

TMBA 1231

CHAPTER 1231 HE WANTS TO LIVE A LONG LIFE

Matthew admitted that there were times when he had wanted to take advantage of Erica, but he only felt this way towards her. He didn't like other women. Why did she think he was a lustful man?

He turned over and lay on his side, facing her. His pajama belt accidentally came loose.

Erica stared at the handsome man. She preferred to leave the curtains slightly open at night to let a little light into the bedroom.

In the moonlight, she saw his exposed chest staring back at her.

The girl swallowed and looked straight into his eyes. "Man, are you trying to seduce me?" she asked playfully.

Matthew rolled his eyes. "Are you turned on by my body?" He played along.

"I am," she said in a low voice, and reached out her hand to touch his chest.

Matthew grabbed her unruly hand and warned, "I've already taken too many cold showers. Think twice before you make a move. Don't touch me if you don't want to get laid." Erica didn't realize how attractive she looked to him in the darkness of the night.

"You're so stingy," she said with an awkward smile. 'Fine! I won't touch you!' she thought, taking back her hand.

She rolled to her side of the bed and closed her eyes. Soon after, she fell asleep.

Matthew stared at her, stunned.

'Did she just fall asleep? And right after taunting me once again!' he cursed in his mind as she slept peacefully.

The next day, Matthew left the city on a business trip. Worried that she wouldn't eat properly if left alone, Debbie asked Erica to temporarily move back to the Hilton family manor.

While Matthew was away for work, Erica spent most of her time at school. She handed the photo of the starry sky she had taken atop the Fragrance Mountain as her homework, and she received high praise from Professor Faulkner.

Four days after Matthew had left, Erica received a call from Rhea. "My dearest Erica, where are you now?"

"My dear Rhea, I'm developing a photo at school at the moment." Professor Faulkner had asked her to develop the photo she had submitted earlier and post it in the column for exceptional works.

"Erica, can you go to the school gate right now? Someone is looking for you."

Puzzled, Erica asked, "What? Who?" She didn't have a common friend with Rhea in Alorith, except Hyatt.

"You'll know when you get there. It's a surprise!" she exclaimed into the phone.

"All right, all right. I'll go!" Erica put down her work and walked towards the school gate with Hyatt.

At the school gate

Confused, Erica asked Hyatt, "What's up with Rhea? Why did she want me to come out here? There's no one..."

Before she could finish, a figure jumped behind her and covered her eyes. The person said in a hoarse voice, "Guess who!"

Erica was stunned for a moment, and then shouted in surprise, "Rhea!"

Rhea loosened her grip and cried, "Ah! You guessed it too easily!" She came around to face Erica. Rhea was wearing a long black coat. She smiled and said, "Rika, I've missed you so much!"

"Ahhh! It really is my dear Rhea!" The girls jumped into a tight hug, ignoring the curious gazes around them.

It had been a long time since she had seen her good friend. Erica was so excited that she was almost in tears.

"Rika, let me look at you! Have you changed much?" Rhea held Erica's hands and looked her up and down. "You've gained some weight and your skin looks so much better. Rika, you look more beautiful than ever!"

"What? Have I really gained weight?" Erica pinched her cheek. It did seem like there was more flesh on it.

"Looks like Matthew is taking good care of you. He is treating you well, isn't he?" Rhea was worried about Erica. She was afraid that Matthew would dislike her for having a baby out of their marriage. But seeing Erica's bright smile, she figured that she had been worried for nothing.

She was relieved. Her friend was happy and they were finally together!

The girls hadn't seen each other since summer vacation.

They had been both in Askor during the vacation, and they could hang out together from time to time. But since Erica got married and came to Alorith, the two of them had to make do with nothing but video chats.

Erica smiled. "He treats me very well. He feeds me so much that I've gained weight!" Matthew would cook all kinds of delicious food at home. Every time she finished her meal, she had to support herself against the wall. How could she not get fat? 'It's all his fault, ' she thought, pinching her cheeks again.

"I'm so relieved to know that you guys are getting along well! Thank God," Rhea chuckled. She finally turned to Hyatt and said, "It's been a while, Hyatt!"

With a shy smile, he scratched the back of his head and asked, "Hi, Rhea. Why are you here anyway?"

"I've missed you two so much! So I flew down here as soon as I could! Mrs. Erica, the air ticket was so damn expensive. You better treat me to dinner to make up for my aching heart."

Erica held Rhea's arm and said, "No problem! Matthew is on a business trip. I can keep you company all day long."

"Oh? Are you saying that if Matthew were at home, you wouldn't keep me company?" Rhea asked, feigning anger and pouting at her best friend.

With a hint of shyness in her smile, Erica shook Rhea's arm. "I didn't mean it like that. Stop teasing me!"

The two burst into laughter.

Erica and Hyatt took Rhea on a tour of their school. Before leaving the place, Erica called Matthew.

Matthew was in a meeting when his phone vibrated. He was about to ignore the call, but seeing the caller ID, he quickly swiped the answer key. "Yes?"

"Matthew! Are you busy?"

He glanced at the dozen or so people around him, talking about important work matters, then stood up from his seat and walked aside. "No," he answered.

"Oh good! I called to ask you something. Can I bring my friend along to stay in our villa?"

"Which friend is this?"

"It's Rhea!" Matthew knew Rhea. She was Erica's bridesmaid for their wedding.

He didn't like others staying in his villa, but since she was a good friend of Erica's, he agreed. "Okay."

Erica was thrilled. "Yes! You're the best, Matthew!" Before making the call, she was worried that Matthew wouldn't agree and that she would have to stay in a hotel with Rhea.

Matthew continued, "But she has to sleep in the guest room on the second floor." There was no way he could allow anyone to sleep in his bed, not even Erica's best friend.

"No problem!" Erica exclaimed happily. She knew that he was a neat freak and she could understand his condition. She had already planned on sleeping with Rhea in the guest room.

Reflecting her good mood, Matthew also smiled. "Why are you so happy?"

"Of course, I'm happy. Rhea and I haven't seen each other in a long time. We are going to hang out together."

"Well, have a nice time. I will reimburse all the expenses when I get back. So, have fun."

She shouted excitedly, "Wow! Are you serious? Matthew, you are amazing. I love you so much!"

Matthew's eyes were full of smile at her words. "Enjoy."

"Bye, Matthew! Take care of yourself."

"I will. You too." He would surely take care of himself. He wanted to live a long life. He wanted to live long and stay by her side forever.

After hanging up, Erica took Rhea and Hyatt to the villa. When she had gotten married to Matthew, Erica was first brought to the Hilton family manor. So, Rhea hadn't been to this villa yet.

As she looked around the gorgeous villa, Rhea's mouth formed an "O" and she gawked at the place the whole time. "Oh my God, Erica, you're so lucky to have married Matthew!" she exclaimed.

CHAPTER 1232 YOU'RE THE BOSS

When she heard what Rhea said, Erica just smiled and showed her around the villa.

"Mind if I snap some pics?" Rhea asked for Erica's opinion.

"No problem!" Erica had the power to make minor decisions like that.

Besides, she asked Hyatt to take some photos of her and Rhea in the garden on the top floor of the villa.

Before she uploaded the pics, Rhea asked Erica, "Rika, can I post these online?"

This question made Erica hesitate for a moment. "I'll need to ask Matthew first," she answered. After all,

he was a very private person.

"Take your time. I just want to show off. I've been to Matthew's villa! Ha-ha!"

"Cool. Let me ask him first." Erica took out her phone and sent a message to her husband. "We took some photos in the villa. Can we post them online?"

"Mi casa es su casa. You're the boss. You can do what you want as long as you're happy!" Matthew replied.

Seeing the message, Erica smiled sweetly and sent him a kiss emoji.

Then she edited and retouched the photos that Hyatt took for her and Rhea, running them through a filter before uploading them to Weibo. One was a shot of them sitting in the garden, and the other had them sitting on the spiral staircase, with the words, "My best friend came to see me! Current mood: happy!"

Not only that, she took a selfie of herself and sent it to Matthew. "Rhea said I gained weight. Don't feed me so much anymore, okay?"

With a faint smile, Matthew saved the photo and replied, "I like you like this. You're cuddlier that way. It feels good to hold you in my arms."

She knew he wouldn't be there for at least a couple more days. She decided to tease him. Erica typed, "Then come back and hug me. That way you can judge for yourself how much I weigh!"

"I'll be back soon. Just wait for me. Be patient." Although he told her to wait for him, he really couldn't wait to see her himself. The business trip couldn't end quickly enough.

"I'm not impatient. We're going to get some hotpot now! Bye!"

