

TMBA 1351

CHAPTER 1351 A SALESMAN

Half of the man's face was obscured by his face mask. He looked middle-aged, maybe forty years old. He held a woman in his arms. Hearing what Pike said, he kicked him and cursed, "You idiot! You can't even handle one skinny bitch! I'm running low on patience. Bring her here tomorrow. I'll interrogate her myself! I'll show you how it's done!" He believed he had what it took to make her spill the beans.

Pike swallowed his anger and nodded to his boss. "Yes sir!"

After Pike left with his men, the woman in the masked man's arms said the most vicious words in the gentlest voice. "Kirk, it's just two women. Why not just kill them?"

Kirk Gray thought on this for a while, muscles dancing in his face, jaw set in fierce determination. "We'll soon find out if Erma is really a cop. I'll break her, but it might take some *ahem!* doing. If she still won't talk after that, then there's no reason to keep her alive."

Erma's skin was fair and tender, and she was more beautiful than any other woman in the surrounding villages. All men were attracted to her. It was no secret what he wanted to be "doing."

Seeing the lust in his eyes, the woman stopped talking and carefully served him.

At dawn, Erica awoke and decided to put her plan into action. She placed a box in the hole on the ground, covered it with a wooden board, and covered that with a layer of soil. She moved the table on top of all that.

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After making sure the box was essentially invisible, she went to the sink to wash her hands, watching the dirt turn to mud and slide down the drain. Finally, she opened the door of her room.

As soon as she did that, she saw a glint of metal flash toward her. Someone was trying to stab her with a dagger. She dodged, and her attacker ducked behind her, intending to slice her throat open. She spun, and dug her elbow into her attacker's ribs.

Then, shaking from adrenaline, she took in what was going on outside her room. There were at least twenty people standing in the old yard. Tessie there too, tied up. Her mouth was covered with tape and she could only make muffled sounds.

Pike laughed wildly, "Good morning, little widow! Your friend is in our hands. I advise you to surrender, or I can't guarantee her safety!"

Erica leaned against the door casually. After thinking for a few seconds, she said, "Let her go. I'll go with you."

"You wish! No, I'll think we'll keep both of you!" Pike and Erica had been at odds for a long time. He strongly suspected the woman worked for the police. It was just that he couldn't find any evidence of that yet, and she had never been caught red handed.

Erica shook her head. "My friend can't fight. All you're going to do is push her around. So, that's a deal-breaker. If you don't let her go, I won't go with you! Haul her off somewhere, and the only thing left of your yard will be ashes!"

Erica was sure there was something wrong with that yard.

Pike's face darkened. He knew he couldn't allow the place to be destroyed, so he had to order his men, "Let her go!"

The moment Tessie was freed from her bonds, she rushed over to Erica, took her hand and said anxiously, "No, you can't go with them!"

"Don't worry! This isn't my first rodeo. I'll be back soon." Erica whispered, "I've got this. But you need to keep an eye on the box. If I'm not back by tonight, get out. Remember the old place? You can hide there!"

Tessie nodded blankly, "Okay."

Erica followed the crowd out of her house. There were some villagers outside who were watching the

fun. A neatly dressed middle-aged man shouted at Pike, "I don't understand you guys. Why are you always watching those two young girls?"

Pike crooked his finger at him. "Got a problem with that? Then come and save her!"

Erica turned around and smiled, waving at the middle-aged man. "Don't worry. It doesn't matter. If I die, just bury me in front of Pike's house, so that I can haunt him every night as a ghost."

Her words made Pike's hair stand on end. "Damn it! Why would you even say that? You've got a sick mind, chica. Fuck off and die!"

Erica laughed at him ruthlessly. "You're such a coward! Afraid of a few words?"

Hearing that, Pike raised his fist, intending to strike her from behind. As if she had eyes in her back, Erica suddenly stretched out her right leg, kicked back, and her strike leveled at the man's belly.

He wasn't hit hard, but he put his hands on his stomach and started behaving.

Erica was taken to the dilapidated yard she had tried to climb over last night. There were more people waiting for her this time.

The masked man was in the middle of this group. Erica had seen him several times, but they had never spoken.

She walked over, and as if she had arrived at her own home, she casually found a seat and leaned on the table. "Is it time for breakfast yet? I'm starving!"

Pike ran over and tried to pull her away, but Kirk stopped him. "Very well. Serve the meal!"

"Yes, Kirk."

Just like that, plates and dishes and bowls were brought to Erica, as dozens of people watched her eat.

Everyone stared at her, afraid that she would disappear all of a sudden.

Kirk lit a cigarette and asked the woman wiping her mouth, "You are Erma?"

"Yes! What do you need?" She looked around but couldn't find the trash can. Finally, she held the used tissue in her hand.

"Where are you from?"

"Oh, from the slum in Mipburg. You've probably heard of it. I came from there." She wasn't lying. Tessie and she did come here by way of that slum.

Of course, Kirk knew the slum she was talking about. Tow Village was already very poor, but that slum was much poorer than this village.

But he didn't believe her at all! Women from that slum could ever be as lovely as Erma! "What does your husband do?"

After thinking of how to answer that, she answered, "He's a salesman. He sells a lot of things—houses, clothes, watches, electronic products... Anyway, he has a lot of experience!"

Only Erica could describe the CEO of a multinational group like an ordinary salesman.

Kirk exhaled a mouthful of smoke and was dubious about her words. "Since your children aren't here anymore, when are you leaving?"

"I'm waiting for my husband to come pick me up! How else would I get back?" She didn't want to take a carriage from the village to the town, take a ship in the neighboring town to the city, and then take a train to the airport.

"When's he coming?"

"I don't know. Whenever he misses me enough!"

Kirk went quiet for a time. After a while he looked into Erica's eyes and asked, "A few days ago, dozens of my men were arrested by the police. Did you know that?"

Erica was unsurprised. "Oh yeah. I knew that. Who wouldn't?" Everyone in the village knew it. If she said she didn't know, she was either lying or stupid.

Cigarette smoldering in his fingers, Kirk stared at the woman and asked, "Who tipped them off?"

The woman replied with a question. "Who? I don't know. I want to know too!"

The man stubbed out his cigarette on the ground. "You'll have some time to think about it. About 12 hours. If you still won't tell me..." The warning in his tone made Erica shiver.

Then she was left alone in the yard. Well, not quite alone, since there were ten other guards there.

Night fell quickly. Erica was still bored. He took her phone, so she had nothing else to do than to play with a few blades of grass.

When it was completely dark, she knew that her time had come. It was easy to do what she wanted under cover of night.

CHAPTER 1352 OUR MASTER AND LADY

Erica shouted at the men who were watching her, "Hey, I want to go to the bathroom!"

