

TMBA 1211

CHAPTER 1211 I DON'T LIKE FLATTERY

Hands trembling, Erica answered after a while, "No time. I need to find Tessie and Julianna." She believed she was innocent and she didn't need to be afraid of what the public thought about her. She knew the malicious rumors going viral online were fake.

But she had underestimated the power of a mob mentality!

Matthew insisted, "If you show your face in Alorith University now, you could be in danger!" Many media outlets had bought this story and reposted it. It went viral on the Internet. So, most people would know about it by now.

If Erica showed up on the steps of Alorith University, she'd be mobbed by angry people who might try to take matters in their own hands.

"But I..."

"Come to my office now. Don't rush off to find Tessie," said Matthew, trying to persuade her patiently. He had to make sure she was safe.

Since he insisted, Erica had to agree first. "Okay."

The driver chauffeured her to Hilton Group. Matthew was waiting for her in his office.

Seeing her come in, he got straight to the point. "Neville just called me."

Erica was stymied for a moment, and then remembered he was the boss of Champion Group. "Oh, why? Did he ask you to cut him a check? It's cool. I did smash the things in his operations department."

"No. That's not why he called me."

"What? Then what did he say to you?" 'Didn't Neville talk to Matthew about the bill?' she wondered.

Matthew fixed his eyes on her face and said, "Neville said you are interesting. He also asked if you have a sister. You apparently made a good impression."

Erica was thrown for a loop. 'What's wrong with Neville? He really wants a girl like me to be his daughter-in-law? Doesn't he have enough drama in his life?'

"What did you say to him?" Erica bent over his desk, playing with a pen.

"I told him a girl like my wife wouldn't be a good fit for his son."

Matthew didn't expect Erica to be so capable of winning people's hearts. Neville only met her once, but he was already fond of the girl and wanted her to be his daughter-in-law.

"His son?" Erica thought carefully about Watkins' handsome face in her mind, and said, "He's indeed very handsome. I think I will like—"

Before she could finish her sentence, Matthew interrupted, "Think it over before you say anything." His cold voice was full of warning.

Looking at his gloomy eyes, Erica realized that he was right to be annoyed—she shouldn't enjoy talking about another man around her husband. "Ha-ha, it was just a joke."

She put down the pen in her hand, slowly walked up to the man standing in front of the window, and naturally wrapped her arms around his waist. "I have such a handsome husband; why would I be looking at other guys? Ridiculous, don't you think? Matthew?"

The man's anger had vanished when she hugged him, not to mention that she called him Matthew in such a sweet tone.

He reached out his hand, pinched her face, making her mouth an O shape, and scolded coldly, "Be honest with me. I don't like flattery!"

Erica protested and pried his fingers off her face. "Jeez, you don't have to be such a bully! You can't take a compliment?" She rubbed her jaw where he grabbed her.

Speaking of bullying, Matthew had to get back to the point. "Whatever. Don't worry about the news on the Internet. I'll take care of it."

"It doesn't matter. I won't cop to something I didn't do." She was quite strong-willed and determined. She wouldn't back down easily.

Taking a deep look at the slender girl in his arms, Matthew tightened his grip and said, "Okay."

Erica closed her eyes and took in the man's scent. "How do you know I wasn't the bully, though? They caught it on video. Looks like Phoebe was telling the truth. Why go to bat for me? Why not just throw me to the wolves?"

"You think I'm blind?"

"What?"

"I saw it with my own eyes, that..." "...she hit you." Matthew couldn't finish his sentence. He was overcome with pain when he thought of it.

And she thought it was sweet. He did care about her—a lot. But she kind of wanted to deal with this herself. Get revenge her way.

"You saw some of it, but not all. What if she was just fighting back? What if I attacked her first, and she was just defending herself?" she asked.

Matthew felt that she was testing his intelligence. "More than ten people just stood by and watched that girl hit you. They knocked Hyatt down and wouldn't let him up. If you were the bully, how could that happen? I know what I saw!"

Erica grinned. Matthew was indeed smart. "Thanks for the vote of confidence. But don't worry. It didn't hurt that much. I did force her head under a faucet, and slapped her. A lot." She wore a smug smile at that point. "Standing in the rain getting soaked bugged me, and she seized the chance to smack me around a bit."

She didn't like getting wet. And her own experience of having her head shoved in the sink, plus the heavy rain, really put her out of sorts. She wasn't at 100 percent then. Under normal circumstances, she would have never let Lenora get the upper hand. But more than 10 on one? There was no way she was going to win with odds like that.

Matthew looked at the grinning girl and sighed silently. What did she want? A medal for being frank?

Erica suddenly thought of a very serious problem. She looked up at the man and said, "You knew Ethan's not my kid long ago, right?"

Matthew already looked into that, and it was in the files he left for her to read. Tessie and Tam were the real parents. Despite the fact that he found the baby wasn't hers, he never said a word about it.

Judging from his calm demeanor, Erica guessed that he knew, even before he investigated.

He smiled mischievously and nodded.

Sure enough! "I figured. When did you know?" Erica felt distressed. This man had already known Ethan was not her child, and she still pretended like he was. She felt like such an idiot.

"Remember what I told you in the kitchen the other day? I said I knew a secret."

"I remember... And that's the secret you were talking about?"

The smile in his eyes became more and more obvious. "Yes!"

Erica pouted her lips. She even tried her best to cover it up, too. But it turned out he knew everything, all this time. And just let her dig herself deeper and deeper. What a jerk!

"But how did you find out? Why were you so sure?"

Matthew answered all her questions patiently. "You told me I was the first guy you kissed—that's when I started wondering. Then, when your mom wanted to get you vaccinated, you told her you had a C-section and didn't need the vaccine. But I've touched your belly. There's no scar."

Anger began to rise in the girl's eyes. Matthew held her hand and continued, "The next day, your dad took your ultrasound report to the hospital so he could find out for himself. And you can guess the rest."

He didn't need to keep talking. Now she knew perfectly well what happened.

In a gloomy mood, she withdrew her hand and pounded on his shoulder. "So you worked with my parents to cheat me, and then you didn't tell me you knew what was going on. So, what? Were you ever going to tell me? Or were you just sitting back, laughing at my attempts to be a parent?" 'He's about as bad as Mom and Dad! They must be related!' she thought angrily.

Matthew knew that the girl would be angry, so he held her in his arms and comforted her. "We just wanted to know if Ethan was really your kid. We didn't pry into anything else. Like this thing between you and Tessie. I didn't touch that till you asked me."

"Humph! Who knows! Maybe you already knew Tessie was lying to me, but you wouldn't tell me. You just pretended to investigate when I asked and just now let me know what you found out!" She knew better now. She'd never believe Wesley, Blair and Matthew ever again!

Matthew kissed her forehead and said, "No. I didn't know anything about Tessie and Tam until today."

He felt bad for Erica. She'd shouldered a huge burden for her friend, and all her friend did was lie about her. Some friend!

CHAPTER 1212 GIVE ME AN EXACT TIME

"I'll believe you for the time being!"

Erica said, before she was interrupted by a phone call from Wesley.

Erica was mad with rage and she answered Wesley's call with furious intensity. "Dad! Tell me the truth! Am I nothing but a pair of stinky socks to you?"

Wesley was dumbstruck, his mind twirling with all kinds of questions. "What's going on?" The concerned father was just calling to ask his daughter about the violence on campus. However, before he could even open his mouth, he was greeted by the wrath of his daughter.

Erica glared at the man who was holding her in his arms and yelled into the phone, "Have you been conspiring with Matthew behind my back? You had someone investigate me and Ethan? How could you do that to me?"

Needless to say, Erica was not at all happy about what was going on all this time. Wesley refuted with confidence, "You lied to all of us! You have some nerve putting blame on me! I'd think twice before mouthing off like that if I were you!"

Wesley got her there. If the anger in Erica's heart had been an inflated balloon, the moment she heard this, whatever air that was inside the balloon was now deflated.

Erica had her reasons for lying to her parents, but unfortunately, she couldn't have told them about her reasons back then. "Then let me ask you, if I had told you that Ethan wasn't my child, would you have forced me to marry Matthew?"

"No!" If Erica hadn't lied to her parents about being pregnant at that time, Wesley wouldn't have forced her to get married at all, even if it was to Matthew.

However, Wesley hesitated as he started to have second thoughts. After all, Matthew turned out to be such a caring husband to Rika.

There was a twinge of regret inside Erica's heart. If she had told them the truth back then, her parents wouldn't have forced her into marrying Matthew. How could she have been so stupid?

"Trust me, if I had known any better, I would have told you the truth—Ouch, Matthew, that hurts!" Matthew squeezed Erica's arm tightly.

Wesley was confused for a moment, and then chuckled. "Are you with Matthew?"

"Well, I was going to ask Tessie about what had really happened back then, but Matthew insisted that I come to his office to see him first." Erica pursed her lips disapprovingly.