"Bye."

Erica put away her phone and the three of them went out to eat.

Rhea couldn't get to Alorith very often. How could they just go shopping and eat hotpot? They decided to go out drinking and celebrate the fact they were finally together.

And so, after eating, they went and found a bar nearby.

It was already eleven o'clock in the evening by the time they arrived at the bar. The place was already packed with people, and the loud music was deafening.

They chose an unobtrusive booth and sat down. The two girls went back and forth on what they wanted.

There were so many good choices. Finally, they decided on some beer and fruit. Their night life finally began.

In fact, Erica wanted to drink at least two glasses of liquor with Rhea, but she was afraid. The bar didn't look all that safe and Hyatt was not a fighter, so she settled for beer instead.

A handsome man took the stage and began to sing. He had a lower-register voice, and sounded very masculine and seductive. Not to mention the song was crazy catchy. Erica was just getting into the song when her phone rang.

It was Tam calling.

'Damn it! I forgot that Tam wants Ethan back, ' she cursed inwardly.

She waved her phone in front of Rhea and said loudly, "It's Julianna's dad. I have to take this."

Erica had told Rhea everything about Tessie and Julianna over hotpot. And now Rhea knew Ethan was Tessie and Tam's kid. She figured Tam might want to discuss Ethan, and that it was a private matter. She gave Erica a thumbs-up sign as Erica walked out of the booth. "Be careful," Rhea said.

"Don't worry!"

Erica went to the door of the bar with her mobile phone, and it was much quieter there. She answered the phone and said, "My parents don't want to give Ethan to you. If you really miss the little tyke, you can go to their place to visit him."

After all, they had already had a relationship with Ethan. When Ethan grew to adulthood, if he wanted to find his biological parents, the Leonard family would not stop him.

Tam was worried when he heard that Erica's parents refused to give Ethan back to him. "Mrs. Erica, we've got our things packed already. We're eager to pick up Ethan at your parents' place. Don't make this harder than it has to be. Please tell your dad I'll be a good father to Ethan. He is my son, after all. I won't treat him like shit."

Wesley already warned Erica that if Tam insisted, they'd have to give him the child. He was legally in the right.

Wesley and Blair were parents of three children themselves. They could understand the pain of being separated from one's own child. Besides, it was best for Ethan to live with his real father.

But Erica didn't want to give the child to Tam. She'd spent some months taking care of a pregnant Tessie in a basement, and had bonded with the boy. "Have you thought about my parents? How they might feel?" she asked.

"I know your parents treat him like their own grandson. I'm really grateful for that. Just let me take him. I'll even promise to take him to your folks' place to visit as much as I can. What do you think?" Tam was so desperate he almost burst into tears.

If he had known something like this might happen, he would have been there to take him as soon as he was born.

"Where are you going after leaving Alorith?" she asked. She had to know where Ethan would be. They would definitely meet in the future.

"To Australia. I already have tickets." Something bad happened to Julianna. Tam knew it was Matthew's idea, so he didn't bring it up again. Julianna pissed off Erica, and the girl paid for it. They had to suffer and enjoy it.

'Australia?' Erica became sadder the more she thought about it.

But it wasn't appropriate for her to keep the child from Tam. She gritted her teeth and said, "You can go to my parents' place to pick him up!"

"Really? Thank you so much, Erica. I really appreciate that." Tam was so excited on the phone that he didn't know how to express his gratitude.

"But you have to promise me one thing first," Erica added.

"Name it."

Looking at the sky, Erica took a deep breath and forced her tears back. "After you take Ethan back to Alorith, I need to see him before you leave for Australia." If she couldn't see the child this time, they would go to Australia. She didn't know when they would get a chance to see each other again.

"No problem!" As long as she was willing to give his son to him, Tam would let Erica see Ethan. It was just a small matter.

"Okay." Erica had nothing else to say to him, so she hung up the phone quickly. She still had tears to wipe from her eyes.

She didn't go right back to the bar. Instead, she called Wesley. "Dad, I promised Tam that I'd give Ethan back to him," she said in a small voice after the call was connected.

Wesley had already been mentally prepared for it. After all, Ethan was not Erica's child. "Well, if you agreed, then we have no choice. Your mother and I will pack up some things for him and ask Tam to take them with him when he comes and gets the kid."

"Okay..."

Wesley suddenly changed the subject and asked, "So when are you and Matthew going to have a child? We won't have to worry about someone claiming him, right? If you have a kid, I'll keep whatever Tam doesn't take with."

'What? You old cheapskate!' "Well, we're going to have a kid, but not right away. You can give those things away!" she answered. She was married, after all. How could she not have a child?

"You brat! Fine!" Wesley thought it was better to comfort his daughter. "Don't worry. You knew this day was coming, and you should have been ready to accept it. Having kids with Matthew will fill the void Ethan left."

CHAPTER 1233 MEETING WATKINS AGAIN

Although Erica didn't live with Ethan, she had kept Tessie company for the nine months she had been pregnant and had brought him back home after Tessie had given birth to him. Erica had a deep connection with that little boy.

"Okay, tell Mom not to be upset when Ethan leaves. If she's that sad, Matthew and I can give her a grandchild. Besides, my sister will get married soon, and so will my brother. You and Mom will have a handful of grandchildren sooner or later," said Erica, trying to comfort her dad.

Wesley sighed silently and snorted. "I am here with your mother and I will comfort her."

'This girl is so silly! She is kind-hearted and always does something that would make us feel bad for her. I hope she doesn't do anything that will hurt herself again, ' he thought to himself.

Erica nodded. She didn't need to worry about her mother while her father was around. "Good."

Just then, she heard a familiar voice. "Erica!"

Erica looked up reflexively and saw Watkins waving at her.

He looked handsome in his black casual coat and expensive sneakers.

"Who is that?" Wesley asked. He had sharp ears and clearly heard a man call out Erica's name. As far as he knew, Matthew was on a business trip. He hoped that his silly daughter wouldn't do something that would make Matthew misunderstand her.

"Just a friend. I'm outside with Rhea now. Talk to you later. Bye!" Erica had a clear conscience. After answering her dad's question, she hung up the phone without a second thought.

Wesley was rendered speechless. 'Where is this girl? And why is there a man with her? Never mind! I trust her. Better to leave her be, ' he thought.

When Watkins trotted over to her, he saw that she had been on the phone. He apologized as she put her phone away. "Sorry, I didn't realize that you were talking to someone."

"No problem. Why are you here?" she asked. Erica looked behind him and saw several rich young men standing there, waiting for Watkins.

With his hands in his pockets, Watkins raised his chin at them and then said to her, "Just hanging out with my buddies. What about you?"

Erica waved at his friends with a friendly smile and said, "My best friend from Askor is here for a visit. We were just having some fun together." Erica had a good impression of Watkins. She was someone who liked making friends, and Watkins was already kind of a friend. She had met him several times now.

He nodded and proposed, "Since we are all here, why don't we have fun together?"

"Uh, I don't think that's a good idea." She didn't know his friends, and they were all men.

Watkins saw through her discomfort and promised, "Don't worry, it's okay. You saved my life. I won't let anyone bully you. You don't have to be so wary of them. They are my good friends, and won't do anything to annoy you. And as for me, you can rest assured. I won't do anything stupid either, because I know you are Mrs. Hilton."

Amused by his slightly humorous words, Erica nodded gracefully. "Okay! My friends are in the booth. Make sure to tell your friends not to mess around!"

"Alright!"

Bars tended to be unpredictable places, and some people would lose control after getting drunk. But with Watkins' guarantee of good behavior, Erica led the men to the booth.

Around that same time, Rhea was filled with regret because she had let Erica go out alone. She stood up from her seat and was about to go out to look for her friend when Erica walked in.

Rhea breathed a sigh of relief. Her hands flying all around her, she shouted, "Rika, you scared me to death! I was about to go out and look for you! Hmm? Who are they?" Rhea finally noticed the group of men behind her.

The man next to Erica was really handsome.

Erica introduced them. "Watkins, this is my best friend, Rhea Cullen, and this is my classmate, Hyatt Brigham. Rhea, Hyatt, this is my friend, Watkins Cruz."

After greeting each other, the group went upstairs to a luxurious booth on the second floor.

In the private booth

Standing in front of the French window, Erica and Rhea looked down at the men and women dancing madly on the first floor.

Behind them, Watkins ordered a couple of wine bottles for him and his friends. Hyatt was on his mobile phone, sitting silently in the corner.

Erica reminded Rhea in a low voice, "It's my first time hanging out with these guys. Don't drink too much." If they got drunk and these men turned out to be assholes, the girls would be defenseless.