"We will accompany you," one of the men replied casually. He nodded at the man standing nearby. The sound of footsteps echoed in the otherwise quiet yard as both men approached her.

Disgust reflected in her expression at the thought. She shook her head and spat out, "I won't use your bathroom. I'm going to my house!"

"Bitch, are you looking for trouble? If this bathroom sickens you, don't go at all!" one of the men yelled.

Fury coursed through Erica, and she slammed her hand on the table. "Who the hell are you to call me bitch? Do you believe that you can stop me? I don't care what you think or say. I'm going to the bathroom in my house now!"

A screeching sound filled the room as Erica pushed her chair back and stood. Without giving the men a chance to respond, she marched toward the door.

The commotion alerted Pike, who rushed into the yard. His brows shot up in astonishment, and he shouted, "What are you doing?"

The man who was about to hit Erica replied at once, "Pike, this woman is making trouble. She insists on going to the bathroom in her house."

"That's not worth all this noise. You five can go with her and make sure she stays out of trouble!" Pike ordered impatiently.

"Yes, sir!"

With a victorious smirk, Erica walked out of the yard. The five ruffians hustled to keep pace with her as she headed for her home.

A few moments later, they passed a dark alley. Erica, who was ahead of the men, suddenly turned, pointed in a direction, and exclaimed, "Hey, look! What is that?"

Reflexively, everyone looked in the direction where she had pointed. "What?"

When the men didn't see anything unusual, they frowned and turned to question Erica. However, she was gone. With widened eyes, they searched for her. Someone yelled when they saw a figure run into a nearby alley. One of the five men, who was bald, cursed, "Damn it! You two go back and report to Kirk. The rest of us will chase her!"

"Yes!"

Erica's heart beat wildly in her chest as she sprinted through the alley, scaled a wall, and disappeared into the darkness.

Before long, chaos erupted in the quiet village. Several people led by Pike separated into different groups to search for the woman.

At the entrance to Tow Village

Two black Bentleys sped down the access road to the village. As soon as the cars stopped, a well-dressed man got out of the first car and jogged to the back door of the second car. When the window of the back seat rolled down, he said, "Matthew, we have reached."

The man in the second car took advantage of the moonlight to examine the shabby surroundings. A deep frown marred his handsome features. 'Is Erica living in this poor village? She might want to experience some hardship, but why did she have to make my sons suffer as well?'

Just then, a figure jumped out from the side and stopped in front of the cars. She stared at the two cars like a startled wild animal. Of all the things Erica thought she'd come across on this road, two luxury cars were not it!

In fact, the people of Tow Village were so poor that no one had a car. Even if there were one, it would be a shabby car that would be worth very little. No one could afford such a brand-new car here.

Erica didn't have to rack her brain to figure out why these cars were here. She mumbled a soft, "Uh-oh." She only knew of one person who would make such an entrance!

At this time, several beams of lights shone in her direction. "I saw someone over there. Hurry up!"

The shouting reminded her of why she had been running. Without overthinking, Erica bypassed the car and ran to the side.

But, she found that she had taken a wrong turn. A dead end lay ahead, and she had nowhere else to go.

She spun on her heels only to bump into something hard. She had intended to backtrack her way to the cars, not fall into a man's arms. "Oomph," she mumbled as she steadied herself.

Almost instantly, Erica was enveloped in a familiar cold aura and pleasant scent. When she opened her eyes, she saw a suit jacket that most definitely was not something that people here could afford.

She gulped and slowly raised her head.

Just as she had suspected earlier, the deep eyes that gazed at her intensely belonged to none other than Matthew, the man she had missed for so long.

The voices of her pursuers became louder as they got closer and closer, but she forgot about escape. She even forgot to breathe!

The man took a step forward, and Erica stepped back. She gulped. He smirked. The pounding of her heart was so loud that it drowned out all other sounds. He took another step forward. 'This is a dead end. I can't run, ' she thought.

Forced against the wall, she had nowhere to go. Her heart raced as she whispered, "You, you... Mph." His lips were pressed on hers.

The familiar scent and kiss overwhelmed her a split second before his strong arms enveloped her.

For over three years, he had searched for this woman. Now that he had found her, all Matthew wanted to do was show her how much he had missed her. And then, he wanted to punish her for tormenting him.

"Pike, someone is over there!" Several beams of lights shone over the luxury cars.

Pike and his companions were stunned as they rushed to the front of the two cars.

Although they had some money, they seldom saw such luxury vehicles.

Owen glanced at the kissing couple. Then, he took out a carton of expensive cigarettes from the car and approached the gangsters. "I'm sorry, everyone. We passed by Tow Village and decided to rest here. We didn't mean to disturb you. This is a little gift for you. I hope you will accept it!"

Pike's flashlight shone on the cigarettes in Owen's hand, and his eyes suddenly lit up. 'Oh, my God, I've seen this brand of cigarette on the Internet once. It was priced at thousands of dollars per carton!' Pike thought as greed coursed through him.

He took the cigarettes at once and pretended to warn, "Get out of here after you've rested!"

Owen nodded and said, "We'll be leaving soon!"

Just as the men turned to leave, someone in the group shouted, "Pike, there are people over there!"

Several flashlights were shone on the dark wall in the alley. A man pressing a woman against the wall and kissing her passionately came into everyone's view.

Owen cleared his throat and walked to them immediately. He blocked the lights with his body and said, "Sir, they are my master and lady. They just want some intimacy in the dark night. Please don't disturb them!"

When Pike heard that Owen mention "master" and "lady," he understood that they were wealthy

people. He didn't think of Erica, as his mind was focused on the expensive cigarettes in his hand. So, he just nodded, "Okay. Let's go quickly. Don't disturb the young couple's romantic moment!"

A few minutes later, the driver got out of the car and whispered to Owen, "How about we find some food for Matthew?"

Although he was not looking at Matthew and Erica, Owen knew that his boss wouldn't stop what he was doing anytime soon. He knew that it was better to give them some privacy. So he agreed, "Let's all go." He wasn't worried about leaving the couple alone as no one from this village was a threat to Matthew.

Hearing the assistant's words, the men Matthew had brought along immediately dispersed.

In the quiet night, Erica gritted her teeth and pulled away. Her cheeks were flaming from the emotions coursing through her. She blushed and said. "Matthew, stop. This is not the right place..."

'How could Matthew want to sleep with me here?' she cried in her mind.

Despite her objections, Erica was so excited that she couldn't stand it!

The man didn't seem to hear her protest and continued his advances.

They hadn't seen each other for over three years, and he had already thought of all the ways he would punish his woman hundreds of times in his mind. Now that he had finally found her, how could he let her go?