"He did it for your own good. He is protecting you. You have no idea what those rumors about you inciting campus violence could do to your future! Can you imagine what kind of hostility you will receive if you confront Tessie now?"

Erica pouted pensively and saw reason in Wesley's words.

"What are those photos online? What happened?"

Erica frowned and answered, "I was set up by Julianna. They baited me to attack them, and then maliciously edited and uploaded my photos on the Internet. That's it. In fact, they hit me first!"

Wesley could feel her pain. "You need to be more careful. It's not going to be easy to be Mrs. Hilton. You can't always be so naive. Don't trust anyone that isn't your family. No matter what happens, your family will always be there for you, understand?"

"Yes, I know." Erica nodded obediently. With her head leaning against Matthew's chest, she looked down at her shoes.

"Okay, put Matthew on the phone."

Erica handed the phone to Matthew. "My father wants to talk to you."

Matthew put one arm around her waist and took the phone with the other. "Dad, it's me!"

"What are you going to do about the rumors of the campus violence?"

"You and Mom don't need to worry about it. I already had someone working on it. Rika's name will be cleared in no time."

Erica raised her head and noticed Matthew's Adam's apple bob up and down as he spoke. Something about the way it moved looked very attractive to her.

Out of curiosity, she pressed it gently with two fingers.

Matthew grabbed her hand at once.

Wesley asked Matthew another question on the other end of the line, to which he answered, "Track the IP address."

Erica pressed his Adam's apple again. Somehow, it was round, bulging and interesting to her.

A minute later, Matthew hung up. "Bye."

Erica immediately withdrew her hand and whipped her head around, pretending as though nothing had happened.

Matthew put her phone back into her coat pocket, pulled her into his arms and kissed her red lips.

He was so fast with his movement, Erica couldn't even resist.

He grabbed her by the waist and swapped spots with her, pressing her against the French window.

Erica had Matthew wrapped between her legs and she put her arms around his shoulders to keep herself from falling down.

When Matthew finally let go of her, Erica gasped for air. The man was so bossy even his kiss was aggressive. It was as if her concerns never mattered to him at all.

Matthew leaned in, so his forehead rested against hers. Rubbing her lips with his thumb, he said, "Rika,

you still owe me a wedding night. When will you make it up to me?"

'I owe him what?' She protested in a low voice, "You're the one who ran away, not me."

"You mean you wouldn't refuse me if I hadn't run away?" he asked.

Erica giggled mischievously. The answer was—no! They were merely strangers sharing the same bed, at the time. There was no way Erica would have given herself to him.

Looking at her eagerly, Matthew said, "I can't wait any longer. Give me an exact time. If you make me wait for a long time, I'll have sex with you now!"

"No, that's not a good idea. You've told me that your office is a very serious place. How can you use it to have sex?" Erica played his own words right back at him.

Matthew kissed her again. Erica's lips were like drops of cold water in a desert. One kiss and he could no longer stop himself from wanting more.

However, in a calm voice the man said, "That was all in the past. I've changed my mind already. Why don't we give it a try now?"

'Here?' Erica looked behind her back with hesitation. They were on the 66th floor and all the walls were made of glass. "No way! Listen to me..." Erica paused for a moment to think. Matthew had been nothing less than a caring husband to her. From what she could gather, he no longer had feelings for Phoebe and on top of that, he even helped Erica fight back against that woman.

As for the baby in Phoebe's belly...Since Erica didn't have a problem giving Ethan, who wasn't her biological son, a home, she wouldn't hesitate to do the same for Matthew's son, as long as he promised to distance himself from Phoebe.

'Yes!' It sounded like a good idea in Erica's head.

"Will you break up with Phoebe after she gives birth to the baby? Of course, I won't object to her seeing the child, but I object to her seeing you."

Without hesitation, Matthew answered, "Of course! I don't want to have anything to do with her." All Matthew ever cared about was the baby Phoebe was carrying in her womb. After all, that baby was Nathan's only son.

Matthew had long lost his patience with Phoebe after she kept provoking Erica repeatedly. If not for the baby, Matthew would never want to see Phoebe again.

Erica smiled happily, but then the smile on her face froze for a moment. "Would it be the right thing to do? Isn't it a bit harsh, if you think about it? After all, I took away her man and now I'm taking away her

child too. That can't be right."

"It is the right thing to do!" The man interrupted her firmly. "Remember, I'm not Phoebe's man. I'm your man. There's nothing wrong with you doing this!"

"Yes, you are right. But what about that child? Let's not separate a mother from her child. Why don't we just let her keep the baby?"

CHAPTER 1213 A MAN I DIDN'T LOVE

"Let's talk about that later. Right now, answer me this! When are we going to become a real married couple?" Matthew was not satisfied with the girl's nonsense. If she continued to act like this, he would really just sleep with her right then and there!

"I heard from someone that you are a scheming Scorpio." That someone was Matthew's own sister, Terilynn.

As far as Erica knew, Scorpio men were usually cold and powerful, arrogant and indifferent; the description was exactly in line with Matthew's personality. He was a typical Scorpio!

"I don't know much about what these signs mean, but my birthday is on November 20th. So, I guess that makes me a Scorpio."

He also knew that Erica's birthday was on August 10th. She was a Leo, and was indeed an outgoing and energetic Leo girl.

Erica calculated with her fingers. His birthday was only a few days away, about half a month or so. She blinked and finally answered his most concerned question. "How about we wait until your birthday?"

Matthew was very satisfied with that date. With a deep smile in his eyes, he said, "Alright then. Stay out of trouble till that day comes!"

"I know!" Half a month should be enough for her to make some mental preparation. If she was still afraid of having sex with him, she could sneak back to Askor.

"I have no choice but to believe you for the time being," Matthew said with a smirk.

"Hey! You know what... I read a book about the 12 zodiac signs. It said that a Scorpio man and a Leo woman don't match well. What do we do?" Erica tilted her head and frowned.

The man's eyes darkened slightly and his tone became domineering. "What is that? I don't believe crap written in a book by some lunatic! I'm the master of my own fate. It's not up to a book of zodiac signs to decide whether we make a good match or not. I will decide that! If I say we make a good match, then we do."

Erica laughed. "Don't you believe in the theories of the 12 zodiac signs?"

"I don't."

If the zodiac book had said that they would make a good pair, he would have believed it.

But since it said the opposite, he had no reason to believe a word of it!

Erica chuckled and kissed him on the cheek gently. "So, you think we match?"

"I'm a hundred percent sure that we are a perfect match. I'm very lucky to have found you!" Matthew smiled.

'Wait a second. Why do I feel like I've heard that somewhere?' Erica tried to recollect.

Then, she remembered. "Did Neville tell you that?" she asked, raising her brow in question. At that time, in Champion Group, she had told Neville that Matthew had said that they were lucky to have found each other. It was a lie; Matthew had never said something like that.

Matthew said, "No. I just said what was on my mind."

Erica rolled her eyes. 'Does he take me for an idiot?'

Matthew kissed her lips again and put her down. "Now, tell me what they did to you yesterday." Only after fully knowing what they had done to Erica could he plan on how to deal with them.

The people who had hurt Erica were in for some pain, and they were about to go through hell, suffering ten times more than what Erica had to endure.

It was upsetting for her to think that she had been slapped in her face. She felt embarrassed to speak about it. Finally, after some hesitation, she whispered, "I was slapped in the face by that girl..."

As Matthew ran his fingers across her smooth face, his eyes flashed with malice.

He was going to punish each one of them. Julianna, Tessie and the woman who had slapped Erica!

They were going to pay for messing with his wife. After this, no one would dare touch her or even think of hurting her ever again.

Erica didn't know about this, but Matthew had silently handled many of the WeChat and Weibo accounts that had spread the news. He always warned them first before wiping them out.

And if he could solve a problem using money, he wouldn't hesitate to do that either.

If money couldn't solve it, he had other ways to handle them. When the account holders thought that their lives were in danger, they spilled the truth about the source of the video.

And just like that, the rumor about Erica's campus violence was quickly solved. Not only did Matthew take down all the edited videos and fake news on the Internet, he also posted the full original video of what had happened that day on Hilton Group's official Weibo account. More than fifty million fans of the account instantly forwarded it in a crazy frenzy.

Hilton Group also ended up on the top search list.

The original video showed Erica being besieged by twelve people in the beginning. Two girls dragged Erica to the sink and tried to drown her in the cold water. She struggled and broke free. To defend herself, Erica drenched the other girl under the faucet instead. The truth was out for everyone to see now.

The video continued to show some of the girl's companions trying to undress her, while the others took pictures of her. Obviously, it was all an act. Later, the girl in lead slapped Erica. That was when Erica fought back and slapped the other girl five times!

