

TMBA 1271

CHAPTER 1271 A SHOCKING SECRE

Erica nodded and spoke frankly. "When we're not at home, someone will come to clean up. And there's also a chef cooking for us. Other than that, we don't hire any servants."

This was hardly the most sensitive kind of information a person could share. Nevertheless, Sheffield had a tiny suspicion that it was significant.

A short time later, Erica took Gwyn to the projection hall to watch a movie, and Matthew put a plate of sliced fruits and several bags of snacks in front of them. Seeing this, Sheffield thought that he was beginning to understand something about his hosts.

While Erica and Gwyn sat in the front row to watch the movie, Matthew and Sheffield stayed in the back and whispered about work.

In time, it became apparent that Erica was used to ordering her husband around. "Matthew, we're out of napkins!" she called at some point.

Without wasting a second, the man got up and went to get her some more tissues.

A little later, Erica said, "Oh, Matthew, can you come help me figure out this remote control?"

Sure enough, Matthew stood up again when he was called.

And again and again as the time passed.

Staying quite comfortable and munching on melon seeds, Sheffield paid close attention to Matthew's behavior. The man was very much under Erica's command and silently served her every whim. He showed no signs of impatience; on the contrary, he seemed to enjoy being given things to do.

Though no one else saw it, Sheffield's eyes widened as an epiphany struck him.

'I finally understand why Matthew hasn't hired any servants!' he thought to himself. 'It's because he is a weirdo! He actually likes Rika and wants to be nice to her, but for some reason or another, he doesn't want to openly express his true feelings for her. So instead, he's willing to just do these little things for her, without her knowing why.'

Sheffield couldn't help but click his tongue. He should have known all along! After all, back when Carlos had asked Matthew to marry Erica, Matthew had agreed—and he certainly was not someone who could be forced into anything. The saying "Erica is Matthew's goddess" was finally confirmed!

Sheffield was satisfied that he had not come in vain tonight. He uncovered a shocking secret about Matthew, one that he didn't think many people knew.

In spite of the movie, Sheffield and Gwyn didn't stay at the house too long. For one thing, the girl had to get up early and go to school the next day. Besides that, Sheffield wanted to let the young couple enjoy their romantic night.

When the two had left, Erica yawned and found that she was no longer interested in the movie. She ended up lying down on the bed and playing with her phone.

The next afternoon, she received a call from Watkins. He went straight to the point and said, "Hi, Erica, I've found the old man's address. Are you free now? Let's go see him together!"

"Really? Of course, I'm free!" she answered cheerfully. The sooner she was able to clear her name, the better. A short time later, Watkins drove over and picked her up.

The old man's home was on the third floor of a crummy living community not far from the scene of the car accident.

When Watkins and Erica knocked on the door, the old man opened it promptly. He didn't recognize the visitors. His voice trembled slightly. "Who are you looking for?"

"Mr. Tab, we are here to see you!" Watkins answered politely, raising the gifts in his hands that he had bought in advance.

Still wary, the old man looked them up and down, and his tone sharpened. "I don't recognize you. How do you know my surname?"

Watkins was not in a hurry to answer that question. Instead, he smiled and asked, "Mr. Tab, I have something to tell you. Can we come in and talk?"

Mr. Tab grunted an affirmative and moved aside, allowing the two younger people into the living room.

He seemed to be alone, and there were only a few pieces of old furniture.

The sofa was a little dirty, so Erica took a chair beside the table.

Watkins put the gifts on the table, then produced a photograph from his pocket and showed it to the old man. "Mr. Tab, is that you there in the picture?"

The old man's eyes were not so good. He took a moment to retrieve a pair of glasses from the table and inspected the image carefully—and his face suddenly changed. With an energy that he hadn't seemed to have before, he put the photo back in Watkins' hands and declared, "No, it's not me!"

Watkins and Erica looked at each other, dumbfounded. It could plainly be seen that it was him. Why wouldn't he admit it?

Erica wasn't about to give up, though. She gave the old man a sweet smile, hoping to disarm him, and said, "Mr. Tab, here's the thing. What happened the day that photo was taken is very important to me. I just want to ask you a few questions. You have nothing to fear from me. Don't worry!"

Without answering her, the old man gathered up the gifts from the table and carried them to the door. Obviously, he wanted them to leave. Watkins caught up with him and reluctantly took the gifts back, saying, "Mr. Tab, please talk to us!"

Tab thrust a bony finger at the door. "Get out, or I will call the police!" he demanded.

"Please don't call the police, Mr. Tab," protested Erica, drawing near. "Why won't you tell us what you saw that day?"

"I saw nothing! My vision is very poor, as you can see!" Mr. Tab yelled. "What do you want with me?! Do you want to see me dead?!"

'Want to see him dead?' Erica and Watkins thought. They were both so stunned that they didn't dare ask any more questions. The old man was obviously very upset, and for all they knew he might have just threatened to commit suicide so that they wouldn't bother him any further. With such haste that he dropped the gifts on the floor, Watkins opened the door and headed out, Erica close behind him.

The sound of the door slamming behind them echoed through the doorway. The two traded an uneasy look before heading for the stairs.

Neither spoke until they were outside. "Who else is in his family?" Erica wondered aloud, gazing back up at the third floor of the building.

"His wife died a long time ago," explained Watkins. "He has a daughter—she's married, but lives in another city. He's lived here alone for a long time, and has no other relatives that I'm aware of. His retirement salary is his only source of support."

"What a poor man," Erica remarked, downcast. Tab looked to be in his seventies, at least, yet he was alone in this world. She couldn't help but feel bad for him.

Sighing, Watkins put his hands in his pockets and leaned against his car.

Erica pulled her gaze away from the building and went over to him. "Do you think he's been threatened by the Campbell family? That could be why he wouldn't tell us anything."

Watkins took a moment to think, then shrugged. "It's possible, but not very likely. Camille had put her assistant in charge to deal with the traffic accident, and she didn't follow up anymore. Still, it's possible because she took the photo, so maybe she saw Tab before we did."

"What does Camille do?" Erica asked, curious.

Watkins glanced at her in surprise. "You don't know?"

"No, I don't. I didn't come to Alorith until I married Matthew. I didn't know anything about Camille before that." Tessie had mentioned Camille a long time ago, but she'd never said much about her; Camille apparently had never treated her well.

"She'd been an actress for two years," explained Watkins. "Then she invested in a magazine company and became the boss and chief editor of their fashion section. She often appears on the covers of various magazines. Haven't you seen her?"

Erica thought it over and shook her head. "No, I haven't."

Watkins found that amusing for some reason. He stood up straight and patted her on the shoulder. "Let's go! We'll talk about it later. And in the meantime, we should make sure to not push Mr. Tab too hard."

"Okay!" Erica nodded, and they got into the car.

On the way, Watkins suddenly suggested, "How about we go to a cafe? I know of a good one that I like to go to. Let's have a cup of coffee there and discuss what to do next."

Erica didn't refuse. There were plenty of things to discuss, and it had to be done sooner or later.

It took a short time to reach the cafe.

After parking the car, Watkins took Erica inside.

Unknown to them, a certain black Emperor car was driving past the same cafe at that exact moment. The man in the back seat abruptly barked at the driver, "Stop the car! Pull over!"

Alarmed, Owen brought the car to a halt on the curb with a slight screech of the tires. He looked around and saw Erica and Watkins walking into the cafe together.

Harmon, who was in the passenger seat, looked at his nephew in confusion. "Matthew, what's wrong?"

Matthew's eyes were fixed on the door that Erica and Watkins had just disappeared through. "Nothing," he said calmly. "It's just a little hot in here."

CHAPTER 1272 A SLAP IN THE FACE

When he heard what Matthew said, Harmon was confused. He looked at the sky. It was an overcast autumn day, and the wind was chilly. How could it be hot?

Owen thought for a bit and asked, "Matthew, would you like to go for a walk?"

"I just got off work. I'm beat," Matthew replied indifferently.

It meant that he didn't want to take a walk now.

Owen rolled his eyes secretly and thought to himself, 'Matthew, that's your wife. You can go inside and check on her if you want! Why do you have to pretend?' "Look, Matthew! There's a cafe nearby! And they're running a special. Buy one cup of coffee, and get a second one free. How about you and Harmon get something to drink there?" Owen suggested, knowing what was on his boss' mind.

Harmon sneered when he heard that. 'You gotta be kidding me. You think Matthew cares about a free cup of coffee? Try harder, man!'

Out of the blue, Matthew answered, "Good idea!"

Harmon was shocked and couldn't believe his ears. His smile froze on his face. Since when did Matthew care so much about the price of a cup of coffee? Had marriage changed him so much?

Harmon and Matthew entered the cafe together. And Harmon quickly figured out why Matthew was so interested in this cafe. It had everything to do with certain patrons, sitting at the table in front of the French window. 'I knew it! Why would he care about a free cup of coffee? He doesn't. It looks like his wife is here, drinking coffee with another guy.'

He smiled and followed Matthew to a table next to Erica's.

With her back to them, Erica didn't see Matthew enter the cafe.