Even if it were daytime now, it wouldn't stop him from making love to her!

In this way, the couple who hadn't seen each other for so long released their longing for each other.

Before Erica could recover from the shock, she was silently punished by the man.

After a long time, Matthew carried the woman into the car and tidied her up. Without saying a word to her, he got out of the car and called Owen. "Come back."

Soon, Owen and the bodyguards returned with some food. "Matthew."

Matthew, who was smoking in front of the car door, ordered without raising his head, "Let's leave."

"Yes, Matthew."

'Leave?' Erica snapped out of the daze that had fogged her brain. She immediately opened the door and staggered out of the car. "I won't go!"

Matthew glanced at her coldly and said to her the first sentence since they met again. "Are you insane?"

CHAPTER 1353 HER GUARDIAN ANGEL

"No, no. o moon, o can't loovo now." oroco shook hor hood loko o rottlo drum. Sho just couldn't loovo tho vollogo wothout fonoshong hor mossoon.

"oro you suro?" Motthow oskod woth o frown. Ho couldn't fothom what was provontong hor from wontong to loovo thos ploco.

"Yos, o'm cortoon!"

Ho put out tho cogorotto. Solonco doscondod os tho couplo glorod ot ooch other. They hod soomongly roochod o stolomoto. Owon stoppod forward ond sood boldly, "Motthow, ot's loto. Why don't wo rost horo tonoght ond talk about ot tomorrow?"

'Talk about ot tomorrow?' Motthow cost o cold glonco ot Owon ond thon ot tho woman who was clongong to tho cor door. "Lood tho woy!" ho ordorod gruffly.

oroco grottod hor tooth ond quockly strooghtonod up. "Okoy."

Sho thought that Motthow would sot on tho cor ond follow hor, but ho dodn't. Tho mon strollod bohond hor, shodowod by hos bodyguards. Tho drovors troolod bohond thom on tho vohoclos.

Whon sho roochod homo, Poko's mon woro wootong for hor ot tho door.

Sho ognorod thom ond wolkod forward to opon tho door to tho courtyord.

Poko ond hos mon dodn't hovo tomo to catch oroco ovon though sho was right on front of thom. Thoor hoorts thumpod whon they sow tho mon troolong hor. Whoro dod thos roch ond powerful mon como from?

oftor tho door oponod, sho stoppod osodo ond oddrossod Motthow woth o smolo, "Motthow, thos woy, plooso."

Loko oroco, Motthow dodn't bothor woth tho stunnod pooplo ot tho door. ot hor onvototoon, ho roluctantly stoppod onto hor yord.

Wholo tho couplo could just ognoro Poko ond hos gongstors, Owon couldn't. Ho wonkod ot tho two bodyguards ond ordorod, "Got rod of thom."

"Yos, sor!"

oftor onvotong tho CoO, who dodn't fot on horo, to hor room, oroco romomborod somothong omportont. "Moko yourself comfortoblo. o nood to stop out to do somothong."

Tho mon, who hod boon survoyong hor houso, which was loss thon thorty squoro motors on sozo,

frownod. Confusoon coursod through hom, ond ho turnod to gloro ot hor, oxpooctong on oxplonotoon.

oftor o pouso, sho clorofood, "o oskod Tossoo to hodo outsodo. Sho doosn't know thot o hovo roturnod. o nood to fond hor."

"Tossoo?" Ho frownod.

"Yos." Tho womon blonkod onnocontly.

Tho mon's oyo longorod on hor for o momont, ond thon ho roolozod somothong. Hos tono was frogod os ho sood, "So, oftor loovong Coss thot yoor, you wont strooght to tho slum to fond Tossoo?"

oroco chucklod ond conformod, "Yos. of o hodn't gono thoro, you would hovo trockod mo down ond brought mo bock homo."

Motthow took two stops forward. Hos gloro was so cold thot ot could froozo hor to dooth. "How could you lovo on o slum with my sons?"

Ho hod to admot thot oroco's plan hod boon offoctovo. Ho hod novor suspected thot sho would hovo gono to tho slum, lot olono fond Tossoo.

"o hod no chooco. o hod to ovoid your mon. Bosodos, o dodn't storvo your sons. Wo hod lovod loko thos for yoor, but o roosod thom to bo hoolthy ond hoppy boys." oroco dodn't boloovo thot ot was o bog dool. oftor oll, thy woro boys. ot was good for thom to oxporoonco somo oorly hordshops so thot thy would troot thoor wovos ond poronts woll on tho futuro.

Motthow roolozod thot oroco stoll hod tho samo choroctorostocs os boforo. Sho hodn't chongod much on thoso thoro yoor, oxcept thot sho was now moro copoblo of provokong thoso gongstors.

Out of tho cornor of hos oyo, ho caught o glompso of somothong. For tho tomo boong, ho droppod tho orgumont with tho womon. onstood, ho walkod solontly to tho small bods bosodo hom. Fovo songlo bods hod boon orrongod sodo by sodo on tho room. Thoso would bo tho bods thot hos four sons ond Konnoy hod slopt on.

os hos bock was toward hor, oroco took tho opportunoty to snook out of tho room.

Whon ho turnod, sho hod olroody dosoppoorod from tho yord.

Ho was spoochloss. Sho hod also omprovod hor oboloty to oscopo. How could sho quootly dosoppoor from undor hos noso?

oroco found Tossoo undor o brodgo ot tho hood of tho vollogo. ot was on oxcollont ploco to hodo. of poplo dodn't look corofully, thy wouldn't fond onyono horo.

odkons hod doscovered thos ploco. Whonovor they woro on dongor, ho would hodo horo woth hos throo brothors.

"oroco, how's ot goong?" Tossoo lookod worrood ond onxoous.

oroco pushod tho polo of strow osodo ond pulloed hor froond up. "ovorythong os fono. Lot's go! Wo nood to go homo, ond thon o'll oxploon!"

Tossoo pottod tho dust on hor body ond sood, "Go homo? oron't you ofrood that Poko woll fond you ond toko you owoy?"

"No, o'm not worrood bocouso my guoroon ongol hos como!" oroco smolod mystoroously ot Tossoo.

"Guoroon ongol?" Tossoo was stunnod. "Tho kods hovo roturnd?" oroco hod sood beforo that tho four choldron woro hor guoroon ongols. ond, so, Tossoo ommodootoly thought of thom.

oroco grobbod hor hond ond lod hor outsodo. Sho shook hor hood ond oxploonod, "No, ot's Motthow." 'Motthow os my grootost guoroon ongol.'

"Motthow?" Tossoo askod os ostonoshmont surgod wothon hor. Sho frozo on hor tracks.