"Got it!"

Watkins thoughtfully ordered two glasses of cocktail with low alcohol content for the two ladies, and the men had liquor, beer and wine.

Watkins casually told his friends that Erica was Matthew's wife. The guys were shocked at first, but then they were quite respectful towards the girls. No one wished to mess with the Hilton family.

They didn't dare play any of the drinking games which they usually played with beautiful girls. All they could do was shoot some craps and play some blackjack.

They had to drink liquor or beer when they lost; the girls could just drink their cocktail. The atmosphere was pleasant.

They were all about the same age and were quite open to each other. Soon, they became good friends and friended each other on WeChat.

After a while, Erica dropped her dices and said to Watkins, "Watkins, you guys carry on. We have to go. We have classes tomorrow morning."

Watkins didn't force them to stay. He stood up and put his hands into his pockets. "Okay, I'll drive you home."

"No, no, no. You stay. We can take a taxi home!" Erica put on her backpack and she, along with Rhea and Hyatt, began to walk toward the door.

Watkins turned around and waved at his friends. "I'll be back soon."

He walked out of the booth with the three of them.

When they reached the side of the road, Watkins stopped Erica. After hesitating for a second, he said, "Erica, we all know what happened between you and Tessie. She doesn't deserve to be your friend. You don't need to be sad for losing a friend like her. Okay?"

Knowing that he was comforting her, Erica nodded with a smile. "Don't worry about me. I've already moved on. Thank you, Watkins."

"Good to know. Let's go now. I'll drive you." Watkins' driver was waiting at the roadside.

Erica tried to refuse, but Watkins insisted on driving them home. It was late, so she got into his car with Rhea.

Hyatt got into another Mercedes Benz and the driver was told to drop him off at school.

The girls sat in the back seat, while Watkins sat in the passenger seat. The driver headed for the Pearl Villa District.

The car rolled to a stop in front of the villa. As soon as Erica opened the door, her phone rang. It was Matthew.

'Wow! Matthew, the aloof husband, is calling me on his own volition! This is so rare!' she thought. With a smile, she slid the answer key and gently greeted him, "Hello, Matthew."

"Where are you?" The man's low voice came from the other end of the line.

CHAPTER 1234 A CLEAN HAND WANTS NO WASHING

Erica looked at the villa and said, "Rhea and I just arrived at the gate of the villa. We haven't gone in yet."

Matthew was about to answer when he heard a man's voice come over the line. "Erica, Rhea, I'm leaving now! Go get some good rest!"

"Okay, thank you! Bye!" That was Erica. Though she had reflexively covered the speaker with her hand, Matthew was still able to hear and discern that it was a man who had spoken to her.

Meanwhile, Watkins was about to get into his car, but stopped as though he'd suddenly remembered something. Seemingly not noticing that Erica was on the phone, he came over and told her, "You know, I've always wanted to invite you to dinner, but I never got the chance. Now that we've friended each other on WeChat, I'll contact you and invite you to a proper dinner sometime soon."

Holding her phone low beside her body, Erica answered, "Okay. But look, it doesn't matter if you're too busy..."

"No, I'm not busy. I haven't had many classes to deal with lately," he said quickly, and then broke off. "Look, we should both be going. It's too cold outside, and it'll be colder tomorrow. Remember to dress warm!" Saying this, Watkins half-raised his arms as though to give her a hug goodbye. However, he remembered that she was married and thought better of it.

Erica pretended not to notice and smiled at him pleasantly. "Oh, I will. Thank you, goodbye!"

Watkins turned and hurried off, leaving Erica to breathe a sigh of relief. Remembering that she was still on the phone with her husband, she brought it back up to her ear. "Hello, Matthew, haven't you gone to bed yet?"

For a moment there was only silence. Fearing the call was disconnected, Erica glanced at the phone's screen to find that it wasn't. "Hello? Are you busy now?"

Matthew's voice came through at last, cold as the air. "No, I'm not. Who's that you were just hanging out with?"

Erica shivered and held onto Rhea's arm as they started toward the villa. "I was with Rhea and Hyatt," she answered.

"What did you do?"

"We went shopping, had hotpot and hit a bar. Then we came back," Erica answered honestly.

"Who drove you back?" asked Matthew.

"Oh, it was Watkins!"

There was another uncomfortable silence. Then Matthew continued, "Did you drink together?"

"Yes," she told him. "Rhea and I had some beer and a cocktail. We're not drunk! Don't worry!"

Her cheery, light tone of voice did nothing to ease Matthew's concerns. 'Don't worry?' he thought to himself. 'I am on a business trip abroad. How can I rest easy after hearing that some other man drank with my wife and drove her home?'

In his sternest voice he ordered, "Stay away from that Watkins from now on. Don't go to dinner with him!"

"What's wrong?" Erica wondered if he was jealous. The way she saw it, he shouldn't have been.

Matthew was incensed by his wife's obtuseness. How could she not see the problem here? "Listen to me. As Mrs. Hilton, do you think it's appropriate for you to have dinner with another man?"

"Well...I don't know if it's exactly appropriate," Erica said noncommittally. "But he and I are just friends. A clean hand wants no washing."

Matthew didn't want to talk to Erica anymore. He could see that he wasn't getting through to her, and

now he needed some time to calm himself down. "Go to bed early," he said in a strained tone.

"Well, all right." Erica frowned. 'Why is he hanging up so soon?' she wondered. 'I haven't even told him about Ethan yet. He must just be too tired to keep talking.'

Seeing her put her phone away, Rhea couldn't help but ask, "Was that your husband?"

"Yeah."

"Does he know that Watkins took us back?"

Erica glared down at the pavement. "Yes. He just told me to not have dinner with Watkins, and to stay away from him from now on. Don't I deserve to have friends?" Making friends in Alorith was not easy for her. And now that she'd finally found one, Matthew had immediately objected to it.

Rhea rolled her eyes at the sky. "What are you talking about? Rika, you silly girl! Matthew is being jealous! Can't you see it?"

'He is being jealous?' This idea flashed through Erica's mind, but didn't stay there long. "No, he's not," she said. "That's impossible. He doesn't love me! How could he be jealous because of me?" The best she could say about herself and Matthew was that he didn't hate her. Maybe he even sort of liked her, but surely there was no love there.

For her part, Rhea really wanted to open Erica's skull to see if there was brain in it. "Let's not talk about whether he loves you or not. Listen, all men are keen when it comes to saving face. His wife was just sent home by another man. Believe me, he is angry!"

"What?" said Erica, still dubious. "So you mean Matthew is angry just because Watkins drove me home?"

Rhea nodded vigorously. "Yes. You'll have to remember to apologize to him later!"

Erica said nothing in reply. She needed time to think this over.

Later that evening, Rhea came out of the bathroom to find Erica staring at her phone in bewilderment. "Rhea, there's something wrong with my WeChat account."

"What's wrong?"

Erica explained, "I was about to send a message to Matthew, but I suddenly found that I couldn't log in. Could my password have been stolen?"

Rhea walked over and glanced at the phone. "What's the error prompt?"

"It just says there's something wrong with my account."

Rhea shrugged. "Huh. Well, I don't know. Just call customer service, I guess."

Erica tossed the phone aside with a snort. "Forget it. I'll just take a shower. Maybe it'll just fix itself after a while."

"Okay, go ahead! I'll warm up your bed for you!"

Hearing this, Erica smiled cheekily. "Beauty, wait for me. I'll be back soon!"

"Ha-ha, you lecher, go to take a shower!"

"Okay!"

After taking a shower, Erica slept in the same bed as Rhea. Some time later she opened the WeChat and tried her password again. Unexpectedly, it worked this time.

She checked her account and found that the money in it was still there.

'What the hell was going on?' she wondered.

Beside her, Rhea opened Watkins' WeChat Moments and clicked on a photo to show it to Erica. "Hey, looks like Watkins is from a rich family too," she commented. "He has so many luxury cars!"

But Erica knew this already and said, "Yes, his father is the CEO of Champion Group." Still, if she hadn't gone to Champion Group to look for Tam before, she wouldn't have known that Watkins' family had anything to do with the company.

A moment passed. Erica was also browsing the WeChat Moments, trying to check Watkins' updates, but she couldn't find his account. "What's Watkins' name on WeChat?" she asked.

She remembered that she had changed his alias to his real name when she friended Watkins on WeChat. Why couldn't she find his account now?

"His WeChat name is an emoji. Haven't you changed his alias?" asked Rhea.

"I'm sure I have, but I can't find it now!" Erica searched her contact list twice without success.