Watkins didn't seem to notice Matthew either. He was asking Erica what she wanted to drink.

Harmon had just concluded his business with Matthew, and decided to take a break. And what better way to spend his free time than having a cup of coffee with the jealous man? All he had to do now was sit back and watch the show.

Erica was here to hammer things out with Watkins, so she didn't really care what she had to drink. She finally decided on a latte, just so they could get to the things she really wanted to talk about.

After the waitress left, she cut right to the chase. "What did Tab do when he was young?"

"I don't know much about that. I didn't have anyone look into him. If I'd thought about it more, I would have. If we knew more, we'd be able to figure out how to deal with him. But here we are, without a plan." Watkins fixed his eyes on Erica.

But she didn't know he was staring at her. She just looked at the table and nodded thoughtfully.

She was about to say something when her phone vibrated. Matthew had texted her. "Where are you?" he asked.

Erica looked at her phone in distress. Should she tell the truth? She didn't think that would go over well. After all, Matthew had warned her several times to stay away from Watkins.

She dodged his question and texted him back. "What's up?"

But Matthew was insistent. "Where are you?" he repeated.

"Outside," she answered. Simple, short, to the point.

"You with someone?"

Erica didn't want to lie to Matthew, but she was afraid that he would get angry. She decided to lie to him. "I'm alone."

'It's just a white lie. It doesn't matter, right? What he doesn't know won't hurt him, ' she thought to herself.

She lied to him because she didn't want him to get upset.

When Matthew saw her reply, his face darkened.

Erica was seeing Watkins behind his back. And now, she even lied to him. He was livid.

Matthew called a waitress over, ordered a glass of lemonade and had it sent to Erica's table.

Seeing this, Harmon leaned in close and asked in a quiet voice, "Hey, all this sneaking around isn't your style. Why don't you just let them know you're here?"

Matthew didn't say anything.

Presently, the lemonade arrived. Both Erica and Watkins were surprised. So when she asked the waitress, she replied, "Courtesy of the man at that table," and pointed at the table where Harmon and Matthew sat. Erica turned her head. There were two men sitting there, and one of them had his back to her. Harmon smiled and simply said, "Hi!"

Erica was sure that she didn't know this guy. She thought he was hitting on her, so she asked the waitress to return the lemonade. "Thank him for me, but I already have something to drink. Thank you!"

Then, she got another message from Matthew. "Someone saw you in a cafe. What's going on?"

'What? Oh man! What do I do now?' Erica cried inwardly. She was on the verge of breaking down. She took a look at Harmon again. He was talking to the waitress. 'Does he know Matthew?

Wait! Who's that guy with his back to me? Why does he look so familiar?'

Sensing her gaze, Matthew didn't bother pretending anymore. He stood up, scooted his chair away, and straightened his clothes.

Then he turned and walked towards Erica.

Without any hesitation, he grabbed her wrist, and took her into his arms. He moved his head close to hers, and whispered, "You need to be reminded who's the boss."

Erica felt guilty and her heart beat faster. She opened her mouth and explained quickly, "Watkins and I had something to talk about..."

She just said she was alone, and now, she was caught with Watkins. It was like a slap in the face.

"And you felt you had to do this behind my back? How could you lie to me?" How Matthew wished he could strangle the woman in his arms right now! She'd lied to him over another guy.

"What? I didn't do it behind your back!" Erica finally came to her senses and denied any responsibility. She wouldn't be bullied! She held Matthew's arm and said, "This is important. I had something to discuss with him!"

Matthew didn't want to hear her for the time being. He looked at Watkins indifferently and said, "Watkins, don't you like playing with the Shiba Inu? How about I send you a cat too?"

With a stiff smile on his face, Watkins stood up from the chair and explained calmly, "Matthew, Erica and I came out to ferret out the truth behind Phoebe's miscarriage. You don't believe her, so I—"

"Who told you I don't believe my wife?" Matthew interrupted him.

Erica was stunned by his words. She raised her head and looked at the stony-faced man. 'Does that mean he does believe me?

But if he really believes I did nothing wrong, why did he ask me to give him a child as compensation? If he believes me, then I don't have to get pregnant so soon.'

Watkins smiled helplessly and smoothed his short hair. After a tense moment, he replied, "Matthew, I'm happy that you trust Erica." He looked at Erica, and said, "You should finish your coffee. Don't let it go to waste!"

The waitress had already brought the two cups of coffee they ordered, but they hadn't had a sip yet.

"The bill's on me. Watkins, you can leave now," Matthew said in a cold voice.

If it were possible, things got even more intense. Erica tugged at the man's sleeve and said in a small voice, "Matthew, don't be like that. We're just having coffee." He was so jealous and possessive that sometimes she felt she couldn't breathe.

When he saw Erica with Hyatt, he had no problem. But every time he saw her with Watkins, he would get jealous.

She didn't know why Matthew hated Watkins so much.

Matthew didn't give in. He tightened his arm around Erica's waist. "You want coffee? I can do that! Hell, I'll buy the cafe for you!" 'But you can't have coffee with another guy! Especially Watkins!' He didn't say that part out loud.

"Coffee is not the point. The point is that Watkins and I are just friends. Don't friends usually go out for coffee?" Erica asked in frustration.

'Doesn't he have any female friends? Wouldn't he go out to dinner with them?' She wouldn't believe it if he said he had no female friends.

After all, every rich man was surrounded by women of all shapes and sizes.

CHAPTER 1273 AN UNPLEASANT TIME AT THE CAFE

'How dare she speak for another man!' Fury was written all over Matthew's face, but he controlled his voice.

"Don't forget that you are a married woman. You can't simply go around making friends with another man, and going out to drink coffee alone with him. It's not normal or proper." As Erica listened, she realized for the first time in her life that even an aloof CEO like Matthew could make trouble out of nothing.

Noticing the awkward atmosphere between them, Harmon hurried over, hoping to mediate the dispute. "Hello, Erica. I'm Harmon Loftus!" he said with frantic, false cheer. "I'm your mother-in-law's cousin, which makes me your husband's uncle. So you can call me 'Uncle' as well!"

'Huh? So he's actually Matthew's uncle!' thought Erica. 'I thought he was hitting on me before! How awkward!' With a strained smile, she remarked, "Uncle, you look so young! How old are you? You must be around the same age as Matthew."

In fact, what she said was true. Harmon looked like he was in his early twenties, but he was already Matthew's uncle.

To her slight relief, Harmon seemed genuinely amused by her question. "Oh, that's so sweet of you to say!" he chuckled. "Actually, I'm already in my early thirties."

"Oh, I see!" Erica said, nodding.

Harmon turned around and signaled to the waiter. "Bring our coffee here."

"Yes, sir."

Harmon took a seat next to Watkins and asked, "Well, I know you didn't mean to meet us here, but can we join you for coffee? You wouldn't mind, would you?"

Watkins did mind, but obviously he couldn't say that. Shaking his head, he indicated the table with a gentlemanly flourish of his hand. "Of course not! Matthew, Erica, by all means take a seat."

Matthew was in a similar predicament. He didn't want to stay either, but it simply wouldn't be proper to rebuff such company.

He sat opposite to Watkins and practically dragged Erica into the chair beside him.

The waiter brought coffee, but ironically, no one was in the mood for the stuff at that moment. While Watkins and Harmon tried desperately and futilely to sustain a conversation, Erica noticed that Matthew was staring at her. "What is it?" she asked in a low voice.

"The coffee's here," he explained icily. "Isn't that what you came for? Just have your coffee and we'll be on our way." He would take her home and lock her up.

That would teach her not to go hanging out with Watkins behind his back! 'Why is Matthew acting so strange today?' Erica asked herself.

With a shrug, she was about to lift the mug to her lips when Matthew's hand clamped around hers. "What are you doing?" he hissed, his face livid. "Have you forgotten you're not supposed to be drinking this stuff right now?!"

'What? Oh, I forgot I'm on my period. He's so thoughtful.' Erica was genuinely moved, but thought her husband was being overprotective. "It's just one cup. It'll be all right," she said mildly.

That only increased Matthew's fury. Coffee jumped over the rim of the mug as he jerked it from his wife's grasp. All the same, he chugged it in a matter of seconds.

His three companions watched, mortified and dismayed.

Had they really witnessed Matthew doing such a childish thing?

After taking the last gulp, Matthew felt that he couldn't sit still anymore. He was afraid that he might try to strangle Watkins if he had to spend another minute in his presence.

Glancing at Harmon, he pushed his chair back and said, "My wife and I are leaving now."

Harmon was stunned, wondering why Matthew was in such a hurry. But he didn't protest. He simply waved at them and said, "Bye!"

Matthew took Erica by the arm and led her toward the door.

"Uncle, Watkins, goodbye!" she called over her shoulder.

Harmon shook his head helplessly. 'Matthew is so possessive of Erica!' he thought. 'And what a temper he has!'

Watkins shrugged and took a long, unhurried drink of his coffee.

He had met Harmon before, but they didn't know each other well, and it didn't take long to find that they didn't have anything to talk about. "Well, Watkins, I have work to do," Harmon said after a moment. "Enjoy yourself here!"