"Yos. Whot's wrong?"

Tossoo was stoll ofrood of tho mon. Just tho montoon of hos nomo was onough to couso ponoc to curso through hor. Sho was also torrofood by tho thought that ho would send hor bock to tho slum.

Sho ommodootoly lot go of oroco's hond. "oroco, you con go to tho houso by yourself. o'd bottor not occompany you..."

"Tossoo, whot's wrong woth you?" Sho soomod to hovo chongod whon sho hoord Motthow's nomo.

Tossoo bot hor lower lop os sho thought of whot sho was goong to soy. Fonolly, sho onsworod truthfully, "oroco, o don't wont to go bock to tho slum."

on tho post throo yoors, sho hod followod oroco to sovorol plocos. although ovory ploco was poor, ot was mony tomos bottor than tho slum.

"Oh, o soo. So that's whot's cousong you to hosototo." oroco grobbod hor hond ogoon ond contonuoed to march forward. "Don't worry. You ond Chontol hovo controbuted sognofocntly to roosong hos sons. of ot woron't for you two, tho fovo of us would hovo storvod to dooth!"

Tossoo hod boon woth hor ond tokon coro of hor four choldron on thoso post fow yoors.

Sho hod holpod oroco during hor rocovery from choldborth. Onco oroco bocomo busy woth shootong

and other things, Tossio looked after the children.

As for Chontol, she had signed a contract with the Global Entertainment and started her career soon after the closed-door audition. With the Leonard family backing her and Matthew's aid, she became famous shortly after her debut.

Once she became a big star, Chontol flew around the world and participated in all kinds of activities and programs.

Every time Erico went to a new place, she would contact Chontol. Therefore, except Tossio, who had been her companion all these years, Chontol was the only other person who knew of the mother and sons' whereabouts.

Chontol would also transfer a large amount of loving expenses to them every month so that they could live comfortably.

However, Erico needed money for other things too, so it was never enough. In the end, she sent the four children to Matthew.

"Erico, please help me. I'd rather stay here than go back to the slum." That place had given Tossio enough nightmares to last her a lifetime.

Erico waved her hand and said, "Don't worry. You can stay wherever you want from now on! The kids have run away, and no one can help me. I'm counting on you!" Erico needed an assistant to help her with simple tasks such as carrying the camera and other equipment.

"Okay." Tossio nodded. She knew that Erico wouldn't look to her. So with a sigh of resignation, she followed her back home.

"No, no. I mean, I can't leave now." Erica shook her head like a rattle drum. She just couldn't leave the village without finishing her mission.

"Are you sure?" Matthew asked with a frown. He couldn't fathom what was preventing her from wanting to leave this place.

"Yes, I'm certain!"

He put out the cigarette. Silence descended as the couple glared at each other. They had seemingly reached a stalemate. Owen stepped forward and said boldly, "Matthew, it's late. Why don't we rest here tonight and talk about it tomorrow?"

'Talk about it tomorrow?' Matthew cast a cold glance at Owen and then at the woman who was clinging to the car door. "Lead the way!" he ordered gruffly.

Erica gritted her teeth and quickly straightened up. "Okay."

She thought that Matthew would sit in the car and follow her, but he didn't. The man strolled behind her, shadowed by his bodyguards. The drivers trailed behind them in the vehicles.

When she reached home, Pike's men were waiting for her at the door.

She ignored them and walked forward to open the door to the courtyard.

Pike and his men didn't have time to catch Erica even though she was right in front of them. Their hearts thumped when they saw the man trailing her. Where did this rich and powerful man come from?

After the door opened, she stepped aside and addressed Matthew with a smile, "Matthew, this way, please."

Like Erica, Matthew didn't bother with the stunned people at the door. At her invitation, he reluctantly stepped into her yard.

While the couple could just ignore Pike and his gangsters, Owen couldn't. He winked at the two bodyguards and ordered, "Get rid of them."

"Yes, sir!"

After inviting the CEO, who didn't fit in here, to her room, Erica remembered something important. "Make yourself comfortable. I need to step out to do something."

The man, who had been surveying her house, which was less than thirty square meters in size, frowned. Confusion coursed through him, and he turned to glare at her, expecting an explanation.

After a pause, she clarified, "I asked Tessie to hide outside. She doesn't know that I have returned. I need to find her."

"Tessie?" He frowned.

"Yes." The woman blinked innocently.

The man's eyes lingered on her for a moment, and then he realized something. His tone was frigid as he said, "So, after leaving Cass that year, you went straight to the slum to find Tessie?"

Erica chuckled and confirmed, "Yes. If I hadn't gone there, you would have tracked me down and brought me back home."

Matthew took two steps forward. His glare was so cold that it could freeze her to death. "How could you live in a slum with my sons?"

He had to admit that Erica's plan had been effective. He had never suspected that she would have gone to the slum, let alone find Tessie.

"I had no choice. I had to avoid your men. Besides, I didn't starve your sons. We had lived like this for years, but I raised them to be healthy and happy boys." Erica didn't believe that it was a big deal. After all, they were boys. It was good for them to experience some early hardships so that they would treat their wives and parents well in the future.

Matthew realized that Erica still had the same characteristics as before. She hadn't changed much in these three years, except that she was now more capable of provoking those gangsters.

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of something. For the time being, he dropped the argument with the woman. Instead, he walked silently to the small beds beside him. Five single beds had been arranged side by side in the room. These would be the beds that his four sons and Kenney had slept in.

As his back was toward her, Erica took the opportunity to sneak out of the room.

When he turned, she had already disappeared from the yard.

He was speechless. She had also improved her ability to escape. How could she quietly disappear from under his nose?

Erica found Tessie under a bridge at the head of the village. It was an excellent place to hide. If people didn't look carefully, they wouldn't find anyone here.

Adkins had discovered this place. Whenever they were in danger, he would hide here with his three brothers.

"Erica, how's it going?" Tessie looked worried and anxious.

Erica pushed the pile of straw aside and pulled her friend up. "Everything is fine. Let's go! We need to go home, and then I'll explain!"

Tessie patted the dust on her body and said, "Go home? Aren't you afraid that Pike will find you and take you away?"

"No, I'm not worried because my guardian angel has come!" Erica smiled mysteriously at Tessie.

"Guardian angel?" Tessie was stunned. "The kids have returned?" Erica had said before that the four children were her guardian angels. And, so, Tessie immediately thought of them.

Erica grabbed her hand and led her outside. She shook her head and explained, "No, it's Matthew."

'Matthew is my greatest guardian angel.'

"Matthew?" Tessie asked as astonishment surged within her. She froze in her tracks.

"Yes. What's wrong?"