After the whole video was unleashed, the netizens changed their attitude towards Erica. They were now proud of her and were glad that she had fought back against those bullies. They thought of Erica as a badass character now.

Most of the people who had earlier lashed at her in the comment zone of her Weibo account apologized for their incorrect judgment.

At the entrance of Alorith University

"Tessie!" After waiting for a long time, Erica finally saw Tessie walk into the campus.

Tessie tried to dodge Erica, but the latter followed her in.

The students near the entrance saw Erica and whispered among themselves. "Isn't that Erica? She's the violent girl who bullied and slapped someone in the campus, right?"

"Violent girl? Haven't you read the latest news on the Internet yet? The official account of Hilton Group posted the full video. Erica was forced to do that. It was the other party who had started the violence!"

"Really? Show me the video!"

"Here, look. See how she was bullied by those girls. Erica fought back by slapping that girl five times! She's so cool. I'm her fan now!"

Erica heard their discussion, but didn't pay much attention to them.

At that moment, the only person she was interested in was Tessie.

And Tessie knew that she couldn't escape from Erica anymore; she had to face her.

They got into Matthew's car. He was waiting for Erica in the driver's seat.

The two girls sat in the back seat. Tessie saw Matthew in the front seat and she was frightened by his cold aura. Her hands trembled involuntarily.

She took a deep breath and apologized, "I'm sorry, Erica. I know you are mad at me, but I had no choice..."

She was still trying to take advantage of Erica's tender heart and her kindness. She pretended to be apologetic so that Erica would forgive her.

"Don't tell me you had no choice! Tessie, is our friendship so cheap to you?" Erica looked at the woman, her eyes filled with loss.

Tessie started to cry and explained to her, "No, it's not like that, Erica. I didn't want to use you, but nobody would have believed me if I had put the blame on someone else!" Erica was known as Miss Troublemaker. She was so arrogant and lawless, and anyone would believe that it was normal for her to do something violent in campus.

It turned out that Tessie's lie did work at the beginning. Everyone in the Campbell family, and even Julianna believed her version of the story.

Erica sneered, "Wow. I didn't know that my reputation was so bad. Tessie, I took the blame for you. My reputation is ruined because of you. I lied to my parents; I told them that I gave birth to Ethan, so that they would treat your son as their own grandson. My mother slapped me when I told them this..." Erica choked. Her eyes brimmed with tears.

She had thought about telling the truth to her family because Wesley had always been a man of integrity. She was afraid that her father would be completely disappointed in her. But she also knew that he would never let her name be dragged through the dirt. But either way, she had imagined that her mother would be supportive. To her surprise, Blair had been the first one to slap her in the face.

It was because of that slap that she had stubbornly refused to explain the situation to her parents at that time. She had been misunderstood until this day.

The girls cried in the back seat. Erica didn't know if Tessie really regretted her actions. But whatever her case, her crying didn't arouse any sympathy from Erica.

"I had to go through so much trouble because of you. My father made me marry a man I didn't love. I am not even 22 yet!" She was still like a minor, living under the protection of her parents. But she had to get married so early because of the baby.

Fortunately, she got married to Matthew. He had always been nice to her and she felt very lucky.

She didn't regret it now. Her father had chosen the best man for her.

'A man I didn't love...' Matthew's grip tightened on the phone as he repeated her words in his mind. He had to adjust his mood to continue with his work.

CHAPTER 1214 TOO CRUEL

"You and Tam have just gone back to normal. Like none of this affects you. You know better than anyone what I went through during your pregnancy. I gave up my cushy life at home and holed us up in a basement taking care of you. Everything I did was for you. And how did you repay me? Instead of thanking me, you framed me! Tessie, you..."

Erica cried so hard that she couldn't get the rest of it out. Matthew always said she was stupid. She was beginning to think he was right. She was more than stupid!

Tessie also cried. "I'm sorry...I'm sorry..." Before Erica uncovered the truth, Tessie was living worry-free for a few months. She thought things would go back to normal; that she wouldn't have to worry about her parents or a baby.

What Tessie didn't count on was Erica marrying Matthew, the most powerful man in the city. That man had vast resources at his command. She had nowhere to hide.

In the driver's seat, Matthew took out two pieces of tissue and handed them to Erica. He coldly warned his wife, "I asked you to talk to her, not sit here and cry. Cut it out, or I'll hand over her to some thugs now and then send her to the slum!"

'Wow...'

Erica and Matthew had discussed this before Tessie came out to the car. She remembered some of the things Matthew suggested doing to punish the girl.

More than ten minutes ago

With a distressed look at the man who came with her to look for Tessie, Erica asked, "Tessie needs to pay for what she did, but I can't think of anything." That was what bothered her the most. She wanted a punishment that fit the crime.

Matthew turned off the engine. "Simple," he said. "First, she needs to admit what she did. Then she needs to explain how she framed you. After that, she should apologize to you in public. Wasn't she

afraid her family would find out what she did? You have to let the Campbell family know what happened, and make them apologize too. And don't stop there. Didn't she accuse you of bullying her? So do it. And finally, we drive her out of the city. She wanted to stay here, right? Didn't want her parents to yank her out of school? Well, she gave up that right when she messed with you. Ask nicely, and I'll ship her out of the country. To the deserted area of Deplua, perhaps." 'She can join Lenora. An appropriate punishment, ' he thought.

"The deserted area? Won't they starve to death?" Erica asked.

"Not really. There's grasshoppers, crickets, ants, termites, stinkbugs. Even scorpions. Those guys might be a pain, but if you remove the stinger they roast nicely. Why are you so shocked? Didn't you want that?"

Erica shivered at his suggestion. She mentioned making Lenora eat worms earlier. But she was so angry she just blurted it out. "I didn't really mean it."

But he was right about one thing. She never wanted to see Tessie again. So exile was just the ticket.

"You could send her to the slum in Deplua," he said.

"What? Isn't that too cruel?" There was an infamous slum located where the borders of three different countries converged. It was a lawless place, and the stink of garbage and offal was overwhelming.

It was a place that decent folk avoided. So did the police. Any money to be found there was stolen.

"We've been over this, Rika—the weaker branch breaks first. If you don't drive her away, she'll only hurt you again! I'm sure of it. If you really can't do it yourself, then leave her to me. I've been pretty busy lately. I might have to leave her with some thugs, so they can do the job for me. I can't be held responsible for what happens after that."

Matthew thought he had been kind enough. He told Erica what he did to force her to come to a decision.

If Erica didn't handle Tessie herself, then Matthew would deal with it. Tessie might end up hurt or worse. If that happened, exile would look like a walk in the park by comparison.

'Thugs? Can't be held responsible?' Images flashed through Erica's mind, making her shudder again. She said, "No, no. Let me think about it! I need some time." Matthew's way was too cruel for her.

Now, Erica came back to her senses and sobbed.

'He is such a jerk. I'm crying because I'm sad. Why can't I cry a bit?'

Tessie's face turned pale when she heard that they were going to send her to the slum. She grabbed

Erica's clothes tightly and begged sadly, "Erica, I was wrong. Really, really wrong. Don't send me to the slum! Please! Please! For the love of god!"

Erica took a deep breath and forced back her tears. Tessie wasn't worth crying over. "I need you to tell the reporters who Ethan is. And anyone who asks you."

There was obvious hesitation in Tessie's eyes, but only for a moment, and she quickly agreed, "Okay, I'll do it. I'll say whatever you want. Please don't let Mr. Matthew send me to the slum. Please!"

Before Erica could change her mind, Matthew reminded her coldly, "Erica, don't forget what I said."

Matthew told her again and again that if she didn't deal with Tessie, she would definitely continue to hurt her.

"Make the statement first. Now," Erica demanded.

"Okay, how do we do that?" As long as they didn't send her to the slum, she would do anything.

But before she got an answer, Matthew suddenly started the car and slowly drove them down the road.

Tessie's eyes widened in horror. She held her breath and looked at Erica. "Where are you taking me?"

Erica glanced at her coldly. "Don't worry. Even if I wanted to send you to the slum, that won't happen right now. There's something more important we have to do."

"Where are we going?"

"You'll know when we get there."

Twenty minutes later, the car stopped at the gate to the Campbell family's house.

When Tessie saw her family home, she was too scared to say another word. Her lips trembled violently and her hands were chilled.

Inside the house, the living room was quite busy. There were quite a few people milling about inside. There were two girls in the center of this group, knocked to the floor, their faces swollen. It was obvious they had been beaten.

The people surrounding the two girls were from three different groups: the Campbell family, the Watts family and the bodyguards brought by Owen.

As soon as the three walked in the door, the people in the living room all made way for Matthew and greeted him warmly.

Matthew took Erica's hand and led her straight to the sofa. He sat down next to this wife. Then his cold eyes fell on the two girls in the living room.

When Erica was seated comfortably, she looked at the two women on the floor. It was Julianna and Lenora! What were they doing here? And what was it wrong with their faces?