Watkins nodded at him. "Thank you, Harmon. Have a good day!"

Harmon left the cafe after paying the bill. Watkins passed a few moments alone, and then left without finishing his coffee. He had a lot on his mind.

Meanwhile, the Emperor car was cruising the streets.

Owen held back his laughter as he listened to Erica trying to coax his boss in the back seat.

"Matthew, honey, don't be angry," Erica was saying, her head bowed, trying to placate her husband. "You know that was just a white lie. I didn't mean to hurt you."

But Matthew wasn't having it. "A lie is a lie!" he declared.

"Hey, look at you! You are a man," she complained. "You don't have to be so mean!"

This remark backfired, though.

Without so much as blinking, Matthew admitted, "Yes, I do. I have always been so mean!" 'Geez! This man is so hard to coax,' Erica thought, rolling her eyes helplessly. "Honey, do you know the difference between you and a monkey?" she asked.

The man's face darkened, as it so often did. "You compare me to a monkey?"

"No, no, no. Listen to me. A monkey lives in the mountain, while you live in my heart!" Erica forced herself to smile. "Aren't you happy to hear that?"

"No, I am not!" Matthew snapped. The truth was the exact opposite, but he refused to admit it out loud.

Erica pulled a long face. For the first time she had really confessed and tried to be humble and apologetic, but he was rejecting all of her efforts.

She was especially disappointed at how her line about the monkey had fallen flat; she had spent hours searching the Internet for a saying that would express her true feelings toward Matthew. The only one it made an impression on was Owen, whose broad shoulders trembled as he fought to contain his laughter.

The conversation went on and on, going nowhere; no matter what Erica said, Matthew was unfazed.

'Alas! Every time I'm angry, I'll accept his apology as long as he coaxes me. But he's impossible to appease! It really is a headache to have such a childish husband.'

Distressed and hopeless, Erica turned to the window and watched the scenery passing by. For a moment, there was nothing to hear but the smooth hum of the car's engine. When she looked back, her husband was reading documents again. "Matthew!"

He didn't respond.

'I know you can hear me, ' Erica thought irritably. She pursed her lips and said, "I want to ask you a question. I can't have any friends in Alorith, can I?"

"You can!" he answered, not looking up. As long as it was not Watkins, he could accept that.

"Well, you've made me a little upset," Erica sighed. She was at a loss.

"Well, when we get home, you should reflect on why you feel upset," Matthew told her.

Back in the cafe, he had been livid and acting out. Now he was cold and in control of the situation again. Erica thought it might be her turn to be furious now. 'What, I should reflect on myself?' she thought. 'Shouldn't he be reflecting on why he made his wife so upset? Oh, never mind! I'm a generous woman, so I'll put up with him.'

"Okay, I'll do that. Will you still be angry then?" she asked.

It was not until then that Matthew finally looked her in the eye. "We'll see about that."

'Ugh! How mean!' she cursed inwardly.

When they finally arrived at the villa, Matthew stayed in the car, so Erica got out first. "Tomorrow, I'll be going on a business trip to the neighboring city," he said at length, right as she was about to close the door.

'So what? Is he asking me if I want to go with him?' thought Erica. "I'm free tomorrow!" she said quickly. Truth be told, she would be happy to go with him any day of the week.

Matthew coughed and gave her a cold look. "I was asking you to pack my luggage."

"What? Aren't you going to take me with you?" Somewhat pitifully, Erica held the car door open and started playing with the window button.

She thought she should break it if her husband refused to take her with him.

Matthew sighed and looked away. "I always keep my word!" Indeed, he had promised to take her on his trips if she wanted to come.

'So does he mean that I can go with him?' thought Erica. The bright smile returned to her face. "Oh, don't beat around the bush. If you want me to go with you, just say it!"

To her dismay, Matthew looked at her with disgust. "Close the door!" he ordered. He was still angry at her, so he wasn't going to say what he wanted plainly. He wanted her to guess.

Erica snorted and slammed the door.

After the car started and began to leave, she made a face at it.

However, Matthew happened to see what she was doing from the rearview mirror.

His face contorted with even more contempt than before.

'She's the one who went to have coffee with another man, ' he fumed silently. 'How could she have the nerve to get angry with me?'

CHAPTER 1274 AN IDOL GROUP

As she stood in the walk-in closet and pondered over what to pack, Erica suddenly remembered that she had forgotten to ask Matthew how long the trip would take. She hurriedly took out her phone and sent him a message. "How many days will we be there?"

Only when she knew the answer could she begin to pack their luggage.

"Three."

Erica snorted when she read his reply. It seemed that every word was worth a great deal of money to Matthew. His answer was always simple and straightforward, not one unnecessary word.

It was easy for Erica to ask for leave from school. All she needed to do was send a message to the guidance counselor.

Soon after, she began to separate their belongings. At first, she had planned to pack their clothes and other items in two separate small suitcases. But it seemed troublesome. In the end, she found a twenty-eight-inch suitcase in the closet and bundled their luggage together.

Erica didn't know when Matthew returned home that night as she had already fallen asleep.

When she woke the next morning, she saw the man sitting on the bed next to her. He seemed to be sending text messages. She turned, placed her arm on his belly, and said happily, "Good morning, Matthew."

She had often heard people say that waking next to a loved one and seeing them first thing in the morning was precious. Now she knew it to be true.

However, Matthew's expression conveyed that he hadn't forgiven her yet. His tone was indifferent as he replied, "Now that you're awake, get up!"

"Okay..." Mathew's heartless response wiped the smile from Erica's face. She wanted to have some intimate moments with him, no matter how brief. After all, he was busy every day, and she rarely had the chance to see him by her side when she opened her eyes in the morning.

After breakfast, Matthew went to the bedroom to finish dressing. Erica entered just as he was rolling up his sleeves. Without glancing at her, he questioned, "What's in that suitcase on the floor inside the closet?" 'Don't tell me that you are going to carry a twenty-eight-inch suitcase for a three-day trip,' he thought.

"Oh, I only packed part of our luggage last night. Some of my belongings haven't been put in yet. Thank you for reminding me! I'll be ready soon." Women were troublesome. She had to leave place in the suitcase for the skincare products she had used this morning.

'Is she really going to take a twenty-eight-inch suitcase?' Matthew looked at her suspiciously. "Can you carry such a big suitcase?"

Erica shook her head and answered honestly, "No."

"Then why don't you change it to a smaller one?" he sighed. Somehow, he knew exactly what she was going to say next.

"Why should I change it? I still have you. Can't you carry it?" Erica teased.

Matthew was at a loss for words. His instincts had been correct. She did want to use him as her assistant!

He was on a business trip with her, and she expected him to carry her suitcase? Did she think that he could be manipulated so easily?

Half an hour later, they walked out of the house.

Owen had been waiting for them at the door. When he saw them step out, he hurried over and took the big suitcase from Matthew's hand. "Matthew, Erica," he greeted with a respectful nod.

When he noticed the blank expression on the CEO's face, he glanced at the CEO's wife. She smiled and waved at him.

'Well... haven't they reconciled yet?' Owen wondered.

'It is said that a couple could settle arguments after one night in bed. It seems that Erica needs to improve her ability to placate Matthew's anger overnight.'

In the car, Matthew read documents as he didn't want to talk to Erica. She, on the other hand, yawned. She had been playing with her mobile phone for so long that she had begun to feel sleepy. It didn't help that she had woken very early this morning.

It wasn't long before her eyes began to close despite her efforts to stay awake. Soon, her head slumped forward.

Matthew put down the armrest and partition between their seats and held Erica in his arms just as her head dropped on his shoulder.

In fact, Erica woke the moment she felt his touch. As she knew who was holding her, she pretended to be asleep. She even went so far as to turn over and bury her face in his stomach.

His thoughtfulness and concern for her brought a smile to Erica's face. It seemed that Matthew was not indifferent toward her!

At this thought, she kicked off her shoes, curled up on the back seat, and reached out to wrap her hands around his waist. She snuggled up comfortably in his arms and fell asleep.

Matthew glanced at the slender, fair arm around his waist, and leaned back against the seat. A smile tugged at the corner of his mouth as he thought, 'She is so cunning.'

It was almost three o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived in Skiyton. Matthew had planned to visit the partner company first, but since Erica was with him, he changed the schedule and went to the hotel.

As the room had been prepared two days in advance, the hotel manager guided the CEO and his wife to the presidential suite floor. Owen trailed, not far behind, with their suitcase.

After ensuring that Erica was settled, Matthew rushed off to work.

Still groggy, Erica rested for a while. When she felt bored and couldn't sit still anymore, she texted her husband, who was working. "I'm going for a walk. Call me when you send someone to pick me up."

His reply was still simple and concise. "Okay."

After unpacking her camera, Erica hung it around her neck and walked out.

The moment she opened the door, the door to the room opposite theirs also opened.

Startled, she glanced up and saw a few young men step out of the opposite room. She wanted to shift her gaze, but as soon as she recognized them, she shouted in surprise, "FC group?"

Yes! The young men across the hall from her were members of the idol group, FC, which had gained tremendous popularity in the entertainment circle recently.