She entered Watkins' account yet again and found that it was not in her friend list.

Erica went to friend Watkins on WeChat again and murmured, "What the hell?"

At that same moment, Matthew, who was still abroad, was leaning against the headboard and staring at

his laptop screen. He had been monitoring Erica's WeChat all this time, and did not miss when she sent a friend request to Watkins again.

It was a simple matter for him to block the friend request from going through.

A moment later, he received a message from his wife. "Matthew, are you asleep?" she asked.

Matthew calmly picked up his phone and replied, "Not yet."

A message came back. "Let me ask you a question. Were you angry just now?"

He felt a little helpless. Was it because he didn't show his anger clearly, or because she was just slow to react? "What do you think?" he asked.

"I don't think you're narrow-minded. Watkins and I are just normal friends. You know that, right?"

CHAPTER 1235 ETHAN LEF

Matthew was speechless. Erica was so good at flattering him.

Anxiety and nervousness coursed through Erica as she had not received Matthew's reply for a long time. Was he angry as Rhea had said?

'Perhaps I should forget about it. After all, it's difficult to figure out what's on a man's mind!' Since it was futile to continue guessing, she decided to wait until he returned.

In Askor

Since Erica had agreed, Tam had booked the earliest flight tickets to Askor. A day later, Tam and his wife, Yanny, stood nervously before the door to the Leonard family house.

Once inside, Tam put aside the valuable gifts that he had brought. Suppressing the urge to hug his son, he and his wife first greeted the older Leonard family members who stood before them in the living room. "Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard." Then he nodded to Chantel and Yvette. "I am Tam Watts, Ethan's biological father, and this is my wife, Yanny Perry. Thank you for taking care of Ethan for so long."

Wesley's expression soured, and he glared at Tam silently. Meanwhile, Blair lovingly gazed at Ethan, who she held in her arms. Her blood-shot eyes indicated that she had been crying.

Chantel looked at Blair with concern while Yvette tried to hold back the tears that threatened to spill down her cheeks.

As no one spoke for a while, the atmosphere became a little awkward. Tam steeled himself and broke the silence. "I know that all of this has been my fault, and I apologize. My actions have caused a lot of

trouble, especially for Erica. We'll take Ethan to Australia and settle there. We won't return to Alorith again. My wife is kind, and she will treat Ethan well. Please don't worry as we'll take good care of him!"

Yanny had mixed feelings as she looked at the wide-eyed little boy, who was holding a toy car. 'No wonder Tam wants to take him home. It isn't just fatherly love and instinct that draws him to Ethan. This boy is so cute that anyone would want to hug him at first sight, ' she thought.

"Australia?" Wesley was surprised. He had assumed that Tam would return to Alorith with Ethan. That way, Rika could still visit him when she missed him.

Tam nodded, "Yes. We know it's far, but you can see the child at any time. If you'd like, we can bring Ethan to visit you when we return home for festivals."

Blair's heart grew increasingly heavy. This was a heartbreaking moment for her, but she had to say goodbye. She glanced at Ethan as she spoke. "Eth, go to your father."

Ethan looked at Blair, who was holding him in her arms. He didn't understand what she had said because he was too young to know what 'father' meant.

Hearing Blair's instructions, Tam stood up cautiously and walked up to her. With outstretched arms, he said, "Son, let me hug you!"

Ethan was more willing to interact with strangers in the daytime than in the evening. So when Tam wanted to hug Ethan, he didn't pull away.

Ten minutes later, Tam and Yanny carried Ethan out of the villa, and the Leonard family followed to bid them farewell.

Once at the car, Tam placed Ethan's luggage in the trunk and helped Yanny and Ethan get into the car.

He then turned and expressed his gratitude to Wesley and Blair again. "Thank you for raising Ethan for so long, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard. If there's nothing else, we'll start our journey."

Wesley nodded. No matter how much he wanted to, he couldn't bring himself to speak.

Tam sat in the car, rolled down the window, and instructed the driver to start.

At this moment, Ethan, who had been quiet, burst into tears. He couldn't understand why Blair and Yvette were outside the car and why they were crying.

"Grandma, Grandma..." he called to Blair. Then he stretched his arms to Blair, wanting her to hug him.

Tears streamed down Blair's cheeks as she rushed forward. But, Wesley stopped her.

Yvette could no longer contain her emotions. Hot tears flowed down her cheeks as she waved goodbye to Ethan.

Chantel held Blair's hand and whispered comforting words to her, "Auntie, don't cry. We'll see Ethan again."

"Waah..." in the car, Ethan's crying grew louder and louder. His eyes were fixed on Blair and Wesley as desperation coursed through him.

Wesley let go of Blair, took a step forward, grabbed Ethan's hand, and said, "Don't you remember what I taught you? Men don't cry. If you want to stay with us, study hard and earn a place in a military school. Then, come here to work. Your uncle Gifford will train you!"

'Ethan will always be one of the Leonards,' he thought.

Gifford was still on a mission and didn't know that Ethan was being taken away.

The boy continued to sob. "Grandpa..."

As tough as Wesley was, his eyes reddened as well. Then he mustered all the courage he possibly could and let go of Ethan's little hand. He told Tam, "Leave before I change my mind."

Just as the engine roared to life, Yvette trotted over and said to Tam through the half-open window, "If, someday, you decide that you don't want to raise Ethan anymore, bring him back to us. We won't blame you. Ethan will always be one of us."

The silver car was finally out of sight.

And Ethan's wail couldn't be heard anymore. Blair sobbed in Wesley's arms.

With red eyes and arm-in-arm with Yvette, who was also crying, Chantel continued her efforts to comfort the two women.

Chantel closed her eyes for a brief moment and made a new wish. She wanted to have a child for Wesley and Blair to raise so that they would never experience this anguish again. But, to do so, she needed to bear Gifford's child.

What distressed her was that Gifford hadn't been home for a long time. He was hardly around, and she might not be able to see him even if he returned occasionally. How was she supposed to have his baby?

At the Pearl Villa District

When Tam and Ethan arrived at Matthew's villa to say goodbye to Erica, Rhea had just left the house after her visit. Erica intended to return to school with her camera, but she received a call from Tam

before she could get in the car. "Mrs. Erica, it's me, Tam. I picked up Ethan yesterday, and we're leaving for Australia tomorrow. Can we come to see you now if you're free?"

'Leaving for Australia tomorrow?' Erica was still processing the shocking news.

Then, she nodded, "Yes, I'm at home."

Tam knew the address of the villa. After hanging up the phone, Erica returned to the house to wait for the father and son.

Ten minutes later, her phone rang again. She thought it was Tam, so she answered the phone without even looking at the screen. "Are you here yet?"

"Yes. How do you know?"

It was not Tam's voice.

Erica checked the number. It was not Tam's. "Who is this?"

"It's me. Watkins. You saved my number. How could you not know it was me?" Watkins had watched Erica save his phone number when they were partying the other day.

Confusion coursed through Erica. She remembered that she had saved his phone number, but why was his name no longer on her contact list? "It's so strange. I lost both your WeChat account and phone number. Is my phone infected with a virus?"

That was the only possibility that she could think of. But, she hadn't downloaded from or browsed any unsafe website recently. How could a virus attack her phone?

CHAPTER 1236 MOMMY

Since Watkins and Erica were in different places at that moment and he couldn't see her phone, he couldn't explain what was going on. All he knew was that she sounded really cute. He smiled in spite of himself. "Come here and let me see your phone."

"Where are you?" she asked.

"At the entrance to your villa." Watkins had just parked the car at the gate of the villa. He couldn't get in, so he was stuck outside.

"Ah! You're here? I'll be right out. How did you know where I was?" Erica walked out of the bedroom and bounded downstairs quickly.

Leaning against the car, Watkins replied honestly, "Rhea told me. I knew she was headed back to her own country, so I called her to say goodbye. She told me you saw her off at the airport, and thought

you'd be home by now."

"Oh! I see. Wait a minute. I'm headed your way."

After hanging up the phone, Erica trotted towards the gate of the villa, phone in hand.

It took about ten minutes to walk from the front door of the villa's living room to the gate. As the crow flew, it would have taken only five. But Matthew had installed a traffic island and filled it full of flowers and bushes. There was no way to get through that without a great deal of trouble. So Erica had to follow the road around it.

Three minutes later, Erica reached the gate, out of breath.

Watkins wore a white sweatshirt, sweatpants, and a new pair of sneakers. He leaned against his convertible. When he saw Erica, he waved at her. "Hi, Erica!"