She was also shocked to see Tam and his wife, Yanny, there.

When he saw Tessie, Lyman Campbell walked up to his youngest daughter and slapped her. "Look what you did! How could you? You slept with your friend's father? What the hell? You're an embarrassment to our family!" And he had every right to say this. He was the head of the family.

Lyman hit Tessie so hard she fell to the floor.

However, no one cared about her.

Even though her lips were bleeding, no one spared a second glance.

Since Tam had decided to go back to his wife, he no longer had any interest in Tessie.

Julianna, whose face had been beaten black and blue, glared at Tessie. She stared at the girl writhing on the floor and said, "Tessie, you're such a bitch! I thought you were my friend! I did everything for you! And then you go and fuck my father!" She spat the f-word as if it were something foul she were spitting from her mouth.

Erica had made a scene at Champion Group. So, Julianna and Yanny also knew that Tam and Tessie were having an affair. It was no secret after that.

Tessie, crying wet hot tears, said nothing. She just covered her burning cheek and cried silently.

The living room went dead silent. Julianna was furious. And then she started yelling at Erica, as well. "And you, Erica. You were Tessie's best friend and turned on her. You deserved to have her screw you over!"

A hint of malice flashed in Matthew's eyes. 'Julianna? Good! I remember you.'

Erica sneered, "Come on, Julianna. We used to be friends! What happened to you?" It was just that their friendship had ended when Erica stopped Julianna from dating a bad boy.

Later, Erica heard that guy got Julianna pregnant. When the thug found out she was pregnant, he tried to make her get an abortion, and she refused. So, when she was three months along, he beat her badly. She miscarried, and the two broke up.

"You—" Julianna choked on her words.

Matthew turned his head to look at Lyman. The old man stared at Tessie with an angry face, as if looking at an enemy.

CHAPTER 1215 LEAVING ALORITH

Fanya, far from her usual calm self, was fidgeting restlessly in her seat.

Their youngest daughter had offended Matthew. Now that the truth was out, Lyman and Fanya wished they had never had this daughter.

"Mr. Lyman," Matthew called out abruptly.

Lyman held his breath. He was clearly scared out of his wits. "Yes, Mr. Matthew?"

The young man asked with a murderous chill in his voice, "What do you think I should do to your daughter?"

"Well, since Tessie is guilty, you have every right to deal with her as you see fit. I won't get in your way, Mr. Matthew." Lyman cared only about saving his own neck. The disgraced man was mainly worried about whether Tessie's actions would get him into trouble with Matthew.

Tessie, somewhat knew her father to be a heartless man who cared for nothing else in the world apart from himself, but when she heard those words come out of his mouth, she burst into tears.

Why? Why was she born into such a family? No wonder Tessie fostered so much hatred and jealousy in her heart for Erica and even her own sister, Camille.

Meanwhile, afraid that Tessie would implicate her too, Phoebe stood there frozen, wishing she could vanish into thin air.

Like everybody else, she only found out today that the illegitimate child she had cursed turned out to be Tessie's child with another man.

A blush of embarrassment heated Phoebe's cheeks and she looked down to avert Erica's eyes.

On the other hand, Camille, the Campbell family's eldest daughter, remained seated next to Fanya, staring at the arrogant and powerful man on the sofa.

'Phoebe is such an idiot. Even if she listened to Matthew and married Nathan, she still didn't get any benefit from Matthew. In the end, the man she loved so much ended up getting married to another woman. Why do I have two stupid sisters?' Camille sneered in her mind.

"Okay, Mr. Lyman." Matthew shifted his gaze to Lenora, whose face had been beaten to a pulp by Julianna, and asked, "Who invited my wife to the No. Eighteen Primary School yesterday?" There was no

emotion in his voice.

Lenora wasted no time and pointed at the girl beside her. "It was Julianna's idea!"

Julianna was afraid of what Matthew would do to her. Immediately, she denied, "It wasn't me. Tessie gave me the idea!"

Tessie's eyes widened in shock. "No, she said she wanted to teach Erica a lesson." Then she turned to Phoebe for help. Her eyes reddened and wavering in desperation, lips parted slightly.

Phoebe, however, turned her away with a harsh glare.

Tessie knew then that Phoebe wouldn't help her anymore.

Matthew sat there holding hands with Erica, clearly unimpressed at the way the three girls were passing the buck to evade responsibility. "In that case, both the Watts family and Campbell family must formally apologize to my wife!"

Even before Matthew and Erica had arrived, Lenora and Julianna had already slapped each other a few times. Sensing mercy in Matthew's tone, Lenora acted quickly and scurried to Erica. "Mrs. Hilton, I am terribly sorry for what happened. I shouldn't have done that to you. Please forgive me! Please?"

Although the members of the Campbell family were reluctant to apologize to a young girl like Erica, Matthew's presence there was enough to break their conceited and arrogant perception of themselves. Without further delay, they all complied and came over to humble themselves before Erica.

Lyman was the first one to come over. He smiled apologetically at Erica and said, "Mrs. Hilton, I failed to teach my daughter how to behave properly. I hope you can forgive us. Please spare our family. Tessie is at your disposal!"

Lyman made it clear that he wouldn't hesitate to throw Tessie to the lions to save the whole Campbell family.

Fanya, who had always carried herself with an air of arrogance, had no choice but to come over too with Camille. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Hilton. I have not been a good mother. It's Tessie's fault. I apologize to you on behalf of the Campbell family!"

As a matter of fact, Fanya held the highest position in the Campbell family, proudly representing each member of the family.

When it was Tessie's turn, she stood up and apologized to Erica again, even though she had already done so many times.

Phoebe slowly stood up from her seat and looked at Matthew's face. She knew that if she didn't

apologize to Erica today, she would get into more trouble with him.

No matter how reluctant she was, Phoebe had no choice but to apologize to the wife of the man she loved. "I'm really sorry, Erica. I didn't know that Tessie had done such a thing and I was wrong to misunderstand you. Please have mercy!"

When it was the Watts family's turn to apologize, Tam maintained a calm expression and said, "Mrs. Hilton, I am sorry for causing you so much trouble. After this is all over, I wish to leave Alorith with my wife, daughter and Ethan. I won't come back here again, except to visit my relatives on the festivals."

This was the best course of action for Tam, especially after what Erica had done, things would get very difficult for him in Alorith. Hardly any company worth working for would be willing to hire him. Moreover, he would have to live with the public bad-mouthing him and his family all the time. The better option was to start over new somewhere else in another city.

Yanny, who had been silent all this while, finally took a step forward. Her face, which wasn't very beautiful in the past, looked quite haggard today.

She looked at Erica blankly and said, "I'm sorry, Erica. You've been wronged because of Tam. Julianna is equally to blame, but I have always liked you. I hope you forgive Julianna, at least for old time's sake. And I promise you, just as Tam had said, we will leave Alorith after this."

In truth, Erica and Julianna did have some happy days in the past. Even Yanny would occasionally ask her daughter to bring Erica some delicious food before their friendship fell apart.

Erica's heart broke for Yanny because her husband was having an affair with their daughter's friend. But she chose to forgive him and left Alorith with Tam.

It was Erica's turn to speak, and she had only one request. "I just want to prove my innocence. I don't care about anything else. As for Ethan..."

Erica didn't want to part with Ethan, let alone Wesley and Blair, who had been taking care of the baby for so long. She knew how hard it would be on her parents, so she said, "I need to ask my parents about that first. If they say no, you can't take Ethan away."

Tam had no choice but to nod his head. "I see. Thank you!"

On the way back home from the Campbell family's residence, Erica's eyes were stuck staring out the window, deeply contemplating something in silence.

Although she hated Tessie with all her heart, she didn't want Matthew to send her to live in the slums. In the end, Erica softened her heart.

"Matthew," she called out.

"Yes?"

"How about we just force Tessie out of Alorith and forbid her from ever coming back again? As for where she goes, let her choose." Erica had to think about Ethan. What if he wanted to find his biological mother when he grew up? If Ethan were to find his mother in a slum, he would be heartbroken.

This was her last act of mercy towards Tessie.

Having realized that Erica was being merciful, Matthew said, "As you wish."

The man's compliance gave her a sense of relief.

Suddenly, Matthew's phone rang. The caller's voice could be heard loud and clear inside the car. It was Owen. "Mr. Matthew, Lenora has set out. I have sent two people to watch her and make sure she doesn't escape."

"Okay, I know. Also, don't forget to send reporters to interview Tessie and Julianna. Ask them to apologize to Erica and clarify everything in front of the cameras."

"Yes, Mr. Matthew!"

After he hung up the phone, Erica sat up straight and said, "Where have you sent Lenora?"

The man swallowed and answered, "In a cave in some primeval forest of a deserted area." Matthew had found the best cave for Lenora.