Each of the four handsome young men in the group had different characters, and a code name: Red, Blue, Yellow, and Orange.

The young men were stunned. They didn't expect that a beauty would be in the room next to theirs. What surprised them more was that she knew them!

The group leader had the code name, Red, to match the color of his short hair. He greeted Erica politely, "Hello!" Then he pulled the mask on his chin to cover most of his face.

Erica was thrilled. This was the first time she had seen the members of the FC group in person. Never in her wildest dreams had she thought this moment would be possible. What excited her more was that she was lucky enough to meet all four of them at the same time! "Nice to meet you! What a coincidence! Are you also staying in this hotel?"

Blue, who was closest to her, nodded. "Yes!"

Erica grinned. She continued their conversation as she walked alongside. "Are you here for work or fun?"

Before any of the others could reply, Orange said, "We came here for work. What about you, miss?" Orange was the youngest from among the four, and his personality matched Erica's as they were both cheerful and enthusiastic.

"I'm here for fun! Oh! Would you mind if I took a picture of you and keep it as a souvenir?" She shook the camera on her chest and smiled sweetly.

Taking the camera with her as she stepped out for a walk was a fantastic idea!

"Of course!" Being photographed was routine for the idols. Without hesitating, they stood side by side in the corridor and posed for her to take photos.

But... Erica had forgotten to switch on her camera. She smiled at them awkwardly, "I forgot that I hadn't turned it on yet. It's going to be ready soon!"

Her expression amused Red. "Are you a professional cameraperson?"

"Not really. I'm studying photography in college. Since I haven't graduated yet, I'm not a professional!" The camera beeped to indicate that it was ready. Erica adjusted the camera to the automatic mode, aimed at them, and pressed the shutter.

After taking the photo, Erica stepped to the side and said, "I'm done. Thank you!"

Orange joked, "You're welcome. Please don't tell our fans that we're in this hotel. Otherwise, they'll flock here, and the hotel will be too crowded! Ha-ha..."

Erica burst into laughter as well. "Okay, I know! I promise to cover the background if I post the picture online."

"Okay, bye, beauty!" The young men bid her farewell.

After they entered the elevator, Erica opened her camera and glanced at the photo she had taken.

CHAPTER 1275 THE WOMAN IS SO CAPRICIOUS

'Well! Not bad!' Erica thought, beaming.

She immediately sent the photo to her mobile phone and spent a moment tinkering with it, using the photo-editing app. Then, she posted it to Weibo with the caption: "Wow, wow! I ran into the idol group FC. Come and see how handsome they are!"

A great many netizens expressed their admiration in the comment section, and not a few asked where the members of FC group were at the moment. She didn't answer them, though.

While Matthew was still in his meeting, he saw Erica's post pop up in his notifications.

His eyes darkened as he inspected the picture and the caption. Here he was doing important work, and what was his wife doing? Meeting with other men and taking pictures of them? And now it wasn't just one man, but four at the same time!

Erica was quite good at attracting men!

Crisis loomed in Matthew's mind like a thunderhead. More than ever before, it now seemed important that he should keep an eye on his wife in the future. Otherwise, she might well dump him for another man one day, and he'd miss her very much. It wasn't impossible; Erica was capable of such a thing, despite appearances.

Later that evening, Matthew made a point to personally pick up Erica, who was playing and taking photos nearby, and take her to a dinner party in a restaurant.

Matthew and Erica were the last to show up. The private room was packed, and everyone stood up to greet them when they came in.

A small army of people—all rich, good-looking, and important—descended upon Matthew to shake hands and say hello to him. While Erica was hanging back a short distance, a man's voice rang in her ear. "Hello, miss. Nice to meet you again!"

Erica turned and found herself face to face with the members of FC group. The one who had said hello was Orange.

"Oh, hello!" cried Erica, her eyes wide. "What a coincidence again! Are you here for dinner too?"

As soon as the words were out, she regretted them. It was such a stupid question; everyone came to a restaurant to have a meal.

Orange laughed and said, "Why, yes! In fact, we are."

Red patted Orange on the shoulder and came up beside him. His voice was a bit mysterious. "I heard that Matthew would bring his wife here tonight. So you are Mrs. Hilton, then."

Erica nodded shyly. "Um, yes..."

Matthew was in the middle of greeting yet another important person when he happened to look Erica's way—and saw her chatting happily with four rather handsome men. For a split second, he froze as he realized that the four men were none other than the ones he had seen in the picture before.

Pulling a long face, he leaned toward his wife. "Rika," he said in a low voice, "come and say hello to everyone."

"Okay!" said Erica cheerfully. Oblivious to her husband's change of mood, she headed over.

As soon as she reached him, Matthew put his arm around her waist and started introducing her to everyone in the room. "This is my wife, Erica Leonard." Looking at her, he explained, "Rika, these are the

CEOs of our company's business partners, and some are the cooperative artists."

Erica put on her best smile and greeted them gracefully, "Hello! Nice to meet you all!"

Everyone responded to her with much enthusiasm, but Erica knew very well that they were treating her this way more for Matthew's sake than anything else.

Matthew was then led to the main seat with Erica following close. She had to follow him closely, in fact, because he wouldn't let go of her hand.

As it happened, Matthew made sure that Erica got the meal she wanted before he did, and the red wine in front of her was replaced by fresh vegetable juice. Everyone seated with them noticed how considerate and loving he was to his wife.

During the dinner, Erica learned that the full name of FC group was Four Colors. They had come to Skiyton to do business with Hilton Group's branch company. The members of the idol group were expected to act as brand spokesmen for Hilton Group's electronic products.

Matthew was afraid that Erica would grow impatient with such boring topics for conversation, so he decided not to stick around too long. The dinner itself was still in full swing when he excused himself and his wife and started saying goodbye to people.

A number of the other guests walked them out of the restaurant and watched them get in the car. They didn't return inside until the couple had driven off.

In the car, Erica inclined her head toward her husband, who was typing something on his phone. "Do you want to go back to the hotel and get some rest?" she asked.

"Not yet," replied Matthew. He hadn't worked a very long day, so he wasn't tired.

"Then where are we going?"

"Where would you like to go? We could go seaside, downtown, or the older districts..." He trailed off. All of these places were nearby, and he was okay with any of them.

Erica thought for a moment. She had taken a walk downtown already that day, and would go to the old districts tomorrow. "Let's go to the seaside!" She wanted to stroll along the beach with him and feel the breeze coming in from the sea.

The average temperature in Skiyton was a few degrees higher than in Alorith, so it wouldn't be too cold.

Matthew glanced at her and said, "Okay." Then he told the driver, "Get us to the hotel."

"Yes, Matthew," came the monotone reply.

Erica blinked in confusion. "Aren't we going to the seaside?"

"Yes, but we should get some extra clothes first," explained Matthew. It was cooler by the sea, and she didn't wear thick clothes.

"No, there's no need for that," Erica told him. "We can just go right to the seaside. Look, I'm wearing a cashmere sweater and everything. I'm warm enough!" She had wanted to take off her sweater during the day, but hadn't. After all, it was possible the temperature could drop considerably at night.

Back in the restaurant, she had just taken off her coat and felt good enough with just the cashmere sweater.

Seeing that there was no point in arguing, Matthew addressed the driver again. "Just take us to the seaside."

"Yes, Matthew," mumbled the man.

In less than ten minutes they were there, and the car smoothly rolled to a stop. Matthew got out of the car, but before he could circle around to open the door for Erica, she was already out and rushing happily toward the sea.

Squinting after her from beneath the harsh glow of a street lamp, Matthew called after her, "Don't you want to take your camera?"

"No, I want to feel the waves!" she called back over her shoulder. Besides, there was nothing to take photos of on the beach at night.

'No, wait, ' she thought a second later. 'Actually, I can take photo of Matthew.'

Stopping, she stared back at her husband, who was strolling to catch up with her at his own pace. Running back and taking his arm, she said, "Matthew, can I go back and get my camera?"

Matthew stopped, frowning in puzzlement. "Didn't you just say you didn't want it?" What a capricious woman!

"But I want to take a picture of you. If it's all right, I mean..." But even as Erica said this, her husband continued to walk on. "Hey, hold on! Slow down, wait for me!"

Now it was Erica staring at his back from under the street lamp. Gritting her teeth, she swore to herself, 'Humph! Maybe I'll have to wait another day until you're willing to let your picture be taken!'

"Matthew," she called softly. Her husband slowed, but didn't stop.

"Honey!" This time he did stop—and that was all. He didn't turn; he just waited.

Catching up with him, Erica tried to placate Matthew with a smile. "Don't be like this—you're such a man. You've been angry with me from Alorith all the way to Skiyton. If you keep on like this, you're going to explode."

The words hit home; Matthew did feel that he would explode sooner or later.

"Look at me," his wife went on. "When I'm angry, all you need to do is just coax me a little, and then I'm not angry anymore. You're being more petty than me right now!"

Matthew was speechless. People who didn't know Erica well would think she was really that generous.