"Hey, why are you here?" Erica asked, panting. She was exhausted. She contemplated buying a scooter so she could ride out to the gate and back.

"I tried to get ahold of you, but you weren't online. It's almost noon. I thought you might want go out and get some lunch. Oh, by the way, where's your phone? You said it's virused? Let me see."

Erica took out her phone and unlocked it for him. She put her hands on her hips and said, "I can't go now, because I'm meeting up with someone later."

"Oh, I was wondering how you knew I was here before I called. You thought I was someone else, huh?" Far from being annoyed, Watkins thought this rashness was rather endearing.

Hearing this, Erica felt a little embarrassed. "Yeah, I answered my phone without checking the number."

Watkins tinkered with her phone for a while. Looking at her wallpaper, he asked casually, "This your husband?"

"Huh? What?"

"The wallpaper." The wallpaper of Erica's phone was a photo of a man leaning against the hood of a car, smoking. She'd snapped it the other day.

Erica admitted, "Yeah. My husband's getting hotter and hotter. So I took a pic of him to remind me!"

She liked hot men, and often used pictures of them as wallpaper. She used to have Aaron on there, until she found out what kind of guy he was. He didn't seem half as attractive after that happened.

The smile on Watkins' face didn't change. "He's a pretty good-looking guy. You were lucky to marry the

guy. Matthew is the dream of thousands of girls in the city. You must get a lot of attention."

"Yeah, hate mostly. They're jealous of me, but it's true—I'm a lucky girl." Erica giggled. Luckily, she was born into the Leonard family and became the daughter of Wesley and Blair. Then she found herself even luckier to marry Matthew despite the fact that she had been forced into the marriage. It was one of the best things that happened to her.

After examining her phone for a while, Watkins found that there was nothing wrong with it, so he took out his own phone and said, "Let's friend each other on WeChat again."

"Okay."

When they were on each other's contacts list again, Watkins handed her the phone.

After talking face to face for a while, Erica saw Tam's car pulling up.

Tam was driving, and Julianna sat in the back seat, Ethan in her arms. Erica didn't think Julianna would be here. When Julianna emerged from the car with Ethan, things got a little awkward.

But Erica didn't pay much attention to it. She strode over and took Ethan from her arms. "Eth, come here. Let Mommy hold you!"

The little boy wore the clothes Blair bought him before: a light brown short hooded coat, black trousers and a light brown hat.

Tam and Watkins knew each other. When they shook hands and greeted each other, Watkins heard Erica refer to herself as Ethan's mom.

He knew that Tessie and Tam were the child's real parents, but he held his tongue. Eventually, he walked over to the child and played with him for a little while.

For the past couple days, Ethan had been crying nonstop. He missed Wesley and Blair, having bonded with them. When he saw Erica, the waterworks started again. He hurt badly.

It made Erica's heart ache. She held Ethan in her arms and tried to calm him. "Good boy, don't cry, good boy."

Tam walked up to her and said, "We're flying to Australia tomorrow morning. Both my wife and Julianna seem to like the little cutie. Don't worry, we'll take good care of him!"

Ethan had changed his surname since he was taken back to the Watts family. Now his name was Ethan Watts.

Erica shifted her gaze from Tam, and looked at Julianna, who stood there, staring blankly. Erica nodded

and said, "If Ethan gets to be too much trouble, just call me. We'll take him back in a heartbeat."

Tam didn't say anything but smiled bitterly. He would never think of Ethan as any kind of trouble again.

He could tell that the Leonard family really liked Ethan. Yvette had said about the same thing. Now Erica confirmed it. Tam felt happy for Ethan. The boy had been raised by the Leonard family, and they were kind parents. He couldn't have asked for more.

The little boy was getting heavier and heavier. Erica put Ethan on the ground, took out something from her pocket, squatted down in front of him and put it on for him. "Eth, these bracelets are for you. If you miss me, just look at your bracelets, okay? I'll send you another gift next birthday!"

She knew Ethan was leaving, so she went shopping for the specific silver bracelets. She brought Rhea with her. They both felt they were perfect.

The bracelets were not expensive, but they each had a lock indicating safety with words "safe" and "healthy" carved on it. What better to carry Erica's wishes for Ethan?

There was nothing on Ethan's wrists, so the pair of bracelets looked just fine.

After putting on the bracelets for him, she picked him up again and kissed him. Once, then twice. She really loved the little guy. "Now, all done. I'll see you soon, okay?"

This time, Ethan called clearly, "Mommy—"

Tears welled up in Erica's eyes when she heard the boy call her "Mommy." This was the baby she had brought back home. The kid she raised, the kid she sacrificed everything for. And now he was leaving. She threw her arms around him and buried her face in Ethan's neck. She sobbed and sobbed.

Ethan thought she was playing with him, so he put his arms around Erica's neck and grinned, revealing his baby teeth. Little, white, perfect and shiny. He looked super-cute like that.

Julianna took it all in, a complicated look in her eyes. After a while, she came over and said, "Erica, if you want to see him in the future, just send me a message. My number's still the same, and so is my WeChat account."

Tessie and Lenora had been sent away, and Matthew had taught her a lesson as well. When she calmed down, she reflected on everything that had happened between her and the other two girls.

Erica had never done anything wrong. She'd always been a good friend. They fell out over Julianna's now ex-boyfriend, but Erica knew he was no good from the start. She saw that now.

CHAPTER 1237 THE WARNING

Everyone, including Julianna, knew that Tessie had lied about what had happened between her and Erica.

Erica didn't want to hold a grudge against Julianna over this issue as she knew that she could put it behind her after Tam and his family left Alorith tomorrow.

Erica forced back her tears, turned, and nodded at Julianna. "Thank you for accepting Ethan."

She could now sympathize with Julianna. After all, her father suddenly had a son, and she had a younger brother.

And all this was because her father had an affair with her best friend. Who could accept such a reprehensible relationship? However, Julianna's actions showed that she seemed to have accepted Ethan as her father's son and her baby brother.

Julianna smiled, "Why should you thank me? He is my father's son. I should thank your family for being so kind to him even though they know that he is not your child."

Her reassurance appeared genuine.

Her mother had been pale-faced and dispirited when she had told Julianna about how she had fought with her father when she learned about Ethan. Between sobs, she had said that she didn't want to divorce him.

After all, Tam had been very good to her before. As they had been married for more than twenty years, it was not easy to break up. She wanted to give him another chance.

If her mother could forgive her father, why couldn't she?

Despite her unwillingness, Erica handed Ethan to Julianna. "My baby, go to your...sister!"

Tears welled in his eyes, and Ethan's chubby arms tightened their grip around Erica's neck. He refused to let go.

Seeing that Ethan was about to cry, Tam stepped forward and said, "Let me do it."

As he had spent more time with Ethan than Julianna, Tam believed that Ethan would be more willing to go to him.

Tam removed a corn candy from his pocket and held it in front of Ethan. With a kind smile, he said, "Ethan, here is a candy for you. Come to Dad."

Ethan glanced at Erica, hesitated for a short while, and then stretched a hand toward Tam.

The smile on Tam's face grew as he lifted the little boy in his arms. Seeing that the little boy was about to cry again, he quickly opened the candy and gave it to him. "Good boy, don't cry. Daddy will buy some toys for you, okay?" Tam coaxed as he walked further away from Erica and Julianna.

Complex feelings coursed through the two girls as they watched father and son leave.

Shortly after, Tam informed Erica that they had to return to the Watts Clan's old house to say goodbye to the clan members. It was time for them to leave.

The car engine roared to life, but Ethan seemed distracted by the toys he was playing with while sitting in Julianna's arms. He didn't notice that he was parting from Erica.

Erica's heart shattered when the car pulled away. The anguish of separation ran so deep that she covered her mouth to suppress her sobs.

At a loss about what to do, Watkins' tone was gentle as he comforted her, "Erica, don't cry..."

Tears blurred Erica's sight. As she couldn't see Watkins' face clearly, she closed her eyes. But her tears continued to fall.

Watkins removed a pack of tissues from his car, took out a wipe, and gently dried the tears on Erica's face. "Nowadays, communication and transportation are very developed. It's not difficult to see a person even if they are far away. You can visit Ethan whenever you want."

At that moment, another car pulled into the driveway, but Erica was too overwhelmed with sadness to notice it.

She was still crying when the car stopped near them.

The car door opened and a man stepped out. When the door slammed shut, Erica was shaken from her sorrow.

But tears blurred her vision. She couldn't see much but vaguely guessed that Matthew had returned.

'It must be an illusion, ' she thought.