CHAPTER 1216 A SPENDTHRIFT MAN

Erica was stunned for a moment and her voice trembled anxiously. "I was just trying to scare her! There's no need to send her there. She's already beaten up so badly. She won't survive out there!"

Although Lenora deserved punishment, she didn't deserve to die.

What happened this time also served as a lesson for Erica who understood the importance of speaking more carefully in front of Matthew. She realized that if she didn't choose her words more carefully, it could bear some irreparable consequences.

"I know what I'm doing!" Matthew said coldly. He wouldn't kill anyone, obviously, but he would definitely torture Lenora for a while.

"Matthew, I'm not joking! She is going to die! You are going to send her to a primeval forest in a deserted area. Just think about what you're doing! She won't even have any food there. If Lenora ends up dying, I will have to live with the guilt of it for the rest of my life!" Erica was clearly very anxious, but Matthew still acted as if he didn't care if that wretched woman died of hunger or some miserable

disease.

He remained silent as he drove her back to the villa.

When they arrived, Matthew asked her to get out of the car and said, "I need to go back to the company first. You should get ready for class."

The girl walked to the driver's seat and put her hands on the half-down window. "I'll go to school, but don't send Lenora there, okay?"

Matthew looked at her small face and answered, "Erica, what kind of person do you really think I am?" 'What do I have to do to make her feel like I am the only man she will ever need?' he wondered gloomily.

Erica said readily, "You're handsome—" '—and hot.'

"I want to hear the truth."

'The truth?' Erica looked at him with puzzlement. She couldn't have been lying to him about his good-looks, after all, the man was, indeed, very handsome. "You're a nice guy!"

Anyway, he was always nice to her. But that wasn't it, he was, in fact, a great guy who treated her very well.

He looked at her hand holding the window and said, "Move your hands away!"

"But you haven't answered me yet. Can you..."

"If you have more questions, you can come to me again after we become a real married couple!"

Erica was speechless. Why did his mood change all of a sudden? He wasn't acting like this at the Campbell family residence just a while ago. Was it because she tried to show Lenora some compassion?

Confused as she was, she moved her hands away when she saw the cold expression on his face.

Matthew stepped on the gas with immediacy and drove away quickly.

While Erica stood there alone in the yard, staring at the back of Matthew's car as it drove off out of her vision.

With a look of disappointment on her face, Erica went back to the villa to get something from the third floor before heading back to school.

She quickly dashed to the bedroom and grabbed what she needed. When she was about to leave, she

noticed a big difference in her dressing table.

Somehow, there were a lot of new things, which she had no recollection of ever buying. She randomly picked up each item and looked at it with great curiosity. There were various shades of lipstick, blusher, highlighter, bronzer and a lot of other makeup cosmetics.

Erica stood there guessing, baffled and confused. Who bought all these?

She took out her phone to send Matthew a message, but when she remembered that he was angry, Erica decided to ask him about the new cosmetics later on.

Thanks to Matthew's help, the matter concerning Tessie was handled very quickly and efficiently.

That afternoon, the truth concerning Erica's childbirth out of wedlock was spread all over the Internet. Tam and Tessie publicly apologized to Erica in front of the camera. In the end, the news article was also accompanied by a paternity test of Ethan. The result showed that Tam and Tessie were, indeed, the biological parents of the baby.

More and more people found out that Erica was actually taking care of her best friend's child, but her best friend betrayed her instead. The netizens were shocked, and many people changed their opinions on Erica because of this.

At the school

Erica walked around campus with her camera, randomly taking photos of anyone and anything that caught her eye, while Hyatt followed her silently.

When she sat down to rest for a while, Hyatt said, "I called your brother the other day, but why did Matthew come to save you instead?"

"Oh, my brother told me that he couldn't make it to Alorith in time, so he called Matthew. Thank you, Hyatt. I don't know what I would have done without your help." Erica had been looking for the chance to thank Hyatt, but she had forgotten all about it until he mentioned the incident from the other day.

With a guilty look on his face, Hyatt said, "Don't thank me. I didn't beat them for you."

Erica put her hand on his shoulder in a friendly way and said, "That's okay. You helped me anyway. I only have you and Rhea as my best friends now. Don't betray me like Julianna and Tessie did!"

"How could I ever... I..." Hyatt was so embarrassed by Erica's remark that his face turned red. "I'm not that kind of a person!"

Erica burst into laughter and said, "I believe you. By the way, has your mother scolded you lately?"

"Yes, she came to see me the day before yesterday."

"Has she been nagging you again?" In her thoughts, Erica could clearly picture Lilith nagging Hyatt.

Hyatt looked down in shame and said, "You have the right guess." It wasn't hard to imagine what Lilith would say; after all, she was always repeating the same old things—"How many times have I told you not to follow Erica. You just won't listen to me! You're such a disobedient son. You even came to Alorith with her. I had to travel a long way to Alorith just to see you..."

Erica nodded and said, "Yes. If I were your mother, I would have nagged you too! You ran away with a married woman. In your mother's eyes, what you did was probably the same as eloping with a married woman. How could she not be mad at you?"

"I don't care. Erica, you don't have to feel guilty. I don't have any friends in Askor and you're the only one who ever treated me like a true friend. I will follow you wherever you go. If you are busy, you don't have to worry about me. I can read novels in the dormitory by myself." Hyatt was obsessed with martial arts and fantasy novels. Caught in his own element, he would often read books and even forget to eat or sleep.

His hobby was nothing but a waste of time in his mother's eyes, and that was another thing she would always nag about.

"Then call me if you need anything!" Erica said.

"Okay."

That night, when Matthew came back home, Erica followed him like a shadow. When he went to the study, she did so as well. When he went to the closet to change his clothes, she'd tag along too.

However, when he took his clothes off, Erica was too shy to look, so she lowered her head and pretended to look through his tie collection in the drawer.

Since the man changing clothes next to her had the perfect figure, it would be a pity to allow such a sight to go to waste for nothing. So, Erica glanced sideways to sneak a peek, only to be discovered almost immediately. When she laid her eyes on Matthew's naked body, she turned her back to him at once, riddled with guilt. She kept rummaging through the drawers full of his ties and watches.

However, her attention was quickly drawn to his drawer full of watches. 'What a spendthrift man! How many watches does Matthew have?' She began to count out of curiosity.

'Oh my God! 75 watches here!

How much did they cost?'

Then the next drawer had all kinds of tie clips, made of gold, mounted with diamonds or gemstones... Her heart stopped when she saw Matthew's collection of rare, vintage watches and tie clips.

Suddenly, Matthew walked out, closing the door of the closet loudly.

The sound brought Erica back to her senses. It was only then when she found that the man behind her had already gone out.

She quickly closed the drawers and trotted outside. When she opened the door, Matthew was standing straight at the doorway.

When their eyes met, the girl smiled and asked casually, "Oh, you're back?"

"Just say what you want to say," he asked indifferently.

"I just wanted to know where you were sending Tessie and Lenora." There was something wrong with Matthew tonight. He didn't even spare so much as a glance at her, while she racked her brains trying to figure out how she had offended him.

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married woman. In your mother's eyes, what you did was probably the same as eloping with a married woman. How could she not be mad at you?"

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"I just wanted to know where you were sending Tessie and Lenora." There was something wrong with Matthew tonight. He didn't even spare so much as a glance at her, while she racked her brains trying to figure out how she had offended him.

Despite that, Erica had to know what had happened to Tessie and Lenora.

"Have you forgotten what I've said today?"

CHAPTER 1217 THE KISS

"What are you talking about?" Erica asked.

Matthew looked at her coldly. It seemed like she hadn't taken him seriously.

Erica's hands trembled in anger. 'What is wrong with this man?'

If he continued to act this way without explaining the reason for his bad mood, she was really going to blow up.

"I'm not kidding! If you need my help again, come to me after we have become a real couple!" he declared.

Erica wanted to yell back, "Fine! I don't need any favors from you!"

But she couldn't yell at this man. Tessie's and Lenora's lives were in his hands. She said instead, "You don't have to be so mean. I just wanted to ask you something, Matthew."

The man retorted expressionlessly, "I am mean? All I want is to exercise my right as a husband!"

Erica was confused now. Hadn't she already promised to consummate their marriage on his birthday? Was he angry because he had to wait? It couldn't be. They had reached an agreement on that, and he seemed okay with it.

Seeing the frown on her face, Matthew turned around and walked to the bathroom.

Erica reached out her hand in an attempt to stop him, but when she remembered what he had just said, her hand froze midair and she withdrew it silently.

After taking a shower, Matthew went straight to the study, leaving Erica alone to toss and turn on the bed. She couldn't fall asleep because of everything that had happened.

No one knew if he had done it on purpose. As soon as Erica fell asleep, Matthew slowly pushed open the door to the bedroom and walked in.

The next morning, Erica got up early because she had extra-curricular activities that day. As she walked down the stairs with a muddled face, she saw Matthew having his breakfast.