Not through with him yet, she pouted, "Oh, come on. We came out here to have fun. If you keep doing this, then I'll get angry too!"

'Didn't she just insinuate that she's more generous than me? Now she's about to get mad, ' Matthew thought helplessly.

He walked on then, unable to keep still. Erica was close beside him, but he continued to ignore her words until at last she seemed to run out of them.

The sea breeze was cool and in its own way soothing. It was a quiet autumn night, with little to hear except for the waves, which formed their own kind of melody. They walked a long way without seeing another soul.

It wasn't a romantic scene, though—not with Matthew's hands shoved into his pockets and the woman hanging her head despondently.

When they'd gone about half a kilometer from the car, Matthew's head finally began to clear, and he found himself thinking of whether he should forgive Erica or not.

He wasn't thinking for long, though, when a scream from directly behind made him jump. He whirled around, thinking perhaps that someone had attacked his wife.

To his bewilderment, he found himself alone. There was no attacker, and Erica had disappeared too! As he scanned the beach, he caught sight of her shoes not far away. They were drifting about slightly, caught on the outermost edge of the waves.

Matthew's face went white and he shouted at the sea, "Rika!"

Amidst the crashing waves he caught sight of a woman's head breaking briefly above the waters. An unmistakable voice called to him, "Matthew, help..."

CHAPTER 1276 DON'T BE AFRAID

Matthew stared across the water. He saw the woman fighting against the sea currents. 'Damn it!' He didn't even know how long she'd been there!

Without thinking, he shrugged out of his suit jacket and threw it aside. Then he kicked off his shoes and rushed into the ocean.

'Rika, don't be afraid! I'll save you!'

When he swam to where he last saw her, she had already disappeared again in the dark of night. The normally calm Matthew began to lose it. "Rika!" he shouted frantically.

He could see Erica's head above the waves again. "Matthew! Over here! Blub..."

Fortunately, he was close enough to hear her. He quickly swam over to where she was, and held her tightly in his arms. "Don't be afraid, Rika. I'm here! You're safe now..." The man was so gentle and caring that Erica almost felt guilty.

'Well... he's certainly being sweet!' He was as gentle as he was when he rushed to the campus to save her the other day. The fact that he was like that made her love him even more.

"You okay?" Matthew asked breathlessly. Erica nodded. "Stay right there," he said, and with that, he dove under the water, coming up behind her. He hooked his arm around her waist, and swam with his legs and other arm, making sure to keep her head above water. Together with his wife, he made for shore.

When they were back on the beach, he took her in his arms and kissed her forehead. "Everything good? Are you cold—" He realized something, and it overrode any concern he might have had for her.

Erica could swim. She loved to do laps in the pool at the villa. She was actually quite good at swimming. That only meant one thing: she tricked him again!

Knowing the jig was up, Erica quickly put her arms around his neck and said fawningly, "Don't be angry, okay?"

What else was she supposed to do? He was ignoring her, so she had to see if she still had a place in his heart.

And as it turned out, she did have a place in his heart. His little freak-out there in the water was proof of that. She felt happy about that.

Matthew said nothing. He grabbed his suit jacket and wrapped it around her tightly.

Erica raised her head and looked at the man expectantly. "Matthew, you like me, don't you?" Otherwise, why did he get so anxious when he thought she was drowning?

Her sudden question made the man pause. He not only liked her, but he loved her more than life itself.

However, he couldn't just tell her that. What if she told him she didn't like him at all? He was afraid to hear her answer. His heart would be broken.

And he didn't want to lose face, either.

Finally, he asked in a hoarse voice, "Was it fun?"

How could she joke about being in trouble like that? He was so angry he really wanted to beat her. Couldn't she see that?

"Matthew, answer me!" Erica insisted.

But the man still didn't make a sound. He walked off and found his shoes, and when he came back, he scooped her up in his arms and made his way towards the road.

"Matthew..."

"Erica!"

"What?"

Matthew threatened in a cold voice, "If you do something like this again, you won't have to jump into the sea. I'll throw you in myself!" Then he would jump in too, because he couldn't live without her.

"So I did a bad thing. I'm sorry. Still angry with me?"

In order to prevent her from doing such a horrible thing again, Matthew nodded and said, "Yes! Just don't do it again. You'll piss me off. And if I get pissed off enough, no one can calm me down!"

Except her.

Erica sulked silently. His words stung her heart.

"Achoo!" She had a sneezing attack, expelling the contents of her nose three times in a row.

All because she jumped into the sea in late autumn, Erica caught a cold the first night they spent in Skiyton.

And in the middle of the night, her fever spiked, with a high of 38.5 degrees Celsius.

Standing by the bed, staring at the thermometer, Matthew was speechless.

Erica was pretty healthy. She rarely got sick, taking after her father Wesley. She was active and energetic.

But today, that was not the case. She had a bad cold, and a fever on top of it.

It wasn't hard to guess why. The sea was cold, she was on her period, so she was more susceptible to disease. Matthew was pretty sure that was what was going on.

He decided to call the hotel's front desk. "Please call a doctor immediately to Room 2206."

"Okay, Matthew. I'll get on that right now," the receptionist said.

More than ten minutes later, the doorbell rang. Matthew opened the door and saw the hotel manager and a doctor standing outside. "Matthew, this is Doctor Lambert, the director of department of internal medicine in the military hospital here."

After some simple greetings, Matthew moved aside and said, "Please come in."

Doctor Lambert took Erica's temperature and did some basic examinations. Then he told Matthew, "No need to worry, Matthew, it's just a cold and fever. I'll prescribe some antipyretics for her. If the fever gets bad enough, get her into an ice bath and give us a call."

"Okay, she's on her period. Be careful when you prescribe anything," Matthew reminded him.

Whatever the medicine was, it had side effects. If possible, he didn't want her to take the medicine, especially on her period. Besides, Erica had already downed a dose of cold medicine before going to bed.

Doctor Lambert nodded. "I'd also like you to try other methods before giving her any meds. She should be getting plenty of fluids, so make sure she always has some water by the bedside. The ice bath is also an option. If things don't get any better, then you can start her on the medicine."

"Got it."

After the doctor's visit, the hotel manager assigned someone to go pick up the prescription. Then the manager asked, "Shall I get someone to apply alcohol to Erica's body?"

Matthew refused, "I don't think that will be necessary."

It was his fault Erica had a fever. If he had not gotten angry with her, she wouldn't have tried to hurt herself in this way.

Alcohol as a cooling solution wasn't supported by any science, anyway, and it would be potentially

dangerous to do that. Erica was pretty ill, and she didn't need to suffer any more ill effects. Coma, heart attack, alcohol poisoning, all of these were fatal on their own. And all of these were reported in connection with using topical alcohol.

He wrapped an ice cube in a towel and put it to her forehead. She slowly opened her eyes. "Matthew," she called. Her voice was hoarse and weak.

"I'm here."

Her face was still red. It was obvious her fever hadn't broken yet.

"I... I feel bad..." Erica struggled to move, but could only manage an inch or so.

Matthew took her hand and felt sorry for her. He wished he were the one who caught a cold and had a fever. "Where does it hurt?"

"My skin hurts, my head hurts, my whole body hurts..." She didn't lie this time. She felt pain all over.

It was normal to feel this way in the grip of fever. The man sighed helplessly in his heart and suppressed his emotions. He pretended to reprimand her harshly, "Maybe you'll be smarter next time."

Erica curled her lips. "I can't believe you! I'm sick, but you still harp on me!" She knew it. He didn't love her!

Matthew didn't have the heart to nag the woman anymore. She was always lively, but she was now lying weakly in bed. He let go of her hand and poured some water into the glass. "Sit up and drink something."

"I can't get up... I feel so heavy."

Matthew wasn't going to let her sit up by herself. He sat on the bedside first and then helped her up, letting her lean in his arms.

Then he took the glass of water to her lips and said, "Come on, open your mouth."

Erica opened her mouth and took a sip of water. It helped clear the bitter taste from her mouth. "Got any juice? I'm also kinda hungry. I need sweet stuff."

'What?' She was sick, but she still asked for things like that? He asked indifferently, "Really? How about a bowl of hot and sour rice noodles, or steamed vermicelli rolls?"

His words lit up her eyes. "Sounds great!" She was pretty hungry, and her mouth was watering already!

Matthew was really pissed off this time. With a gloomy face, he said, "In your dreams!"

CHAPTER 1277 DIE ALONE

Erica pouted, but grudgingly drank half a glass of water.

After putting away the water, she still didn't sleep. She kept baiting Matthew, who was wiping her body with a clean towel, into a conversation. "Matthew, I'm so moved. I didn't expect that you would personally take care of me."

Without raising his head, the man answered with feigned annoyance, "I have no other choice." The decision hadn't been a difficult one to make. Right from the beginning, all he had wanted to do was take care of her.

Erica snorted when she heard his reply. Would it be so impossible for him to say something nice for once? "Hey! You know what? The members of the Four Colors are all scumbags!"

Her declaration filled Matthew with satisfaction. "How do you know?" he asked, curious to hear her explanation. If that was the case, then he didn't need to do anything.