When the car pulled into the driveway, and Matthew saw Erica and Watkins stand so close to each other, he couldn't wait for the driver to open the door for him. So he pushed the door open and got out of the car.

Watkins, who was wiping Erica's tears, sensed the coldness emanating from the man. He withdrew his hand, smiled politely, and nodded at Matthew.

Matthew was pissed. He felt that he couldn't go on any more business trips as he would find Watkins

and Erica together every time he returned.

Last time, he saw Erica apply ointment to Watkins' wound, and this time, he saw the man wipe Erica's tears.

The two were so intimate when alone. Did Erica and Watkins not care for what people would think if they saw them together? And what about Matthew? Did neither worry about his feelings or reputation?

Fury coursed through Matthew at the thought. Just as he was about to speak

Erica grabbed the tissue in Watkins' hand and wiped her tears.

When she saw that Matthew had indeed returned, she ignored his grim expression and threw herself in his arms. Hysterical sobs escaped her lips as she tried to tell him what had happened. "Matthew, Ethan... Ethan left... Boo... hoo... He is moving to Australia!"

As the woman in his arms seemed so anguished, Matthew held back his anger.

After a while, he reached out with his hand and stiffly stroked her hair to comfort her.

His scent and warm embrace, which she was familiar with, were enough to relieve the grievance in her heart. Erica's weeping gradually turned into gentle sobs.

Watkins knew he should leave the couple alone. He pushed his hands deep into the pockets of his jacket and said, "Mr. Matthew, Erica, I will leave now."

Erica wanted to raise her head from Matthew's arms, but he pressed her head against his chest so that she couldn't look at Watkins.

With a grim expression, Matthew warned Watkins, "Mr. Watkins, please leave as soon as possible. You'd better not appear in front of my wife again."

Watkins was stunned by his harsh tone. As Matthew had misunderstood his relationship with Erica, Watkins decided to explain. "Mr. Matthew, you might have mistaken my intentions. I believe Mrs. Erica is lovely, like a little girl. I just want to be friends with her."

"Yes, my wife is cute. But, she is a married woman and carries the Hilton family surname. It is not suitable for her to be friends with a single man. Besides, there are many lovely girls in the world. If you want, I can arrange for a dozen of them to be at your service." The man stood still with his wife in his arms. The imperial aura he emitted was beyond the reach of Watkins, a boy who had not yet graduated from university.

Erica wanted to refute Matthew's words, but Matthew didn't allow her to look up.

But then, Watkins conveyed what she wanted to say. "Mr. Matthew, you're too overbearing. How can you deprive Erica of the right to make friends? She won't be happy if you keep doing this!"

Erica repeatedly nodded as she agreed with Watkins.

Matthew held her head tightly so that she couldn't raise her head at all. "Mr. Watkins, you're wrong. Rika was very happy before she met you. Most importantly, as her husband, I'm responsible for her happiness. A bachelor like you wouldn't understand the fun and romance Erica and I have."

That was a harsh comment, especially his use of the word "bachelor."

As Watkins got in his car, Erica struggled to free herself from Matthew's hold. It was not until the car had disappeared that Matthew let go of the woman in his arms and looked at her indifferently. "Matthew, how could you say that about Watkins?"

"What do you mean?"

"You said that he was a bachelor."

Matthew asked, "Isn't he?"

Erica didn't know how to respond. 'Well, he seems to be unattached. Otherwise, why did he have the time to come to see me?'

Her reaction deepened Matthew's annoyance. Every time he got off the plane, he would go straight home. And every time he reached the villa, he would see her and Watkins. He warned, "Erica!"

"Yes?"

"I'm warning you now. Stay away from Watkins in the future!"

CHAPTER 1238 WHAT A WASTE OF MONEY

Tears welled up in Erica's red eyes again. Her lips quivered as she complained to the man standing in front of her with a long face. "Why are you scolding me?" Erica was already having a hard time dealing with Ethan's departure.

Matthew stood in stunned silence, his mouth agape at Erica's reaction. Was he not supposed to scold her? Was he not supposed to be angry at her? "Then what do you think I should do to you?" he asked. 'Should I just sit by and watch her get close to another man?'

Erica's eyes and nose were red from crying. She wiped away her tears and said, "We haven't seen each other for a week. Don't you miss me?" She missed having him around, especially since she had been sleeping alone.

Needless to say, Matthew missed her as well. Why else would he end his trip one day earlier and return to his home country in such a hurry? Why else did he rush home instead of going to the company as soon as he got off the plane?

Erica, however, didn't expect him to say that he missed her. Perhaps, the woman he missed was Phoebe. In any case, she was determined to push that woman out of his heart. "Come here!" she ordered the man.

Matthew couldn't believe his ears. Where did she get the audacity to speak to him like that? How dare she raise her voice to him? Nonetheless, he took a step forward.

"Lower your head!" she ordered again.

'She's ordering me again!' Despite the anger, he humored Erica again as he looked down at her in confusion.

"What are you looking at? Kiss me now!" 'Isn't that what a couple is supposed to do after they see each for the first time in days? I see other couples hugging and kissing each other when they meet again after a long time. Why is my case any different?' Erica wondered.

She soon came to realize what the reason was. 'Matthew is just a cold and arrogant man!'

Without saying a word, Matthew held the woman in his arms and lowered his head to kiss her red lips.

In truth, this was what he had in mind the whole time. If only he hadn't become so furious after seeing her with Watkins.

However, Erica couldn't stop thinking about Ethan and she kept on sobbing silently.

Tears streamed down her cheeks and stopped at the spot where their lips locked. The salt from her tears spread inside their mouths and Matthew immediately loosened his grip on the woman, with a worried look in his eyes. "Did I hurt you?"

"No... I was just think of Ethan again. I'm sorry..." Erica couldn't control her emotions anymore.

Matthew sighed helplessly. "If you cry again, I'll have someone bring Ethan back right now. I'll also make sure that Tam never sees him for the rest of his life!"

Matthew only cared about his wife's mood, which was far more important to him than the reunion of Tam and his son.

'How could you be so cruel?' Erica pouted. She sniffled pitifully and said, "I'm not crying. I can go to Australia to see him in the future."

"That's right. I can take you to see him whenever you want!" Matthew promised. With his long and slender fingers he covered her eyes and wiped away her tears.

"Okay! It's settled!"

"Okay!"

Matthew held Erica's hand and led her into the car. The driver drove them back to the villa.

In the bedroom, Matthew took off his tie and unbuttoned his shirt. When he saw Erica carrying his suitcase into the walk-in closet, he strode in and said, "Next time if Watkins invites you to dinner, call me."

Erica looked up at him with puzzlement and asked, "Why?"

The man took off his suit jacket and explained calmly, "You are students with no source of income yet. It's not the same with me, so it'll be my treat."

Erica silently lowered her head and fiddled with his suitcase. "You just asked me to stay away from Watkins, and now you want me to call you if he invites me to dinner. Mr. Matthew, what do you really want? It's so hard to be your wife!"

"Well... then just stay away from him." It would be best if they didn't see each other again.

"What is the password of the locks to your suitcase? Let me help you unpack your luggage." Erica had nothing better to do. Besides, Matthew had been working hard for several days now; he would have been exhausted.

Matthew answered, "2508."

"Is it the same password for the two locks?" There were two coded locks in Matthew's suitcase, to ensure maximum safety.

"Yes."

Erica flipped open his suitcase with ease and found his briefcase and some work related necessities inside, but no clothes. "Where are your clothes?"

"I don't have any."

"What? Then how did you change your clothes there?" Erica, half squatting on the floor, raised her head and looked at him in confusion.

"I had my assistants prepare new clothes for me every day." Matthew had asked his assistants to take

care of the clothes he had worn and he didn't think it was necessary to bring them back from abroad.

Erica looked at him with stunned disbelief. 'Wow! Mr. Big Spender!' "That's such a waste of money! You shouldn't do that again. I'll help you tidy up your luggage if you go on a business trip again," she said, assertively. 'Can't he just give that money to his wife? Why waste it?' Erica shook her head disapprovingly.

He protested, but in a low voice, "But the fabric will wrinkle when they are folded."

"Then let your assistant iron it for you. Don't make excuses!" she retorted. Erica felt as though her heart was bleeding!

Matthew shook his head helplessly. Arguing with his wife wasn't going to give him peace. Matthew could only be at peace as long as she was happy. "Okay!"

Erica took out the folders from his suitcase and found a box under it. The box was light pink in color and it looked very exquisite. "What's this?"

He looked back and explained casually, "Oh, it's a bottle of the latest perfume. I saw it when I did a market search in a mall. You can try it."