Still mad, she snorted and walked towards the door.

He called, "Come back here!"

"What do you want?" she asked in a hostile tone.

'Isn't he still angry? He completely ignored me last night! Why is he talking to me now?' she thought gloomily.

"Have your breakfast."

"No need!" She was in no mood to eat with him.

"Give me one good reason!" he demanded.

'Do I need a reason for everything? Fine! I'll give him one!' she thought angrily. "It's not good to have breakfast on an empty stomach."

'What the hell? That's the most ridiculous excuse ever!' "Erica!" Matthew called, with a warning in his tone.

"What?" She turned around impatiently.

"If you take one more step towards that door, I'll have you sent to the deserted area with them tomorrow."

She gritted her teeth. "I knew it! You want to drive me away so that you and Phoebe can live together! You want me gone, don't you?"

'Phoebe? What does this have to do with her?' he wondered, confused when she wasn't making any sense.

Erica strode to the dining room and sat down opposite him, ignoring the man's frown. "Fine! You win! I'll eat!"

When he heard that Erica would be having breakfast as well, the trembling cook immediately brought her share from the kitchen and placed it on the table in front of her.

After taking two bites from the sandwich, Erica looked at her gloomy husband, who was chewing his food slowly. She reminded him mischievously, "You should eat slower than that, or you might choke on it."

Matthew put down the spoon in his hand. A cold aura filled his eyes. "Are you trying to start a fight?"

"What if I am? What will you do?" she asked with a defiant look.

Expressionless, Matthew waved at her dismissively and said, "Never mind. You don't have to eat your breakfast. Leave already."

"Tough luck! I was about to leave when you stopped me. But now, I think this breakfast is too delicious to leave half-eaten. So, you leave!"

Matthew ground his teeth, agitated. But he remained silent.

Noticing the irritation in his eyes, Erica snorted, "I know I have a bad temper. If you can't bear with it..."

"It's nothing I can't handle," he said casually, trying to comfort her as he thought she was beginning to reflect on her behavior.

However, the conversation didn't go as he had expected.

Erica continued, "You should reflect on your own personality. Why can't you bear my temper while others can? It's obvious that you're the problem here!"

Matthew felt defeated. Indeed, he began to reflect. Not on his personality, but on what he had done just now. Why did he have to ask her to have breakfast? He could have had his breakfast alone. It would have been so peaceful.

After breakfast, Matthew decided to drive Erica to school personally.

She didn't want him to drive her, because she didn't want to be with him at that moment. But since she couldn't drive, she had to regretfully get into the passenger seat.

The car rolled out of the villa. As soon as she fastened the seat belt, she felt like she was sitting on something hard and small.

She groped around her seat and found it.

A lipstick!

She immediately questioned, "Matthew! Why is there a lipstick in your car? On the passenger seat!"

Which woman left this here? Who is she? I won't stop asking till you tell me the truth!"

She had solid proof that he was cheating on her. There was no escape!

Matthew glanced at the lipstick in her hand and answered calmly, "I don't know."

"You have the guts to cheat on me, yet you don't have the balls to admit it? You have been driving this car around since yesterday. So, don't even think about blaming someone else. You cheated on me! Tell me! Was it Phoebe or some young model? Or was it someone from your office?" Erica made random guesses as she let her imagination run wild.

Frowning, Matthew asked, "What are you talking about? Don't be ridiculous."

"I will definitely investigate and find out whose lipstick this is. And when I find out who it was, I will smash it on your face and I, Erica, will dump your ass!"

She fell silent. If the lipstick was really Phoebe's or some other woman's, would she divorce him?

She felt her heart tighten. She didn't want to leave him, and her heart ached. What was going on?

Matthew's mood dropped to the lowest when he heard her last words. "Whatever," he said in a low voice.

Erica was upset as well. "Fine. But I advise you to admit it honestly, or else it's not just me who is going to be embarrassed when the truth comes out."

The man sneered, "Why should I admit to something that I haven't done?"

Erica was the only woman to ever sit in the passenger seat when he drove. This phantom woman was just her imagination.

"Deny it all you want!" Erica was infuriated by his stubbornness and swore to find out the owner of the lipstick.

When the car came to a halt at the university gate, the two of them were still in a bad mood. When she was about to get out of the car, Matthew said, "Wait!"

Erica thought that he wanted to kiss her as usual, so she retorted impatiently, "I'm very angry right now. There will be no kiss. Even if you kiss me first..." The rest of her words were caught in her throat as he grabbed the lipstick from her hand and took a picture of it.

He also twisted the tube and took a photo of what was inside. Then he put the lipstick into her pocket and retorted with the same words she was about to say to him. "Even if you kiss me first, I won't kiss you. Get out of the car!"

Erica's face reddened. 'He won't kiss me even if I...' She felt insulted. It was so embarrassing.

Erica couldn't stand it. She bit her lower lip and decided to get back at him. She leaned towards his seat, held Matthew's head between her hands and kissed his thin lips.

Her eyes were tightly shut. Matthew smiled involuntarily. Without any hesitation, he held her head and kissed her back passionately.

Erica was taken aback. Didn't he just declare that he wouldn't kiss her back?

She got out of the car with her bag and camera on her back, and was still in a daze from the kiss even after he drove away.

CHAPTER 1218 DENY I

Things at Hilton Group were going smoothly, as usual.

Matthew adjusted his tie and flicked a mote of dust off the sleeve of his five-thousand-dollar suit jacket as he strode past the personal assistants' office. After getting settled in his own office, he called Paige in.

"Good morning, Mr. Matthew," she said pleasantly.

With a slight nod, Matthew took out his phone and tapped at the screen. "I'm sending you two photos," he explained. "Go and check if this lipstick is one of the ones Erica bought when she went shopping with my mother, or one that I asked you to send to the villa."

As soon as he was done speaking, the phone in Paige's pocket vibrated twice. "Yes, Mr. Matthew!"

When she was gone, an evil smile appeared on Matthew's face. He knew the lipstick was most likely Erica's own! He was waiting for his wife to be embarrassed.

If that happened, he guessed that her anger would be something to see!

Meanwhile, Erica was taking pictures of a vase on campus when a question suddenly flashed through her mind. Was the lipstick her own?

Setting her camera down, she went looking through her backpack. Where previously there had been two lipsticks, now there was only one left.

Deep in thought, she reached into her pocket and produced the lipstick Matthew had taken the pictures of. It was definitely one of those she and Debbie had bought together.

She seldom actually used the lipsticks after buying them, so she hadn't recognized her own one earlier.

Thinking of what she had done in front of Matthew, she began to think she was doomed!

After all, Matthew even had pictures. Surely, he was going to have someone find out whose lipstick it was.

If it turned out to be hers, how humiliating it would be.

'What should I do? What should I do?' she asked herself over and over.

After spending some minutes panicking, she decided simply that she would not admit to anything. She would never talk about this matter again. As for Matthew, if he brought it up again, Erica would just change the topic.

It wasn't a perfect solution. Still, it was the best she could come up with.

Erica went on with her day without incident—until her last class in the afternoon was over, when she got a call from Matthew. "I'd like you to come to my office," he told her.

Trying not to sound worried, Erica asked why. She was immediately suspicious that he had figured things out.

Having expected her to be on guard, Matthew casually said, "It's about Ethan."

Erica bought it. "Okay."

A short time later she arrived at Hilton Group.

Stepping into the CEO's office, she found Matthew behind his desk, relaxed as usual. "What's the matter with Ethan? Did Tam call you?" asked Erica. Privately, she wondered, 'Didn't I tell Tam not to rush it? What does he want now?'

Matthew shrugged. "Let's not talk about Ethan right now. I have another important thing to discuss with you."

"What is it?"

A smile crept across his face as he began, "That lipstick is..."

Of course he had to bring up the lipstick. Smiling awkwardly, Erica tried to deflect the matter. "Um, Matthew, let's not talk about the lipstick now. I don't care whose it is anymore. What's happening with Ethan? Did Tam contact you?"

Her husband went on, undeterred. "Paige has confirmed it—that lipstick was the one you and Mom bought together that day."

Erica's face flushed as anger mingled with embarrassment. "There's nothing going on with Ethan, is there? You just mentioned him to trick me into coming here, so you could mock me."

"Mock you? That's the furthest thing from my mind! I just think it's funny that you didn't recognize your own lipstick. You even insisted that I was cheating on you."

Matthew's smile grew wider and wider. Unable to stand it, Erica slammed a palm against his desk. "Matthew Hilton, I've tolerated you for a long time. If it weren't for you drying my hair, washing my feet and cooking noodles for me..."

Behind her, there was a click and a creak as the door to the office opened.

But in her anger, Erica didn't notice. Looking daggers at Matthew, she went on, "I would have been finished with you a long time ago!"