"Because... all men I can't get will be considered as scums!" Erica laughed out loud and ignored the sour expression on his face.

Matthew's eyes narrowed, and he lowered his voice as he spoke. "Do you want to hear something horrible about them?"

"What? Really?" Erica was reminded of her previous idol, Aaron. Not long ago, he had been ridiculed as a has-been star. He stopped appearing in front of cameras ever since. She rarely saw him anymore.

"Of course. Everyone in the entertainment circle has kept something secret from the public," he said nonchalantly. He didn't want his wife to think about male stars all the time. So, he decided to find female stars or actresses to cooperate with the Hilton Group in the future.

Erica shook her head decisively. "I don't want to know! Don't tell me anything!" If things went on like this, she would have no idols left except for Matthew!

The man gazed at her in silence.

"Matthew, you know what? I've envied two types of women in my life. The first is the kind of woman who is very confident and does well in her career. A successful woman who always follows her mood and chooses whether to talk to you or not. And the second is the kind of woman who appears fragile and acts spoiled. People would do anything to protect a woman like that. As for me, I happen to be stuck between these two kinds of women. I'm neither successful nor fragile. Matthew, what kind of woman do you like?"

He raised her chin with one hand and wiped her neck with the other. His intense gaze studied her for a reaction as he said firmly, "Neither." No matter what kind of woman Erica was, he would like her. He

wanted her to know this, but he struggled with finding the right words. He liked her. Only her!

"Humph!" It was so typical of him to be frugal with his words. Erica believed he was this way with her because he just didn't want to talk to her. "People like you should die alone. Then you would learn how precious women are!"

There must be so many women around him that he could pick whoever caught his fancy.

He didn't have to wait until he died alone to know how precious it was for him to have married her.

"Perhaps you have nothing to say as you don't dare to confess your love for your goddess in front of me?" 'Is he afraid that I will get even with Phoebe again?' she wondered.

Matthew's gaze met hers as he replied, "You're right about that."

'What? He didn't deny it?'

Erica grabbed his hand, placed it on her chest, and asked, "Can you hear my heart breaking?"

Matthew's gaze intensified when he looked where she had placed his hand. He swallowed hard and said, "My hand can't hear anything." He tried to keep his desire at bay as she was sick, and he didn't want to take advantage of her.

Erica was careless even when she had a fever. She couldn't see what the man thought, even though it clearly reflected in his expression. Still lost in her world and insecurities, she prattled on. "Oh...my heart aches. Forget it. Just hold me and sleep!" It didn't matter whether he loved her or not. He was by her side now, and she was determined to enjoy this moment with him.

"Okay. I need to wash my hands first." Reluctantly, Matthew withdrew his hand from her chest, flipped the towel on her forehead, and tidied up the bedside table before heading for the bathroom.

Fortunately, Erica's fever lowered after midnight.

Soon, it was dawn. Matthew looked at the thermometer after he had taken her temperature. It was 37.5 degrees Celsius. Relief coursed through him at the thought that she had a low fever now.

She would be fine if she paid more attention to herself during the day.

At eight o'clock in the morning, Erica slowly opened her eyes, turned over on the bed, and fell into a man's arms.

It was Matthew. He was still by her side! She glanced at his face only to find that his eyes were closed. She was surprised to find that he was still asleep. He hadn't rushed off to work like before!

Erica grinned as she pulled his arm, rested her head on his shoulder, and placed her other hand around his waist. She closed her eyes and enjoyed the sense of security of being in her husband's arms.

The corners of Matthew's mouth lifted slightly.

Her warm breath fell on his chest, and her sweet fragrance surrounded him. This blissful moment was precious, indeed.

However, two minutes later, she couldn't help coughing, thus, breaking the silence in the room.

Matthew pushed her hand away and sat up on the bed. Erica continued to hold his waist. She buried her face in his body and said in a sweet tone, "Please sleep a little longer!"

The sick girl seemed to be a little clingy. He smoothed her long, messy hair and said softly, "Sleep again after taking your medicine."

He had just checked her temperature, and it had returned to normal. She didn't need to take an antipyretic, but she still needed the cold medicine.

Erica sniffed. She knew he was right. But, she just didn't want to let go of him. Grudgingly, she removed her hand.

After wearing his pajamas, Matthew placed a call for breakfast before heading to the bathroom to wash.

Erica slept for about ten more minutes. She was still groggy when he returned from the bathroom and helped her up from the bed. "Breakfast is ready. Go brush your teeth," he said in a gentle tone.

"Okay." Her stomach rumbled when she heard the word, breakfast. She pushed her messy hair behind her ears, yawned, and struggled to open her eyes.

Matthew had prepared warm water, a toothbrush, and toothpaste for her in the bathroom. Erica was still so dazed that she barely noticed as she brushed her teeth mechanically.

After breakfast, she took her cold medicine and went back to bed.

Matthew sat on the edge of the bed after tucking her in, and said, "I'm in the meeting room next door. Call me if you need anything."

"Don't you need to go out to work?"

He shook his head. When he learned that she was unwell, he postponed all his appointments for later that afternoon. He would go out after lunch if she were better.

Erica's mind was so hazy with the medicine that she didn't think too much. She just closed her eyes and

continued to sleep.

It was almost noon when Erica woke again. This time, she was in high spirits. Except for a nasal twang when she spoke, all other symptoms had improved.

Later in the afternoon, before leaving for work, Matthew asked her to stroll around the streets near the hotel and not stray too far. He didn't want her to exhaust herself as she was still weak.

She was obedient this time and just took photos on the old streets nearby.

The streets of this city had a history that dated back thousands of years. The most famous spot was the ancient gate of the city in the southern part.

When she stepped through the ancient gate, Erica found that the alley was filled with shops that sold a variety of goods or souvenirs. The alley floor had been paved with some kind of ancient black bricks. Walking in the alley, Erica felt as though she had been transported to ancient times.

For Erica, who liked to take photos of scenery, this was the best place for shooting. She held the camera and took photos happily.

After a while, she felt a bit tired and thirsty. So, she found a small shop to buy a bowl of red bean soup with taro balls and a cup of bubble tea. It was leisurely to walk along the street while eating these desserts.

She took a picture of the food in front of her and sent it to Matthew. "Matthew, the red bean soup with taro balls is delicious. Do you want me to bring you one?"

"Who allowed you to eat a smoothie?"

'Huh? Smoothie?' Erica looked at the food carefully. As she had eaten some of the red beans and taro balls, the thick layer of shaved ice beneath them had been exposed. Matthew's eyes were so sharp!

CHAPTER 1278 LIGHT OF HER LIFE

Erica chuckled when she realized that Matthew was concerned about her. Her fingers flew across her screen as she typed, "They made it differently. I didn't know that there is a layer of shaved ice on the bottom. Don't worry. I won't eat it!"

Matthew replied a second later, "If you have nothing else to do, go back early and rest."

'Wow! People say that those who reply to your message so quickly care for you.'

The happiness glimmering in Erica's eyes couldn't be concealed. She decided that Matthew would be the light of her life from now on!

Shortly after their return from Skiyton, Erica recovered from her cold. Matthew, who had been angry before they had left for Skiyton, finally ended the tension by declaring, "I don't want to argue with a weak and sick woman."

Erica's heart soared when Matthew finally stopped being angry with her. She ignored the words—weak and sick.

'As long as Matthew is happy, it doesn't matter if I'm wronged,' she thought.

After her return to Alorith, Erica didn't dare to go to Tab with Watkins. After all, that would agitate her husband.

She had to curb her desire to discover the truth before Watkins asked her out.

'Does Phoebe think that I will let her go so easily? Then she is wrong!'

As per Erica's observation, every time Phoebe left school and got into the Campbell family's car, she would sit on the right side of the back seat.

One day, as the Campbell family's driver smoked beside the car, a male college student ran to him. After a brief moment of hesitance, he shyly asked, "Sir, can you do me a favor, please?"

The driver shot him a puzzled glance and questioned, "What's wrong, young lad?"

The student pointed at a car not far away and said, "I can't start my car. Would you take a look?"

"Oh, I see. No problem!" The driver and the student then made their way toward the car.

A split second later, a figure quickly ran to the Campbell family's car. She stopped and glanced around to ensure that no one noticed her. Then, she gently opened the back door, squatted, and placed something inside. Finally, she closed the door and hid behind a big tree.

The student's car roared to life. With feigned confusion, he stared at the car and said, "That's odd. I couldn't start it a few minutes ago. Sir, you are so awesome!"

The driver was stunned. He turned to face the student and explained, "There is nothing wrong with your car. Perhaps you didn't start it correctly."

"Okay, I see. Thank you so much, sir."

"No problem!" The driver waved at him and returned to his car.

Meanwhile, the girl hiding behind the big tree snuck back to the student's car and climbed in the back seat.

The student was none other than Hyatt, and he was already waiting for her inside. When he saw Erica clamber in, he thumped his chest and breathed a sigh of relief. His face had turned red! He glared at his friend and declared, "I was scared to death!" He had never done such a thing before.

Erica cupped her hands and expressed her gratitude generously. "Thank you very much, sir. I will repay you double!"