'Perfume?' A touch of joy spread across Erica's heart. "Is it for me?"

This time, without turning his head, Matthew took out a suit from the closet and said, "You can take it as a gift for you!"

What did he mean "take it as a gift?" The joy disappeared from her face almost in an instant. "It doesn't matter if it's not for me. I don't usually use perfume. You can give it to whoever you want!"

She assumed that Matthew must have felt pressured to give it to her, even though it was never intended for her.

Matthew frowned. After all, she was his wife. Who else could he give the perfume to? He looked back at her with a serious face. "It's for you!" Why did she have to force it out of him? It was so embarrassing.

Erica was confused by his anger. "Why are you glaring at me like that? I told you that you can give it to whoever you want. I don't want it. Why are you so angry?" Erica regretted unpacking his luggage in the first place. If she hadn't looked through his suitcase, she wouldn't have found the bottle of perfume, and he wouldn't have been glaring at her right now.

Matthew took a deep breath and said calmly, "Think about why I'm glaring at you!"

"I'm not a mind reader. How can I know what you are thinking?"

Erica finally realized how easy it was for them to break into an argument with each other.

Matthew was utterly frustrated by her attitude. "Erica, how many wives do I have?"

She blinked at him with confusion. Why did he suddenly ask her this? Why was he asking her such a silly question? She answered impatiently, "One!"

"Who is it?"

She blinked again and asked cautiously, "Have you finally lost your mind? Why are you asking so much nonsense?"

Matthew felt helpless. It was as if nothing was going right for him today. His wife was busy acting so foolishly that she couldn't even understand that the gift was for her! "Is there a problem with a man giving his wife nice things?"

"No problem!"

"Since there is no problem, just keep it! Please!"

After a moment's silence, Erica was convinced. "So, you really bought this for me?"

"Who else could it be for?" he replied impatiently.

With a big grin on her face, Erica held the perfume bottle and said, "Then just tell me frankly. Just say you brought me a gift. Why did you have to ruin such a nice moment by saying something so stupid?" Wasn't Matthew always straightforward and efficient? What was wrong with him today? Why was he beating around the bush?

'He's just so arrogant!' she thought.

Matthew unbuckled his belt and looked at her coldly. "My fault?" Was he wrong to give her a gift?

Erica swallowed nervously as she saw him take off his pants. Fascinated by what she was looking at, she shook her head in a hurry. "It's my fault." 'He's hot; he's the boss!' she exclaimed in her mind.

CHAPTER 1239 SINGLE DOG

A mischievous smile tugged on Matthew's lips. Satisfied with Erica's apology, he said, "Come here!" Then, he crooked his finger at her.

Erica, perfume bottle in hand, immediately sashayed toward him and asked with a chuckle, "Mr. Matthew, what can I do for you?" Delighted with her attitude, he pulled her into his arms and whispered in her ear, "I was not satisfied with the kiss earlier. Let's do it again!"

Erica giggled, and a tinge of pink graced her cheeks. Then, she lowered her eyes and saw that he was still undressed. Her face flushed, and she stuttered, "Yes, sure. But you have to wear your clothes first!"

Matthew grabbed the closest night robe in the wardrobe and nimbly put it on. His swift movement caused his muscles to ripple, and Erica almost swooned.

The passion glimmering in her eyes pleased the man. With raised eyebrows, he ordered, "You can start now!"

"O-okay." Erica put the perfume bottle aside, encased his waist with her slender arms, stood on tiptoe, and kissed his thin lips.

Soon, the sound of their rapid breathing echoed in the otherwise quiet closet.

More than ten minutes later, Erica escaped from Matthew's tight embrace. Before leaving, she grabbed the bottle of perfume.

Bang! The door slammed shut behind Erica. Still excited from her intimate moment with Matthew, she leaned against the wall and tried to steady her breath.

She placed her fair, delicate finger on her hot burning face and thought, 'Oh, my God! Matthew is such a flirt...'

Only then did she realize that she was disheveled. She lowered her head and tidied up her clothes which Matthew had pulled open, before trotting to the dresser to study the perfume.

The perfume had a light fragrance with a lingering scent of fresh fruit. It was delightfully sweet.

Erica licked her lips as she studied the light blue liquid in the bottle. It looked tasty too...

After Matthew showered and changed his clothes, they grabbed a quick lunch outside. As Erica had more classes, she needed to return to school.

At the entrance of Alorith University

Owen glanced at his watch as annoyance coursed through him. He had been waiting for ten minutes.

A few minutes later, he finally saw the person for whom he had been waiting. He immediately straightened his clothes, took a few steps forward, and called, "Mr. Watkins!"

Watkins' brow furrowed when he saw a strange man hailing him. It took a minute or so for Watkins to remember that this man was Owen, one of Matthew's personal assistants.

But he didn't know why Matthew had sent Owen to him. Cautiously, he greeted the man, "Hello, Mr.

Owen."

With a polite smile, Owen replied, "Mr. Watkins, may I have a word with you?"

Still confused about Owen's purpose, Watkins glimpsed at his two friends. Then he turned, nodded, and said, "Sure!"

The two walked toward Owen's car in silence. As the assistant unlocked the trunk, Watkins shot him a puzzled look.

An odd noise dragged Watkins' attention back to the trunk. His eyes flew open when he saw a Shiba Inu puppy peering back at him through the bars of a delicate cage.

The dog was about ten centimeters tall.

Owen took out the cage and handed it to Watkins.

When the younger man took the cage, Owen calmly relayed Matthew's message. "Mr. Watkins, this is a gift from Matthew. He asked me to buy you a little dog as he thought you might be lonely! Mr. Watkins, please take it. I'm leaving now."

Watkins was speechless. 'I'm lonely? Is this some kind of joke?'

Before Watkins could retort, Owen got into the car, started it, and drove away.

Confusion coursed through Watkins as he glanced at the pup in his hand, and then at the disappearing luxury car.

'It's okay if Matthew doesn't want me to see Erica. But what does he mean by giving me a dog?' Watkins' eyes flew open when he understood Matthew's subtle message.

'Is he implying that I'm a poor single dog*?'

(*TN: Single dog is Chinese Internet slang for people who are single and in need of company.) The realization angered Watkins. Not only did Matthew order him to stay away from Erica, but he was also taunting him!

This was an unbearable insult!

There were two days left before Matthew's birthday. In the office, he called Owen through the internal line. "Send someone to keep an eye on Erica. Report to me immediately if she behaves unusually!"

As his birthday was approaching, Matthew felt increasingly certain that Erica would misbehave. He had to ensure that nothing went wrong.

"Yes, Matthew."

The day before his birthday, Matthew received a report from his subordinate. His wife went shopping with her classmate after school, and nothing unusual happened.

Matthew was still worried. He instructed the bodyguards to watch Erica closely as the mall could be crowded. If something happened to her, they would face Matthew's wrath!

At the Shining International Plaza.

Erica and Hyatt walked around the men's products floor, wondering what present she should give to Matthew for his birthday.

She had never been so undecided when choosing gifts for her father and brother. As they were more frugal, they would not buy a second item if the old one was useful.

But Matthew was different. He already had a ton of watches, ties, sunglasses... He had everything!

Trying to find the perfect gift for a man who had everything was giving her a headache.

When she passed a men's accessories shop, her attention was drawn to a brocade box.

The saleslady next to them immediately explained, "Sir, ma'am, this is a gemmed cufflink. It's an important accessory for a man as it is a symbol of good taste. As this cufflink is inlaid with sapphire, it perfectly matches men's white shirts. The style is classic, simple, and elegant."

'Matches white shirts?' Erica recalled that most of Matthew's shirts were white. This would be the perfect birthday gift!

She peeked at the tag again. The price of the cufflinks was sixty-five thousand, nine hundred, and ninety-nine dollars.

Ouch! She felt her heart ache.

Why did she come to the Shining International Plaza to search for a birthday gift? Had she been smart, Erica would have visited the mall two kilometers away. Everything was a great deal cheaper there, and cufflinks would have cost only a few dollars.

Erica gently lifted one of the cufflinks and studied it. The sapphire on it shone so brightly that she felt it warranted the price. Even then, it hurt to think of how much money it cost.

Hyatt's eyes almost popped out. He whispered in her ear, "Erica, it looks good. It's very suitable for your husband."

She nodded, "I believe so as well. But it is too expensive..." Then, with a sweet smile, she asked the saleslady next to her, "Well... is there a discount?"