From the open doorway came a woman's voice. It was a good-natured laugh, and this time Erica heard it.

With a start she turned around. Before her were Debbie and Carlos, beaming as they stepped into the office.

"Ah!" cried Erica. "Dad, Mom. Come in. Welcome."

Seeing that she had embarrassed herself with her outburst, Erica immediately dropped her angry expression. She stood up straight and greeted the newcomers obediently, looking every bit the well-behaved lady she was supposed to be.

Debbie came over and took Erica's hand warmly, remarking, "So Matthew washed your feet and dried your hair? Why, I'm his own mother, and I haven't enjoyed such treatment yet. Oh, Rika, he's so good to you!"

"No, no. I was only kidding..." Struggling to maintain her composure, Erica thought, 'Damn. Why didn't he tell me his parents were coming?'

Looking from his distressed wife to his affectionate mother, Matthew put in, "But Mom, Dad does everything for you."

"But we're talking about you. You never did that for me. That's different!" insisted Debbie. She let go of Erica's hand, but told her, "Rika, you've trained Matthew very well. I'm impressed. Keep it up." Indeed, Debbie had found a new side of Matthew. Rika must have really charmed him; he seemed to be so very thoughtful around her.

Erica turned even redder than before. "No, no, Mom. It's not that at all. Matthew's just very tolerant, so

he doesn't mind my bad temper."

"That's just as well, then!" exclaimed Debbie, her good mood impenetrable. "If he's so willing to spoil you, it can only be because he loves you so much. Now, listen, your father-in-law and I were about to pick you up at school, but Matthew called and told me that you had already come to his office. So, we came straight here. Let's all go to the manor for dinner tonight. Evelyn and Terilynn are both home, and they're a little worried over what's happened to you recently."

As long as the Hilton family was in Alorith, they all would have dinner together from time to time. Just as Debbie had said, it was in large part out of concern for Erica that they wanted to come together that evening.

"Well, certainly. I could hardly refuse," Erica replied sweetly.

Matthew observed the whole conversation in silence from behind his desk. He couldn't help wondering whether all women were able to change their moods as quickly as they could turn a page.

The gathering at the Hilton family's manor that evening was lively enough.

Sheffield's family was there, along with the three members of Joshua's family. Upon seeing Erica, Gwyn ran over to her with Godwin and Godfrey following close behind.

"Aunt Erica, Aunt Erica!" the three kids chanted, grabbing her legs and arms and practically smothering her in hugs.

At first sight of Matthew, though, Gwyn left Erica and rushed over to him happily. "Uncle!"

"Hi, Gwyn," Matthew replied, sweeping her up in his arms with surprising affection.

"Oh, Uncle, we haven't seen each other in such a long time!" Gwyneth pouted, holding onto his neck in a rather spoiled manner.

"Yes, you've certainly grown taller!" he remarked.

Seeing this and glancing at the two little boys in her arms, Erica couldn't help but think, 'Is Matthew fonder of girls than of boys?'

Upon entering the living room, they found Sheffield holding Evelyn's shoulder. One of them was talking and the other laughing.

Sure enough, Sheffield was doing all the talking, and Evelyn was doing all the laughing.

Erica was a bit surprised when Matthew came over and took her hand. "What are you doing?" she whispered in his ear. "I thought you were angry at me."

"We can put our fighting aside for the time being," he explained quietly.

"Look around you. The family gathering is more important. We can pretend to be a happy couple for a few hours." Erica made a face, but her husband failed to notice.

After the greetings were done with, Evelyn pulled Erica aside and asked, "How's it going?"

It was a casual question on the surface, but Erica knew what she was really asking about. Rumors of the campus violence and the matter with Tessie had made their way through the family, and Evelyn herself had already called Erica once, asking about what had happened.

CHAPTER 1219 HELPLESS AND HOPELESS

"Everything's been settled, Evelyn. There's only one thing that hasn't been taken care of yet, but that's coming!" Erica said. She hadn't figured out what to do with Tessie and Lenora yet. The young newlywed was still discussing this with Matthew.

"That's good. Anything I can do to help?"

"Thanks, Evelyn. But I think I'm good. Matthew H...Matthew took care of everything. He's so good to me." And the events of recent days had taught her that. She had always been grateful to him. She might as well invite him to dinner to thank him for his help.

Evelyn nodded, "Nice! Well, dinner's almost ready. We probably need to get in there. Let's go."

"Okay."

The noise level was rather high. The Hilton family was a big one, so that was to be expected. They all chatted and bantered back and forth, gathered around a huge table in the dining room.

Eventually the topic turned towards attractiveness. Erica decided to suck up to her elders. "Hey, Dad, you were pretty hot back in the day. You could have been a model or a movie star. You still could, to be honest."

Matthew snorted. "She's defiant and arrogant around me. Why do they get all the love?"

She had them charmed. The more she talked, the deeper Matthew's frown became.

"Why the frown, Son? Rika is young and playful. You should enjoy having a woman like that," Carlos said.

Debbie echoed, "That's right. Rika doesn't even have any makeup. If I hadn't reminded Matthew last time, she still wouldn't have any."

It was not until then that Erica realized that it was Debbie who had reminded Matthew to buy the

makeup that sat on her dresser. She smiled sweetly at Debbie and said, "Thank you, Mom!"

"No need to thank me. Hey—if you need something and Matthew doesn't pick it up for you, just remind the guy. Matthew, you should learn from Sheffield and Joshua. Look how they treat your sisters!" In Debbie's eyes, Sheffield and Joshua were the perfect sons-in-law. They could do no wrong and treated her daughters like queens.

Matthew put down the wet tissue in his hand and looked at the others indifferently. "If you could see how she treats me at home..."

The smile on Erica's face froze. She pinched the man under the table and thought, 'Couldn't he say something nice about me?'

Matthew held her hand and continued, "I carry her up the stairs, cook for her, wash her feet, make dessert to make her happy..."

When she went to Alorith University to confront Tessie, he knew that she would be in a bad mood. So he canceled appointments with some major clients so he could be there for her. That was when he cooked up the chocolate.

"Yeah, yeah, come on, be serious," said Terilynn.

"Man, you're something else. You're so obvious when you lie," Carlos commented.

"You imagining things, Matthew?" asked Sheffield. He couldn't imagine the aloof Matthew cooking, much less washing Erica's feet. That would just be too surreal. He couldn't believe it at all!

"Matthew, you mean you are going to learn to do these things, right?" Joshua said.

Everyone in the Hilton family shook their heads.

Obviously, none of them believed it.

Debbie was the only one that believed Matthew. She had heard Erica say that herself. But she wasn't going to get involved in this.

Erica just sipped her cola without a care in the world. But she wouldn't meet Matthew's gaze. The smile on her face was like a little fox's, revealing her smugness.

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Erica just sipped her cola without a care in the world. But she wouldn't meet Matthew's gaze. The smile on her face was like a little fox's, revealing her smugness.

Matthew sneered. He knew when he was beaten. So he wouldn't say another word about how they were together. This woman was clever!

They were his own family. His father, mother, sisters, and brothers-in-law. But none of them believed him. The only one that did wouldn't say a word to back him up.

And now, something Erica once said suddenly occurred to him. She said she was the black sheep of the family. Come to think of it, Matthew was beginning to feel kind of woolly himself.

Looking at Erica, who was still busy sipping her coke, Matthew squeezed her hand and said, "Don't you want to say something to everyone?" She needed to learn how to stick up for her husband in front of others.

Carlos glared at his son with dissatisfaction. "Matthew, if Rika doesn't want to say anything, then she doesn't have to. Why are you trying to make her do anything?"

Matthew felt misunderstood and helpless. He wasn't trying to make her do anything. He wanted her to speak up, and was reminding her to do so.

After thinking for a while, Debbie said, "Rika, if Matthew does something like that again, pack your stuff and move in here. Stay here as long as you want. It'll teach him a lesson!"

Matthew felt so glum. Why did he come here for dinner again?

It was Sheffield who burst into laughter first after hearing what Debbie said. He gave Debbie a thumbs up and said, "Hahaha, you're definitely Matthew's biological mom!"

Erica also wanted to laugh out loud, but she had to maintain her image. So, she smiled a little and said, "Thank you, Mom. Maybe I'll really come and bug you one day!"

"What are you talking about? It's your house too. You know where Matthew's room is. You're welcome here anytime." Debbie was on Erica's side. It was about time someone put that man in his place.

She felt bad for Erica. The girl tried to do something nice for her best friend, and got spat on for it. She not only raised a baby that wasn't hers, but it also ruined her reputation. Everybody talked trash about her because of it. Now her name was finally cleared. She had no child or boyfriend. Matthew was pretty thorough at getting the news out. He and Rika had a bright future together, and he was a lucky man indeed.

"Sounds good! But Matthew doesn't bully me," Erica said. She turned and smiled at the recently deflated man.