Her behavior amused Hyatt. Then, he thought of something. Concern reflected in his eyes as he said, "Erica, what if Phoebe knows it was you who did it?"

"Don't worry. She can't do anything even if she finds out. They know that I put the snake on her bed last time. What could she do about it? Nothing!" Matthew was supporting her now. Last time she had tricked Phoebe, but he had no intention of getting even with her.

It was a pity that she couldn't see Phoebe wither with embarrassment after her plan worked.

Erica's driver, whom she had sent to buy water, returned. He climbed into the driver's seat and handed the bottle to her. "Erica, here's the water you wanted."

Erica leaned forward, grabbed the bottle, and thanked the driver. "Thank you!"

"You're welcome, Erica!"

Just then, Phoebe appeared at the school gate. However, Erica's driver had already started the car. They left before anything happened.

Phoebe had rested at home for half a month before returning to school for further study.

As usual, she made her way toward her car, opened the right back door, and climbed in.

"Ahhh!" she screamed as soon as she sat down.

The driver immediately turned and asked, "What's wrong, Phoebe?"

Phoebe was in such agony that she closed her eyes tightly. Something in the car had pricked her leg.

She supported herself by placing one hand on the seat. She wanted to search for what had poked her, but before she could find it, something else stung her palm. "Ahhhh!" Another scream escaped her lips, and she quickly withdrew her hand, as if she had touched electricity.

A thorn protruded from her fair palm.

The driver was shocked. Concern laced his voice as he asked, "Phoebe, what's this?"

Phoebe was confused, upset, and furious. She glared at him. "How would I know? It hurts!" Carefully, she removed the thorn from her palm.

Then she checked the seat to ensure that nothing else was around her. Just as she shifted, she found three more identical thorns on the back seat.

The thorn in her leg had not punctured her too deep because she was wearing jeans.

However, blood began to ooze from her injured palm.

Phoebe was pissed off now. She seemed to have encountered a spate of bad luck. No matter what she did, something awful always happened to her.

She handed the thorns to the driver, and asked with disgust, "What are these? Who put them here? My hand is bleeding! I'm a painter. Who will take responsibility if there is severe damage to my hand?"

"I'm sorry. Give them to me, Phoebe." The driver apologized several times. He didn't dare to say anything else as he knew that nothing would pacify her now.

At once, he studied one of the thorns. It was reddish-brown and hard to break. The color and appearance of the thorn stupefied the driver. He had no idea what it was or where it came from. He cautiously suggested, "Phoebe, I'll take you back and then find someone to identify them. Would that be acceptable?"

"Whatever!" Phoebe said impatiently as she wiped the blood on her palm with a tissue.

Two days later, much to her surprise, the wound had swollen up. The puncture site on her leg had swollen just like her palm.

She winced as she gingerly touched the wound. It was not only swollen but painful as well.

Phoebe, who had forgotten about this accident, summoned the driver and asked, "Did you find out what pricked me?"

The driver shivered with fear and immediately apologized. "I'm sorry, Phoebe. After I brought you home that day, I was instructed to take your father to the company. I forgot about it. I'll go and find out now!"

Phoebe was outraged by the driver's forgetfulness. 'He is so useless!' she cursed inwardly. Her eyes widened in anger. "Go and check now! My hand and leg are swollen. Tell me what they are as soon as you find out!"

"Yes, Phoebe. I'll do it right away!"

Phoebe stood still and gasped for breath as the driver bowed and scampered off.

She glanced at her swollen palm, and fresh anger surged through her. She knew the identity of the culprit. Regardless of whether that person did it on purpose or not, Phoebe swore that she would make her pay for what she'd done.

A few days later, Phoebe marched into the CEO's office of Hilton Group.

As soon as she stopped in front of Matthew's desk, she slammed a test report on the desk. "Matthew, Erica has gone too far! This time, I won't tolerate her tricks. I've already contacted a lawyer, and we are preparing to sue her."

CHAPTER 1279 MY COUSIN

Matthew took his time to study the examination result. 'Stung by the Spina Gleditsiae and needs a local operation?

Is this Erica's doing? Did she try another trick on Phoebe?' "Evidence," he said through gritted teeth.

Phoebe had known that Matthew would ask for proof, and she was ready. At once, she pulled out her phone and sent him the video she had prepared in advance.

The recording was a clip from surveillance footage from a Chinese medicine shop. It showed two people speaking to the shopkeeper. The video had sound, and one of the two newcomers—a young woman—could clearly be heard saying, "Sir, do you sell Spina Gleditsiae here?"

The shopkeeper nodded and asked, "Yes, indeed. How much do you want?"

The woman thought for a moment, and then said, "Five grams would be enough."

As he weighed the Spina Gleditsiae, the shopkeeper shot her a puzzled look. Eventually, he asked, "Young lady, may I ask why do you want to purchase this herb? It's poisonous."

The woman's expression remained unchanged as she replied, "Oh, I know that. It's for the treatment of retained fetal membranes in my cow. I'm going to burn the Spina Gleditsiae to ash, mix it with warm wine, and feed it to the cow."

This was indeed, one of the known uses of the herb. However, one particular detail in the explanation caught the shopkeeper's interest. "Your cow?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. "You don't look like a cowherd. How do you know that the Spina Gleditsiae can be used for this purpose?"

"My cousin majored in traditional Chinese medicine," explained the woman. "He told me all about it."

"I see." The shopkeeper carefully wrapped the five grams in paper and told her the price. A brief moment later, he added, "Remember, be very careful with this stuff."

"Of course. Thank you, sir!" The video ended after the woman paid and left the shop along with the person who had entered with her.

The woman in the video was none other than Erica. The man who accompanied her was Hyatt. He was always willing to help Erica with whatever she did.

As for the so-called cousin she mentioned... Of all the people they knew, Sheffield was the only one well-versed in traditional Chinese medicine.

Matthew knew that Sheffield wanted Godwin to learn from him, but the boy was still young and had only grasped the uses of some simple herbs. He certainly couldn't know much about the effects of various kinds of medicine.

So, he eliminated Godwin as the so-called cousin quoted by Erica.

That left him with no doubt that Sheffield had informed Erica about the herb and its uses.

After buying the Spina Gleditsiae, Erica had used the poisonous herbs to prick Phoebe. Unaware of how serious it was, Phoebe hadn't approached a doctor or hospital.

Had the wound been treated earlier, it would have healed, and she wouldn't need surgery. But, the treatment had been delayed until today, when the continued discomfort forced Phoebe to go for an examination at the hospital. Sure enough, the result had shocked her. She hadn't expected that she would need surgery for such a small wound.

Phoebe gritted her teeth and swore that she would sue Erica for intentional injury!

Matthew put down the pen he had been holding and folded his hands before him, doing his best to hide his weariness. Every time his scheming wife did something naughty, she not only left evidence, but also relied on him to deal with the consequences.

It was beyond doubt that Matthew needed to teach her how to be more careful. Otherwise, there would be no end to the headaches she would cause him.

Finally, he raised his eyes and glared at Phoebe. "You and I know the real reason for your miscarriage. Do you know why I haven't gotten rid of you yet?"

Phoebe's face twitched. Then, she stiffened. No matter how many times Matthew brought up the topic, she would refuse to admit the truth. "I don't know what you are implying. I've already said that it was Erica's fault."

'Incorrigible!' Matthew thought as he snorted. He narrowed his eyes, restrained the anger that glinted inside them, and growled at the despicable woman standing before him, "You are foolish to think that I

don't believe Erica." After an intentional moment of silence, he continued, "I haven't kicked you out of Alorith because you're still useful to me. Did you believe that you could hide the truth by threatening the witness? If so, then you are wrong! How could I not know what you did?"

Tab was the old man whom Watkins and Erica had gone to see the other day.

Phoebe's confident facade began to crack, and fear rose in her heart. She had been certain that there was no surveillance at the scene of the accident—except for the recorder in the vehicle, which wouldn't be able to pick up what had happened clearly. As long as she refused to admit to her actions, Matthew couldn't do anything.

Now, Phoebe was caught off-guard. She hadn't expected him to figure this out so soon! Otherwise, she would have arranged for that old man to disappear from the world altogether! After all, no one would be suspicious if someone Tab's age were to die of some accident while living by himself.

Matthew pushed his chair back and stood. He refused to take his eyes off Phoebe. "It was you who killed your unborn child, and then you framed Erica for it. And you exposed your lie when you sent people to silence Tab. I might not have found any direct evidence had you not been so stupid!"

It was true. There was no video monitoring at the spot where the accident had happened, and there was no direct evidence on the vehicle recorder. Matthew hadn't been able to investigate the cause of the incident as Phoebe refused to admit to her wickedness. It was fortunate that Phoebe had panicked and threatened the witness. Otherwise, he wouldn't have gotten any evidence to prove Erica's innocence.

He had believed Erica from the beginning. But at that point, his love and understanding of his wife had led to his unshakeable belief that she was innocent.

Phoebe swallowed nervously before asking, "Why do you trust her so much?" Almost as soon as the words left her mouth, she winced. No matter how hard she tried, she hadn't been able to hide the tremble in her voice.