The smile on the saleslady's face didn't change. "I'm sorry, ma'am. We don't sell our goods at a discount all year round. But, there are some promotional activities in the shopping mall. You can get a suitcase with the Shining International Plaza's logo if you shop for fifty thousand dollars. If you spend one hundred thousand dollars, the value of the gifts increases as well. You can visit the reception desk to learn more."

Erica nodded. As she hadn't found anything suitable after hours of searching, she agreed to the cost. "Please pack it for me."

"Okay. Would you like to pay by card or cash?"

"Swipe my card!" Suppressing the reluctance in her heart, Erica removed a card from her purse and followed the saleslady to the checkout counter to pay the bill.

At Hilton Group

It was late at night, and Matthew was still finishing his last task for the day.

At about ten o'clock, he called Paige through the internal line. "Cancel all my meetings for tomorrow." Paige was surprised. The CEO's daily schedule was usually arranged half a month in advance.

Perhaps he had forgotten what was on his schedule for the next day. Paige felt it was prudent to remind him, "But, Matthew, you have an important meeting tomorrow..."

Matthew's tone was quite decisive when he replied, "Postpone it for a day. And let the important clients know that I will visit them in person later."

CHAPTER 1240 RIKA LEONARD HILTON

"What about Phoebe's prenatal check-up tomorrow?" Paige asked.

Matthew frowned. Why was another prenatal check-up scheduled so soon? "Since I have another engagement, you need to accompany her. My instructions apply to all future prenatal examinations as well."

Paige nodded as she replied, "Yes, Matthew." She thought, 'Matthew is conscientious and always puts his work first. Why did he cancel his meetings for tomorrow? What's happening?'

"Don't call me for anything. If you need something, contact the general manager," he added.

Although puzzled by the situation, Paige had to suppress her curiosity. "Yes, Matthew."

The evening inched closer to midnight.

At the Pearl Villa District

A camouflaged figure jumped down from the windowsill and ran toward the wall encircling the villa's courtyard. A glance showed the figure that two bodyguards were patrolling the main gate of the villa.

Erica had sensed that several people had been following her these past two days, and she was right.

A shiver went down her spine when she thought of what would happen next. She mumbled a quick apology as she felt sorry for Matthew.

Then, without further hesitation, she threw the rope in her hand upward...

At eleven twenty, Matthew's car slowly pulled into the villa's driveway.

The man stepped out and glanced at the two bodyguards, who had walked up to the car. "Where is Erica?"

One of the bodyguards immediately answered, "Matthew, Erica is inside. She hasn't stepped out since she returned tonight."

"Good." Matthew nodded with satisfaction.

After entering the villa, he made his way to the bedroom on the third floor.

Oddly enough, there was a piece of white paper stuck to the heavy wooden door. Matthew's brow furrowed as he read the note, "Please look at the bed."

A sense of foreboding coursed through him. It struck him then that the villa was too quiet, which was contrary to Erica's personality.

He pushed the door open and surveyed the room. The bedside lamp had been switched on, but there was no one in the room.

When he walked to the bed, Matthew saw that a brocade box had been placed alongside another note.

The handwriting on the paper matched the note he had found on the door. It said, "Happy birthday, Matthew! I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I will be gone for two days. When I return, I'll be at your disposal! I carefully selected the gift in the brocade box. I hope you like your birthday present! I promise that I will return after a few days. Please don't worry. Bye! From your cowardly wife, Rika Leonard Hilton."

'Rika Leonard Hilton? Humph!'

For the past two days, Matthew had felt that Erica would misbehave. Although he had taken all precautions, he hadn't thought that she would run away! The temperature in the room seemed to fall several degrees as fury coursed through Matthew. Slowly, he crumpled the note she had left him.

So far, Erica had been the only person who dared to play such a trick on him!

Perhaps he had treated her so well that she thought he could be easily bullied.

Matthew pulled out his phone and dialed a number. As soon as the call connected, he ordered sternly, "Search the whole city for my wife. Make sure you leave no stone unturned!"

Anyone who angered Matthew faced dire consequences.

Even though it was the middle of the night, all the hotel check-in systems in Alorith were examined to see if Erica had made a reservation under her name.

But the search didn't yield any positive results.

She wasn't at school or any of the Internet cafes. They couldn't find her anywhere!

Matthew didn't sleep the whole night. As soon as the sun kissed the horizon, he left the villa and drove to one of their other houses in Alorith. It appeared as though Erica had been here!

There were obvious traces that someone had slept in the bedroom. The corners of his lips hooked into a smile as he recanted his words. He had always said that Erica was stupid, but now he knew otherwise.

She was not stupid at all! She knew the most dangerous place was the safest.

From what he could tell, she had stolen the key to their other house from the study and come here. She had even tucked herself in the new silk quilt and slept comfortably for the night.

When he stepped into the bathroom, he noticed that she had used the toiletries that had been placed for his occasional visits. Finally, Matthew watched the surveillance video and saw that she had left the community in a good mood early that morning.

'Erica Niugulu, good job!' Matthew thought as he gritted his teeth.

Meanwhile, since Matthew had placed men in all the airports and railway stations, Erica had no choice but to spend thousands of dollars to hail a private car. When the car arrived, she instructed the driver to take her out of Alorith.

In Askor

After several hours in the private car, Erica finally reached her destination. Stiff and uncomfortable during the car ride, she nursed her aching back as she stepped out of the vehicle. After thanking the driver, she hailed another taxi and went to the Leonard family residence.

Once she neared the neighborhood of the Leonard family's villa, Erica instructed the driver to stop. To her surprise, three men hailed her as soon as she got out of the taxi.

Even before they could speak, she turned and fled. But the men reacted quickly and tried their best to catch up with her.

In less than two minutes, a familiar man appeared in the middle of the road and blocked Erica's way.

'Oh, crap!'

Erica froze when she saw the man. She turned to glance at her followers before facing the man in front of her. She gasped for breath as she spoke. "Dad, please pretend that you didn't see me today!"

Without a word, Wesley reached out and grabbed her wrist. With an expressionless face, he barked, "Go home!"

"Dad, who is at home now?" Erica cautiously asked, even though she somehow knew the answer.

Since Matthew's men had appeared near the Leonard family's house, he must be there too.

Wesley didn't answer her. Instead, he began dragging her toward the house.

Panicked, Erica tried flattery. "Dad, my good dad, can we stop, please? You are my superhero!"

Wesley glared at his daughter. Her honeyed words and flattering smile didn't fool him. Instead, he retorted, "I'm not your superhero. It should be Matthew."

"Dad, don't be so humble. If you take me back now, he will bully me even more!" The relationship between Matthew and her father perplexed Erica. What did Matthew do to her father to make the old man side with him every time?

Wesley loosened his grip on her wrist and stared at his daughter. "Erica! Tell me again. Who bullied whom?"

"Of course, it's—" Although she started confidently, Erica couldn't continue the lie with conviction. She lowered her head and said weakly, "He bullied me..." Matthew always wanted to sleep with her. Was that the only important thing in a man's heart?

Had Gifford been standing in front of him, Wesley would have kicked him. After taking a breath to control his anger, Wesley said, "It was you who fled to your parents' house on your husband's birthday.

You stood him up. You climbed over the wall to escape. Poor Matthew was worried sick when he didn't find you after searching for you the whole night. He eventually figured that you would return to Askor. So, he chartered a plane to get here and ensure that you were safe. What else do you want Matthew to do?" Wesley thought his daughter had gone too far this time! Her behavior was becoming more and more unacceptable, and he couldn't stand it anymore.

Wesley's harsh tone broke Erica's heart. She retorted, "It's his fault. He always wants to... wants to..." Erica blushed crimson when she thought of what she needed to say. How could she explain her situation to her father?

She was terrified of having sex with Matthew for the first time. Otherwise, why would she go through all this trouble?

As an experienced man, Wesley immediately understood what she had hesitated to say. With a gentler tone, he questioned, "Erica, don't tell me that you and Matthew aren't a real couple yet."

The truth had been exposed! Erica's mouth opened and closed, but she couldn't think of what to say. Finally, she silently lowered her head.

Wesley gritted his teeth as he glared at his daughter. Even though anger surged in him, he remained calm and asked, "Is it because Matthew is impotent?"

Erica's eyes flew open, and her face reddened. Instantly, she recalled all the times that Matthew had taken a cold shower after being with her. Finally, she shook her head. She was sure that her husband had no such problem.

"So, it's you! You're the reason why you and Matthew haven't become a real couple! You're the one with the problem."

Erica blushed and retorted, "You are the one who has problems!"

Enraged with her behavior, Wesley raised his hand threateningly. Erica turned and fled homeward. She screeched, "Mom, the old man is going to hit me!"