Tessie was still afraid of the man. Just the mention of his name was enough to cause panic to course through her. She was also terrified by the thought that he would send her back to the slum.

She immediately let go of Erica's hand. "Erica, you can go to the house by yourself. I'd better not accompany you..."

"Tessie, what's wrong with you?" She seemed to have changed when she heard Matthew's name.

Tessie bit her lower lip as she thought of what she was going to say. Finally, she answered truthfully, "Erica, I don't want to go back to the slum."

In the past three years, she had followed Erica to several places. Although every place was poor, it was many times better than the slum.

"Oh, I see. So that's what's causing you to hesitate." Erica grabbed her hand again and continued to march forward. "Don't worry. You and Chantel have contributed significantly to raising his sons. If it weren't for you two, the five of us would have starved to death!"

Tessie had been with her and taken care of her four children in these past few years.

She had helped Erica during her recovery from childbirth. Once Erica became busy with shooting and other things, Tessie looked after the children.

As for Chantel, she had signed a contract with the Global Entertainment and started her career soon after the closed-door training. With the Leonard family backing her and Matthew's aid, she became famous shortly after her debut.

Once she became a big star, Chantel flew around the world and participated in all kinds of activities and programs.

Every time Erica went to a new place, she would contact Chantel. Therefore, except Tessie, who had been her companion all this time, Chantel was the only other person who knew of the mother and sons' whereabouts.

Chantel would also transfer a large amount of living expenses to them every month so that they could live comfortably.

However, Erica needed money for other things too, so it was never enough. In the end, she sent the four

children to Matthew.

"Erica, please help me. I'd rather stay here than go back to the slum." That place had given Tessie enough nightmares to last her a lifetime.

Erica waved her hand and said, "Don't worry. You can stay wherever I am from now on! The kids have run away, and no one can help me. I'm counting on you!" Erica needed an assistant to help her with simple tasks such as carrying the camera and other equipment.

"Okay." Tessie caved. She knew that Erica wouldn't lie to her. So with a sigh of resignation, she followed her back home.

CHAPTER 1354 MAKING NOODLES

When Tessie and Erica returned, Owen was sitting in the dimly-lit yard and playing on his cell phone. When he saw them, he stood and greeted them.

Erica had wanted Tessie to meet Matthew, but she was afraid of the man. And so, after much insistence, Erica let her friend retire to her room. She figured it might be better if the two met each other the next morning.

After bidding Tessie good night, she walked to the door to her bedroom and pushed it open. Matthew was sitting on the chair in her room, waiting for her.

When he saw his wife enter, the worry niggling at his heart gradually disappeared.

Erica ran forward and hugged the man who was sitting upright. "Matthew, why haven't you slept yet?"

He sat motionless and let her hold him, but he did not respond.

Erica didn't mind his attitude. After all, she hadn't seen him in years. And, he had just saved her from Pike and his men. She glanced at him and asked, "How about we go to bed now?"

It was late, and after all the events that had transpired, she was exhausted.

However, Matthew said flatly, "I'm hungry."

"What?" she exclaimed. She scratched the back of her head. It was late at night, and her kitchen was quite bare. What was she going to feed her husband? Finally, she stuttered, "I...I can cook noodles. Is that okay?"

'She can cook noodles?' Matthew shook his head. "I'm afraid your cooking will poison me."

"Okay. Then perhaps I can ask Tessie to cook for you. She is good. Your sons always enjoy meals

prepared by her," Erica offered. She had volunteered to make him a bowl of noodles, but he didn't seem to trust her culinary abilities.

'Let Tessie do it? Never!' The man pinched the bridge of his nose and ordered, "You can make the noodles!"

'Me?' Erica was stunned with how quickly Matthew had changed his mind. "Aren't you afraid of getting poisoned?"

"Cut the crap and do as I say!" Whatever little patience Matthew had left seemed to have disappeared. He glared at his wife as he waited for her reaction.

"Okay, okay, I'll do it right now!" Erica ignored his tantrum, turned and ran out of the room.

Their kitchen was small, but it was spotless and orderly because Tessie would clean it every day.

Erica placed the water to boil before hunting for dried noodles in the cupboard. Then, guided by the beam of her flashlight, she scoured the corner of the yard for some vegetables. On the way back, she found a few mushrooms that Tessie had placed on the shelf to dry.

Curious, Owen followed her into the kitchen. After looking around the small shabby space, he couldn't help asking, "Erica, why did you choose to stay here? This place is so..." He had inquired about the village before bringing Matthew here. He hadn't believed the reports. But now that he was here, Owen could see that it was not much better than the slum.

While washing the vegetables, Erica raised her head and answered with a smile, "Technology in big cities is advanced. I was afraid that I would be caught on surveillance cameras less than two days after my escape and then be taken home!" Such a premature return would ruin all her plans.

After careful consideration, Erica had decided that only a poor and backward village, where even the phone signal was weak, would be a safe place to hide from Matthew and her family.

Owen had to admit that sometimes Erica was quite smart.

She threw the washed vegetables into a clean basin, tilted her head, and thought for a while. "Owen, I'll find a place where you and the others can sleep in a little while. We don't have the luxuries that you and the others are accustomed to. So, please make do with what I can offer."

"Thank you, Erica. I'm not picky," Owen replied as casually as possible. Since his boss hadn't grumbled about this place, he didn't dare to complain.

Back in Alorith, it was Owen's job to do odd jobs for Matthew. He, thus, felt very uncomfortable standing by while Erica was cooking. And so, he offered, "Erica, let me help you."

"No, I'm good. Just wait outside. The noodles will be ready soon!" Erica replied with a smile. About ten minutes later, the noodles were ready.

Just as Owen was about to say something, he heard his boss summoning him. "Owen," Matthew called out.

"On my way!" Owen answered as he spun on his heels and left the kitchen.

Several minutes later, Erica returned to her room with a bowl of steaming noodles. With a smile, she placed the bowl in front of Matthew.

Then, she turned to Owen and said, "I've cooked a lot. If you are hungry, help yourself to some food."

Upon hearing this, Owen glanced at Matthew, hoping for a reaction that would help him decide. But his boss kept his eyes on the bowl of noodles. So, he politely refused. "Thank you, Erica. I had some food earlier, but Matthew hasn't eaten anything since noon."

Previously, when the couple were making out in the alley, Owen, the drivers, and the bodyguards had found something to eat. They were afraid that Matthew would dislike it, so they didn't bring any for him.

"It doesn't matter. I have made a lot. Even if you eat a large bowl of noodles, there will still be plenty left. Well, I'll get you a bowl." Afraid that he was shy, Erica turned and headed for the kitchen.