Noticing the self-satisfied look in her eyes, Matthew tried to hide his wounded ego with a harsh attitude. "Bully her?" he snorted. "You women are always put on a pedestal in this family. How can I compete with that?"

Terilynn immediately reprimanded him, "Matthew, don't frighten Rika with your attitude. Why are you being so mean?"

Matthew was even more despondent. He didn't want to come back here for dinner again if he didn't have to.

Looking at the silent, brooding man, Erica felt sorry for him. He was being targeted and shot down at every turn. And worse, it was over her.

The longer this went on, the worse she felt. She poured a glass of red wine for Matthew, filled a bowl of soup for him, and served it to him with a smile. "I'm sorry, Matthew. Have some soup."

It was obvious that she was trying to please him.

However, this scene made everyone overreact again. They all thought that it was because Matthew was angry and Erica was afraid of him so she acted like a servant to mollify him.

Debbie tried her best to sound patient. "Rika, Matthew should be serving you soup, not the other way around. He's a man, and men take care of their wives."

Erica hadn't expected to hear that. "It's okay, Mom. It's just a bowl of soup."

Carlos began, "Are you seriously pouting? Look how scared Rika is. Hurry up and grab some food for your wife!"

Matthew felt hopeless and helpless. What did he do wrong? He did nothing and said nothing. Why were they constantly harping on him? It was like he could do nothing right.

He really didn't feel like part of the family anymore.

Without saying a word, he picked up the chopsticks and began to pick up food for Erica. He also glared at his wife, who was struggling to control her laughter.

"Dad, I saw Matthew glaring at Rika! Give him a talking-to." Sheffield decided to rat on Matthew, telling Carlos, as if he thought there was too much peace in the house.

Matthew had done the same to him many times before. Evelyn always got mad at Sheffield thanks to Matthew's meddling. Now it was his turn.

CHAPTER 1220 I WANT A HAREM

Carlos scolded Matthew, "Did you come here for dinner or to make me mad? Keep acting like this, and I'll have you serving the dishes for everyone at our next family dinner."

Matthew put down his chopsticks with a stern look.

Seeing that father and son were about to come to blows, Erica felt sorry for Matthew. Her husband had even been harangued by Carlos. She tried to fix things. "Mom, Dad, it's not what you think. Matthew is a good guy! He treats me like a princess. Really. He cooks for me, watches movies with me and washes my feet... "

She recounted a list of all the good things Matthew did for her.

Everyone at the table was stunned. Matthew wasn't lying. Everything he said was true!

Carlos pondered this for a while. He still didn't believe Matthew was so humble that he'd wash someone's feet. "Why are you covering for him, Rika? He's always been high and mighty. Why would he do all this for you?"

Carlos looked at Matthew and saw his mini-me. The young man had inherited a lot of Carlos' traits, like his icy demeanor and arrogance.

But marriage tempered Carlos, changed him, melted his icy heart. But to his father, Matthew hadn't changed at all.

"Let it go, Dad. It's true. Can we eat now? I'm starving!" Erica urged. She felt guilty and tried to change the topic. If she had stuck up for Matthew, maybe Carlos wouldn't have been so angry. She was full of

regret for just doing nothing.

The father and son had been at each other's throats for a long time. The family was used to it, and just accepted it as a normal thing. Erica tried to smooth things over as best she could. And soon, things were a lot less tense at the table.

Hearing everyone talking and laughing again, Erica quietly breathed a sigh of relief.

She also felt that Matthew was put upon. She kept picking up food for him at dinner and tried to smile.

Seeing that, Carlos shook his head. He knew Matthew was lying. Obviously, Rika had been taking care of Matthew, not the other way round.

After a while, Matthew stopped Erica from picking up food for him. "Don't mind me. You need to eat, too!"

"I am eating!"

Matthew glanced at the rice in her bowl. She had only taken a few bites and was busy picking up food for him.

"I'm almost full. Just eat your food and leave me alone."

"Fine! I will!" Erica didn't pursue the matter and started to dig in.

After dinner, the family gathered in the living room for a while, sitting around on the sofa and on the chairs strategically arranged around the place. They were enjoying their time together, but all good things came an end.

Before leaving, Erica held Gwyn's hand and said with a smile, "Know what you missed? Your uncle Matthew made some chocolate!"

"Chocolate? And Uncle Matthew made it?" Gwyn looked at her in confusion.

"Yeah. I was going to bring some to you, but you went to your grandpa's place, so I ate it all!" She didn't mean to, but it was so delicious she couldn't stop!

Gwyn was more and more confused. "Uncle Matthew knows how to make chocolate? I never knew that!"

"What? That's not the only thing he can make. He's made macaroons, too. Didn't you know that?" Erica was confused by Gwyn's reaction.

Gwyn shook her head. "No, I didn't. I don't like macaroons. Chocolate's better anyway."

'Huh?' Erica's confusion grew. "You never had your uncle's homemade chocolate?"

Gwyn shook her head again. "Uncle Matthew's super-busy. How would he have time to make chocolate for me? If you hadn't told me, I wouldn't believe you!"

Erica responded in puzzlement, "Oh, okay!" There seemed to be something wrong, but she couldn't figure out what it was.

In the Emperor car on their way back home, Erica tilted her head to look at the man who was driving. "You know what day it is? It's Thursday. I'm free on Saturday. How about I buy you dinner?"

"Why the sudden interest in taking me to dinner?"

"You've helped me out a lot lately. This is my way of saying thanks!" she answered honestly.

"I really don't feel like going out."

"But I want to show you how grateful I am."

"There's all sorts of ways you could do that. Buying me dinner? Food is empty. You eat it, you pass it, you're done. Now, experiences? That's a gift worth giving," Matthew stated.

'Huh? What does he want? A kiss? Maybe sex?' she wondered. Erica protested timidly, "Didn't we agree to wait until your birthday?"

Well, he didn't want to force her. "Then tell me, who were you going to marry if you hadn't married me?" He had heard her say she didn't love him. He wanted to know whom she did love!

"Well... I can't settle on just one guy. I want an imperial harem, where I keep all kinds of hot men. Young, handsome ones; big, beefy ones; suave, mature men; and domineering CEOs. There's just so many to choose from. I want them all!" As she talked, she got more animated. Her voice became more emphatic, and an excited glint appeared in her eyes.

"Huh!" He was so angry! But Matthew had to keep his poker face.

Erica giggled, "Be honest. Don't you want a harem? One stocked with every type of girl you could imagine? You could sleep with tons of women..." Even she found it tempting to think of all these sexy women!

Matthew sped up the car and said through gritted teeth, "Erica, aren't you afraid you'll bite off more than you can chew?"

"Well, about that... Just looking at them and running my hands over them is enough for me." Just like

touching Matthew, his pecs and abdominal muscles were so tantalizing. It was hard to resist. And thinking about it made her want to do just that.

Erica was not just a troublemaker. She sounded like a man-eater. "Be serious. I want a name!"

"Only children answer multiple choice questions. I want all of them!"

Matthew cranked the steering wheel hard and braked all of a sudden.

They were thrown forward by the sudden stop, but fortunately their seat belts held them firmly. He grabbed the back of her head and pulled her towards him. "Do you regret marrying me?" he asked coldly.

His expression told her she had to think it over before she opened her mouth. Erica was more than a little scared. "Um...I...er...I mean... Nuh uh. No regrets. I married a wonderful guy! You'd never hurt me!" Seeing the man reach out his hand, Erica was frightened and immediately tried to inveigle him.

Matthew didn't buy it this time. "Enough with the flattery! I can't wait anymore. I'm going to have sex with you! Right here! Right now!" He didn't care how it sounded. He was beyond thinking at this point.

"No, Matthew. Stop! I'm on my period..." she said urgently. It was true.

"Stop with the bullshit. If you really loved me, you'd have sex with me!" Since he heard her say that she married a man she didn't love, finally everything was starting to make sense.

Including why she hadn't slept with him after their wedding! She didn't love him, so she didn't want to have sex with him.

"No, that's not how it is..." she tried to explain.

"Are you trying to say you want to sleep with me?"

"Let me explain..."

"You love me?"

"Just let me— I'm saying I'm not trying to bullshit you. I'm really on my period. Back at the manor, I borrowed a tampon from Evelyn. I'm telling the truth." Erica was so frightened that she didn't stammer anymore and her words tumbled out in a torrent.

After she said that, the car got supernaturally quiet.

Matthew slowly released her. He didn't say a word. Instead, he took something from the glove compartment, opened the door and got out of the car.

Erica saw him walk to the front of the car. Then she saw him touch his mouth. A lighter roared to life, and soon there was a lit cigarette in his mouth. He took a drag and let a cloud of smoke out of his mouth.

Matthew was smoking!

Matthew smoked? Erica was surprised. She had never smelled tobacco on him before. She had never seen him smoke.