make sure she knows that I'm your wife, and this is my house, not hers. I'm the hostess of this villa!"

'Well, that's a good idea!' Matthew thought happily.

As a matter of fact, though, Erica had only said those words in a fit of anger. She didn't think that Matthew would actually bring his goddess home to see her get hurt.

But this time, she was wrong.

Meanwhile, in Askor

Wesley finished his last bite of dinner and turned to Blair, who was feeding Ethan. "If everything goes well," he said, "your son will come back tonight."

"Why would he do that?" Blair replied with a frown. "He still doesn't have a girlfriend. I don't want to see him! You should call him and tell him not to come back unless he has a girl to bring home!"

Wesley was thoughtful. "I thought you just recently set him up for a blind date. Did that not work out?"

"No, it didn't work out. He refused even to go see the girl; every time I find someone for him, he resists. If he ever stops being so stubborn and agrees, or else finds a girl on his own, then he can come back for a visit." This was a battle that Blair had been fighting for a long time. She was more determined than ever to find a girlfriend for Gifford.

With a helpless shake of his head, Wesley turned to the girl across the table, who was eating silently.

"How was everything at school today, Chantel?"

Chantel swallowed, wiped her mouth, and replied with a smile, "Everything's good. I'm doing well in my classes, and the teachers take good care of me. Thank you for your concern, Uncle Wesley and Aunt Blair."

It had been a while since Chantel was brought to the Leonard family's house. The girl was diligent, lively, and obedient, and Blair liked her quite a bit. So she had talked with Wesley about sending her to a college. Wesley, of course, would go along with just about anything Blair wanted.

With that settled, they had asked what kind of major Chantel wanted to study. Tentatively, the Leonard couple had planned to have her learn language, just like Blair.

The girl had agreed when they suggested that major, but Wesley was able to sense that she wasn't really interested in it. No doubt she'd just been unwilling to disappoint them.

So he had asked her what she really wanted to learn.

After hesitating for a long moment, Chantel had said, "I want to learn acting." She wanted to be an actress! Indeed, this had been her biggest dream. As she saw it, she had to seize the opportunity, now that it was before her.

After discussing it among themselves, Blair and Wesley had pulled some strings and sent Chantel to the Department of Performance of the School of Drama in Askor.

Chantel had never been to a university before, so obviously she had started out as a freshman there.

"That's good," Blair said. "If you need anything at school, just tell me. Don't be shy."

"I will, Aunt Blair. Thank you both," the girl said pleasantly. With that, she lowered her head and went back to eating, hoping they wouldn't notice her eyes watering. She had only been in the Leonard family house for a few days, but Uncle Wesley and Aunt Blair had shown her so much kindness. She really didn't know how to repay them.

After dinner, Chantel stood up and was about to clean up the table, but Blair stopped her. "Don't you have to practice dancing? We have maids here. You don't have to worry about the housework. Just attend to your studies."

Chantel had started slower than others, so she needed to work harder in order to catch up with her classmates. Taking Blair's point, she didn't insist on cleaning the table or the dishes. She touched Ethan's tender face, said goodbye to the two elders, and went back to her room.