Owen immediately followed her and refused in fear. "No, no, no. I can do it myself!" He was afraid that his boss would teach him a lesson if Erica had to serve him.

"Okay." Erica didn't force him. She stood by as he went to the kitchen.

A few moments later, she turned to look at Matthew. The man was still glaring at the noodles in his bowl. It appeared as though he didn't want to eat.

Erica walked forward. After sitting next to him, she urged, "Eat while the noodles are still hot."

Matthew lifted his head and gazed at her. "Is this what you usually eat?" She had placed some chopped green onions, vegetables, and mushrooms above the noodles. There was no meat in the food.

"Yes." Erica was accustomed to eating like this. She propped her chin on her hands and said, "Don't worry. The noodles are definitely cooked. When Tessie was away, I would cook for our sons. They enjoyed my noodles very much. Well, sometimes I would prepare two extra dishes for them. But it's too late now, and I don't have the ingredients to make those dishes for you. Tomorrow, I will buy you some beef and mutton." The meat in this place was famous, and almost all families raised cattle and lambs.

The thought of his wife and sons living in this squalor and eating meager meals sent such a pang of anguish through his heart that his hands balled into fists.

He shot up from the chair. Erica frowned and asked, "Where are you going? Don't you want to eat?"

The man turned. He suppressed his emotions and said, "I'm going to wash my hands."

"Okay. I'll show the way." She heaved a sigh of relief. Her heart almost broke when she thought that he wouldn't eat the noodles she had made. However, it turned out that he was just a neat freak.

There was a tap outside the house, and it was connected to a pipe that was fed by cold spring water. When Erica came here, there hadn't been such a tap in the village, and every household had to fetch their water from the river. She had paid someone to install this tap.

She quickly fetched a basin of water and put it in front of him. "Wash your hands!" she said.

The weather was neither hot nor freezing. The spring water was cool, but it could be used to wash hands.

After Matthew finished, Erica handed him a yellow towel and said, "This is Adkins' towel. This little guy is also a neat freak like you, so his towel is the cleanest one. You can use your son's things!"

Now that she had cared for four boys, Erica had become good at taking care of people. She carefully wiped the water on Matthew's hands.

She guessed that Matthew like the noodles she had cooked. After all, he ate in silence till all the noodles were finished.

Just like the four little guys. They never said a word from beginning to end while eating the noodles made by their mother.

In the kitchen, Owen picked up some noodles and asked Tessie, who had quietly come out to clean the kitchen, "How often does Erica cook? And have you tried her noodles before?"

Tessie glanced at him and answered briefly, "Yes."

"What do you think about them?" Owen asked cautiously. He didn't say that the noodles tasted awful.

Tessie didn't say anything. Instead, she busied herself with cleaning the kitchen.

Since she stayed silent, Owen got her point. "Did the four boys grow up by eating these noodles?" That would be miserable! To be honest, he had never eaten such terrible noodles before. He really felt bad for the boys.

"No, I can cook. I am the one who usually cooks for the boys," said Tessie. She couldn't help smiling as she thought of how the four kids would gobble up her food every time she'd cook for them.

Although they were only three years old, they were so sensitive and understanding as if they were teenagers.

"That's good to hear!" Owen nodded his head with a smile that indicated his sense of relief.

Even he could understand that it wasn't easy for the two women to take care of four children.

As he mulled over their situation bitterly, Owen wondered if Matthew would be able to carry on with his original plan. Although Owen was just an outsider, he couldn't help sympathizing with the wife and children of his boss because the living conditions in this place were deplorable. And yet Matthew was planning on leaving his wife here so that he could teach her a lesson.

'I don't think Matthew has the heart to go through with it, ' he thought to himself.

At night, Matthew wanted to wash his feet, so Erica got Adkins' plastic basin and filled it with warm water.

When Matthew said he wanted to brush his teeth and wash his face, Erica knocked at the door of a nearby shop in the middle of the night and bought him a set of toothbrush.

Matthew had a lot of demands, and Erica did everything for him without any hesitation, just as how he had willingly taken care of her a long time ago.

After Erica made sure that Matthew's needs were met with, she took Owen to the village head's house and woke him up so he could help arrange a place for Matthew's men to stay for the night.

By the time Erica came back, it was almost midnight and Matthew was sitting on the bed with his legs crossed.

Erica stretched her slightly cramped muscles, but she wasn't ready for sleep just yet. "Why don't you go ahead and sleep? I'll come to bed later."

She had an important thing to do today.

The man's confused eyes watched Erica as she quickly locked the door and took out her treasure box from the hole on the ground. She unlocked it and flipped it open, revealing a camera and a few developed photos.

There was a look of melancholy on her face after she turned the camera on and looked through all the photos she had taken that day.

Erica had failed to gather evidence on the crimes of Kirk and Pike because of the dog. It seemed as though she needed to work harder.

All the while, the man who had been sitting on the bed without uttering a word, finally got up and walked towards her to see what she was looking at with so much prudence.

Most of the photos were of sceneries and people.

Suddenly, he grabbed her hand and said, "Hold on a second!"

Erica looked up at the man in confusion and asked, "Why?"

Matthew took her camera and squinted his eyes at the tiny screen. Two of those photographs were the originals that had won the first and second prizes in the Twentieth International Photography Competition.

"So you are EM," he said firmly.

EM was the alias for an up and coming dark horse in the photography industry. Although the whereabouts of this person was shrouded in mystery, most people would find EM's photos real and easy to relate to. That was how EM quickly managed to gain traction in the photography industry.

Just in the past two years, EM had won countless awards in the photography industry.

When Matthew was still searching for Erica, he also had someone investigate EM, but the information he received from his contact was of a man who was born in Creygro. There seemed to be nothing that could connect EM to Erica because they were from completely different backgrounds.

Erica looked at him in shock and asked, "How did you know?" When she looked down at the backs of the four boys on her camera, she realized how stupid her question was. "Ah, yeah. I'm EM." EM was an abbreviation for Erica and Matthew.

Erica decided to change her name after she left Cass. She named herself Erma, which was a combination of Erica and Matthew, and she used his surname as hers. She was quite satisfied with the name "Erma Hilton."

Matthew was at a complete loss for words. He finally realized why neither the Hilton family nor the Leonard family was able to find her, despite their ardent efforts.

They had been looking for Erica in the wrong places.

What they were looking for was a woman named Erica or Rika and she was with twins—two boys, two girls, or a boy and a girl.

However, as it turned out, Erica had changed her name to Erma, moved into the slum, and was a mother to four sons.

Matthew rubbed his aching temples. Whoever said his woman was stupid obviously didn't know what she was capable of.

"Let's go to bed!"