"Rika is naughty, but she is not malicious by nature. If you provoke her, she will come up with a thousand unpleasant ways to deal with you. The snake and the Spina Gleditsiae incidents were the examples. However, she would never kill anyone, let alone an innocent baby!"

Tessie had made Erica suffered a lot back then. When he sent Tessie to the slum, softhearted Erica had asked him to be merciful.

Even though she put a snake on Phoebe's bed, she had searched the pet market for a non-poisonous one and ensured that its fangs had been treated.

How could such a person kill a baby?

Phoebe remained unmoved and unconvinced. She bit her lower lip, and after a moment of silence, she

argued, "What if she were careless? Like she pushed me down by accident?"

"Huh?" the man sneered. "By accident? In my eyes, she is innocent even if she did it on purpose, let alone by accident."

Phoebe clenched her fists. She had been so consumed by rage and envy that she had forgotten about her injury. She winced as her nails dug into her injured palm. Her face paled, and she was forced to release her fist.

Matthew grabbed the examination report on the table and tore the paper from the middle. "If you want to sue her, be quick. Eventually, you will be of no use to me. When that day arrives, you will lose your chance to sue her."

There would be no chance... Phoebe's eyes searched Matthew's face as she asked in a trembling voice, "What do you want to do to me?"

"What do I want?" After throwing the pieces of paper into the trash can, he ruthlessly pronounced, "From the day you killed my friend's unborn child, you were already on your way to the slum. If you behave well before I send you there, maybe I will let Tessie be your company. If you continue to be stubborn and hurt Erica again, I will ensure that it isn't Tessie, but a beast, or something more terrible than a beast who will accompany you."

Phoebe's legs weakened, and her body shook. She grabbed the desk to steady herself but found that she was unable to stand firm.

She finally realized how much a man like Matthew could spoil a woman as long as he loved her.

He spoiled Erica without a care in the world.

Phoebe's envy toward Erica grew by leaps and bounds. There was no doubt left in her mind that Erica was the woman in Matthew's heart.

But Erica was stupid. Even though she was the woman Matthew loved, she was ignorant of it and continued her efforts to find out who he loved.

Matthew ignored Phoebe's pallid complexion, and continued, "Aren't you going to sue her? Please go ahead. I'll play the game with you to the end." It was yet to be seen who would end up in jail.

After saying that, he called Owen through the internal line.

He ordered, "See the guest out!"

CHAPTER 1280 PREGNAN

Ten days passed as Erica waited for news from Phoebe. But as yet, her love rival didn't show up to get back at her.

One night, Matthew came back from the company to find Erica waiting downstairs.

As soon as she saw him, she came, offering him a glass of water and a flattering smile. "Matthew."

Looking from the water to his wife's shining countenance, Matthew idly wondered if the drink had been poisoned.

In the end, he decided that it didn't matter. He took the glass calmly and said, "Just say it."

"I want to ask you something," Erica began. "Have you met with Phoebe recently?" She didn't think the other woman would let things go easily.

'So this is what's bothering her,' Matthew realized as he took a sip of water. "You know," he said, "the next time you do something bad, you should learn from Phoebe. Do it in a place without surveillance, and if there are any evidence or clues left behind, you have to go back and get rid of them."

"What?" Erica wondered if this meant that Phoebe really had gone to see him. "What did she tell you?"

Matthew finished off the water, then handed the empty glass to her. "You should stay away from your 'cousin' from now on," he remarked cryptically. "He's a bad example."

'So... he really figured it out,' thought Erica.

Glass in hand, she followed him into the next room and asked with a smile, "What else did she say? Are you going to avenge her?"

"What else did she say?" Matthew echoed. "Put the glass down and I'll tell you."

Erica set the glass on the table and took hold of his arm. "Okay, tell me now!"

By way of reply, Matthew pressed her against the handrail of the stairs, held her head in one hand, and lowered his head to kiss her.

"Mmph..." Lost in the moment though she was, it didn't escape her that this was not exactly an answer to her question.

A few minutes later, Matthew whispered in her ear, "Now, you have to accept my punishment for you!"

"Don't... Don't do that here..." Although the heating was on, this was dangerously close to a staircase. It would not be the most secure place for what he obviously had in mind.

Her husband chuckled in her ear and said in a low voice, "Don't you want to experience something new?" After all, they had tried having sex in many different places, but this was a new one.

Erica leaned her soft body against his and wrapped her arms around his neck, as docile as a kitten. "I don't mind. As long as you are happy!" As long as he didn't deal with her for the sake of Phoebe, she would listen to him this time.

He was very satisfied with her obedience.

Outside, the cold wind was bleak, and inside the villa, they were having a most romantic time.

The New Year was only a few days away. Early one morning, Chantel hid in the bathroom of the Leonard family house and dialed a number on her phone. As soon as the call was connected, she exclaimed nervously, "Rika..."

Erica was still in bed, having been sound asleep until the phone ringing had roused her. When she heard Chantel's voice, though, she quickly got her wits about her. "Hi, Chantel. It's so early. You must be studying hard."

Blair had told her that in order to make a debut as early as possible, Chantel got up very early every day, despite also studying hard at night.

"Rika." Tears welled up in Chantel's eyes as she clenched the thing in her hand.

Sensing that something was wrong, Erica quickly sat up in bed. "What's wrong?"

After a moment's silence, Chantel sobbed, "I...I'm pregnant."

Yes! She was pregnant! She looked at the two red lines on the pregnancy test stick in her hand again.

"Ahhh! What? Chantel, you...pregnant?!" Erica leaped from the bed, beaming. Even if she were the one who was pregnant, she wouldn't be as excited as she was now.

"Thank you, Rika!" Chantel said, steadying her voice with some effort. Although she hadn't seen Gifford since the important day, their goal had been achieved.

"I'm going to be an aunt. You're so awesome!"

Chantel wiped the tears from her face and added, "I'm going to the hospital for a checkup to make sure of it now."

"Okay, okay, go ahead!" cried Erica. "Do you need someone to keep you company?"

"No, I can do it myself."

Kneeling on the bed, Erica was so happy that she laughed. "Okay, well, let me know how everything goes!"

"Okay, bye!"

After hanging up, Chantel stood up from the toilet, tidied herself up, and walked out of the bathroom.

The first thing she saw downstairs, however, was Gifford coming towards her.

Gifford hadn't come back in a long time. Seeing him suddenly appear, Chantel stopped in her tracks, and even took a step back. A guilty conscience weighed on her.

Her weird reaction to Gifford's presence made him frown. He didn't think of himself as a frightening or intimidating person.

Before either one of them could speak, Blair emerged from the kitchen, two plates of toast in her hands. "Oh, Gifford, I forgot to tell Chantel you were coming back," she explained, seemingly oblivious to what was going on between them. "Both of you, come and have breakfast."

With a final glance at the young woman, Gifford silently strode into the dining room.

After watching him a moment, Chantel trotted up to the table and grabbed two pieces of toast. "Auntie Blair, I have something to deal with at school. I'm leaving now!"

Blair didn't doubt her; this wouldn't be the first time the girl left home earlier than usual. "At least have a glass of milk first."

Chantel's eyes flitted to Gifford, who was busily eating at the table. Shaking her head, she said, "No, this is fine. I have to go. Bye!"

With that, she practically ran to the door of the living room.

Watching her go, Blair shook her head helplessly and sighed. "She really is a tough girl. She sometimes goes to practice dancing and piano at four or five o'clock in the morning. Gifford, she's like a sister to you; you should at least bring some food to her later!"

Without raising his head, Gifford refused, "No, I'm afraid I can't. There's something I have to do later today."

"The New Year is coming. What's got you so busy? Can you at least be home on New Year's Eve?"

Gifford paused to think, then nodded. "Sure."

He needed to rest for a few days to think about his relationship with Chantel.

Thinking of her, he cast a look at the door and realized that she was already gone. Gifford had been too wrapped up in his thoughts to notice.

'Huh! Did she realize that she had done something wrong? Is that why she is avoiding me?'

Later at the hospital, Chantel was sitting on a bench uneasily.

Her appointment had gone without incident so far. She was waiting for the examination result now.

Waiting was excruciating; the ten minutes she spent on that bench felt like ten hours. Finally, the doctor called her name, "Chantel Rodgers!"

"I'm here!" the girl called back. She hurried to the window, where she was handed a report. She scanned the page, trying to find the results first.

But before she could understand what she was reading, the attendant of the color ultrasound room told her, "Sign here and take the form to the doctor."

"Okay, thank you," Chantel murmured. After signing her name, she headed back to the outpatient department of gynecology.

The doctor there glanced over the results, then raised his head. "You're five weeks pregnant," he explained dispassionately. "Do you want to keep it?"

'I'm really pregnant, ' thought Chantel. The thought seized on her mind so thoroughly that for a moment she forgot where she was—until the doctor spoke again. "Do you want the baby?"

"Yes, yes!" she cried, coming back to herself. It would not be easy for her to have Gifford's baby. But how could she give it up?

Joy that she could not contain lit up her face.