"Ah, I have to—"

Without giving her a chance to speak, the man put the camera back inside the box and closed the lid.

Much to Erica's surprise, Matthew carried her to bed.

The pillows and even the quilt still had the same scent as Erica's. As he turned off the lights, Matthew kissed her even though she was still grumbling.

Erica was shocked to say the least. 'Didn't we just have sex? What does he want again?'

Matthew's actions made Erica wonder whether he had come all the way here just to sleep with her.

The scary part was that Erica's guess was actually right.

The next morning, Erica fluttered her eyes open and got out of bed. Just as she opened the door, she overheard Owen. "Matthew, the car is waiting for you. You can leave now if you want." Matthew frowned as he glanced over at her vegetable garden in a pensive mood.

'The car is waiting?'

Despite the pain all over her body, Erica rushed out of the room in her pajamas and stood in front of the man before he could get into the car. "Are you leaving?" she asked in disbelief.

Glancing at the woman, Matthew didn't utter a word.

Owen understood that it was time for him to carry out his boss's plan. He stepped forward and said, "Yes, Mrs. Hilton."

Before Erica could say anything, Matthew reminded Owen, "Owen, what did you just call her?"

'What did he mean?' Erica strongly believed that her IQ had improved a lot during these years, but whenever she faced Matthew, she felt as though she was still the same stupid woman.

Owen lowered his head and coughed, not knowing what to say next.

Instead of waiting for Owen to speak, Matthew explained, "What he is trying to tell you is that we are no longer married. It's not appropriate to address you as Mrs. Hilton."

"What?" Erica exclaimed. Those words struck her like a bolt of lightning. She stared intently at the man, but he didn't seem perturbed in the least. "No, it's impossible..." she murmured.

As far as she knew, a couple needed to go through the divorce procedures together. So how did they get a divorce while she was away?

'Sorry, Erica. It's your husband who forced me to say this,' Owen sighed in his heart. "It's true. Matthew has already divorced you," he said flatly.

Erica's heart sank. They hadn't seen each other in over three years and now she just found out that they were already divorced. "But how did you...?"

"Well, thanks to my connections, it was easy for me to divorce you without you being around," Matthew explained calmly, paying attention to her every reaction.

The look of shock and sadness on her face gave Matthew satisfaction.

Erica held back her tears and asked, "Then... why did you sleep with me yesterday?" Matthew had slept with her the moment they met!

Owen took a few steps back as soon as he heard that. After all, their private matters were something that did not concern him.

Matthew looked into Erica's eyes and said indifferently, "It's normal for a man to sleep with a woman."

'So what he did yesterday was just what a man would do to a woman without any emotions involved?' she wondered.

"Come on, it's been over three years. You can't tell me you didn't want to have sex with me as much as I did with you?" he continued to ask.

Even if Erica had wanted to, she was too embarrassed to admit the truth. "No, no..."

A hint of playfulness flashed through the man's eyes. "I think you were also very enthusiastic last night." Matthew gave her a sly smirk.

'Jerk!' she cursed inwardly.

Before Matthew was about to leave, Erica stopped him and said, "I know what you mean. Take good care of our sons from now on. I will go to see them when I'm free."

CHAPTER 1356 YOU LIED TO HER

"If you know what I mean, what is it then?" Matthew thought she wouldn't understand what he meant.

Thinking about the letter she left to him three years ago, Erica sniffed and said, "Have you met a very excellent woman?" That was the only reason she could think of

why he divorced and abandoned her. She guessed it wrong, and he had already expected that she wouldn't really understand what he wanted to say. But since she was not willing to go back with him, he thought it would be useless to explain it.

So instead of answering her, he just gave her an extremely cold look, turned around, and strode to his car.

Matthew's car left Tow Village immediately. But at the gate of Erica's house, a lot of curious villagers still stood. They enjoyed what they had witnessed just now, so they didn't leave the place.

Holding back the tears that were about to fall, she went back to the yard, closed the gate, and washed her face quietly.

Tessie, who had been in the room when Erica and Matthew talked, heard everything. After making sure that Matthew had left, she came to Erica and comforted her, "Erica, are you okay?"

Erica turned around and replied with a smile, "Yeah, I'm fine." She then finished washing her face and began brushing her teeth.

"I think Matthew still has feelings for you. After all, he flew thousands of kilometers just to see you. Don't overthink things," Tessie said. Alorith was more than three thousand kilometers away from the nearest airport to Tow Village. All in all, Matthew had traveled over six thousand kilometers back and forth.

Erica stopped brushing her teeth upon realizing that Tessie made sense. She took the toothbrush out of her mouth and said, "He must still be angry at me for leaving without saying a word three years ago. And yesterday, when he asked me if I would go back to Alorith with him, I said no."

"Well, since you left Alorith just like that, leaving only a letter, even your parents must be angry. You can't blame Matthew," said Tessie.

Erica nodded and replied, "That's actually one of the reasons why I don't want to go back. I'm afraid that my father will skin me alive as soon as he sees me."

Because of what she said, Tessie persuaded her, "You better go back as soon as possible. Don't wait for your dad to come here, or else the consequences will be dire."

"You are right." Erica made up her mind. She would go back to Alorith as soon as possible after she had

dealt with everything.

'So what if Matthew has a new woman by his side now? I believe I can also drive her away like what I did to Phoebe and Camille, ' Erica thought to herself.

Meanwhile, two luxury cars were driving out of the village. Matthew's face darkened upon remembering what had just happened. They hadn't seen each other for more than three years, but Erica seemed to have become more heartless. She didn't even stop him from leaving. As soon as his car drove away, she turned around and entered the yard without looking back.

Owen, who was sitting in the front seat, looked back at him and asked, "Matthew, is it really appropriate that we lied to Erica?"

'It is impossible for Matthew to divorce Erica. In the past three years, he has never given up looking for her even just for one day. He is not going to end their marriage, just like this, ' he thought inwardly.

But Matthew just cast a cold glance at him and said, "Watch your mouth."

Owen was a little confused, trying to analyze if there was something wrong with what he said. After thinking about it for a long time, he just kept quiet because he failed to see what was wrong with his question.

Matthew seemed to have read his mind, so he explained calmly, "It was you who lied to her, not me."

"What?" Owen's eyes widened in shock. He had worked with Matthew for many years, but he still couldn't understand what he was thinking.

Matthew continued, "Remember, I just said, 'Owen is trying to tell you we are no longer married.' It was you who said, 'Matthew has already divorced you.' Have you forgotten about it?"

With confusion written all over his face, Owen retorted, "But Matthew, it was you who asked me to say those..."

"Yes. That's why it was you who lied to her, not me," Matthew cut in. Since it wasn't him who told Erica that they were already divorced, it meant that he didn't lie to her.

For the first time in his life, Owen had realized how scheming his boss was. He never thought that he had planned to shift all the blame to him.

As a consolation, Matthew added, "Didn't you eat the noodles cooked by Rika? I was actually going to make you pay for that. But since you will take the blame for me, I will forgive you for eating the food she made for me."

It was the first time that Erica had cooked noodles for him, but Owen had eaten a lot. If they were in a

different situation, he would have taught Owen a lesson already. 'What? It was Erica who insisted that I eat those terrible noodles. I didn't want to eat them in the first place, ' Owen cried inwardly.

The driver, who was only listening to their conversation, tried his best to hold back his laughter as he turned to look at Owen, who was still in a daze.

There were many questions he wanted to ask Owen, but he couldn't because Matthew was there.

Matthew's four children were already sent to a kindergarten in Alorith.

He found Kenney's biological parents, and when the kid agreed to be with them, he immediately sent him back to his hometown so they could be together again.

On the day that he came back from Tow Village, the four kids rushed downstairs as soon as his car stopped at the garage of the manor.

When Matthew entered the living room, Colman rushed over at once and hugged him warmly. "Dad, you're back. Where's Mom?"

"Your mom will be back in a few days," he answered firmly. Although Erica had refused, he was determined to bring her back.

Adkins looked at Matthew in silence. The expression on his face was like saying he already knew it.

With a racing car in his hands, Damian raised his head and asked Matthew in a low voice, "Dad, can you transfer us to another grade?"

Matthew put Colman down and squatted to face his four sons. "Why do you suddenly want to change grades?" he asked.

The four brothers looked at each other, then Boswell answered, "We already know everything that the teachers are teaching us." They all felt that it was an insult to their IQ if they continued to stay in their current class. Instead of going to the kindergarten, they wanted to go to the primary school already.

Stroking Boswell's head, Matthew stood up and announced to his four sons, "Okay then. You'll move to the preparatory class. And next year, you'll go straight to the primary school."

"Great!" the four boys cheered in chorus.

Debbie walked downstairs, holding a glass box in her hands. She then asked in horror, "Who put a caterpillar in this box?"

Colman raised his hand in an instant and replied, "It's me, Grandma."

"Why did you catch it?" she asked in confusion.

Taking the box from her hands, he explained, "I used to raise caterpillars when we were in Tow Village. Many people bullied us before, so I scared them by throwing caterpillars into their clothes. They all rolled to the ground in fright. Ha-ha!"

As they got reminded of the funny faces of those who bullied them before, the four boys burst into laughter.

Matthew got curious, so he asked, "Why were you bullied?"

After looking at each other, the three boys looked at Adkins in tacit agreement. Understanding their gazes, Adkins explained instantly, "People are saying that Mom is a bad woman because we don't have a father. Someone has even sneaked into our house..."

"Sneaked into your house? Why?" Matthew interrupted. A bad feeling rose in his heart.

Since the kids didn't want to hide anything from their father, Colman was the one who answered next. With eyes wide open, he said, "A man asked Mom to abandon us. He said that if Mom married him and leaved us, he would give her one hundred thousand dollars."

Debbie was shocked to hear such revelation from the little boy.

With a darkened expression, Matthew asked, "What did your mom say?"

Boswell's eyes filled with admiration upon thinking about Erica as he answered, "Mom didn't say anything. She just picked up the stick next to her and beat him up."

Damian then added with a smile, "Yes, that's right. Then Colman put a caterpillar on that man's neck. He was so scared that he almost pissed his pants."

"Ha-ha!" The four little boys laughed again as they remembered the man's embarrassed look.

CHAPTER 1357 COLLECTION OF PHOTOS

But Matthew and Debbie didn't find the boys' story funny. Debbie, who felt sorry for what they had gone through, held Colman in her arms and asked Matthew, "Didn't you go to find Rika? Why is she not with you?"

"Give her some time." Matthew wanted Erica to come back to him willingly and never leave him again.

"Why do we have to wait?" Debbie gave him a confused look and added, "Didn't you coax her enough? Didn't she want to come back with you?"

Colman suddenly cut in, "No, Grandma. Mommy can't come back now, maybe because she hasn't finished her task yet."

"Task? What task?" Debbie got more confused.

Colman blinked and hesitated for a moment. "Grandma, I will tell you, but don't tell anyone."

"Okay, go ahead."

"Mom has promised the police to find evidence of the crimes made by Kirk and his men. That's what we only know. Mom didn't tell us the details. And when she sent us back here, she hasn't gotten the most important evidence yet."

Matthew and Debbie looked at each other. Then Matthew turned to Adkins and asked with a frown, "Does your mom do this kind of task often?"

Adkins nodded first but then shook his head afterward. "We don't know. Sometimes Mom doesn't tell us."

"I understand. You can go and play now," he said.

"Okay."

The four boys ran upstairs and went back to the games they were playing before Matthew arrived.

Debbie watched them running upstairs and sighed. "Although these children grew up in such a poor place, they don't have any bad habits. I admire Rika for raising them well. It must have been difficult and tiresome for her to take care of them even though Tessie is there to help her."

Matthew didn't say anything. But deep in his heart, he knew that Debbie was right. So he promised himself that he would never let Erica suffer again.

Before going upstairs, Debbie reminded him, "Get Rika back as soon as possible. Don't let her suffer more outside."

"I will." He would definitely take her back. It was only a matter of time.

As night fell, Matthew stayed in his study, looking at the photos taken by EM. Her first winning entry had photos shot three years ago.

It was a collection of five photos called "Different Childhood." In the first picture was a thin girl who was about six or seven years old. Dressed in patched clothes, she was pulling a rope on her back. The rope was connected to a wooden cart behind her that was full of dried wood. Since the cart looked so heavy, the struggle was visible on her face.

The second photo showed the same girl, but this time, her dark face was covered with tears. She was squatting beside the river and washing some clothes, while a fat woman beside her was holding a whip.

In the third picture, the little girl was climbing a steep mountain with her younger sister on her back, to collect some herbs and sell them for money.

In the fourth picture, she was kneeling under the rain and apologizing to her mother.

In the fifth picture, she was peering over the windowsill of a classroom in the village, quietly staring at the characters on the blackboard. The intense yearning for knowledge reflected in her eyes.

The second collection of photos revealed how a nursing home abused the elderly. She took six pictures from different angles, showing the sadness and despair in the elderly's eyes, the arrogance of the staff, and their complacent faces upon receiving some money.

The third collection showed how a group of criminals, on an old cruise ship, abused the women and children they had bought. Some of the pictures also showed their happy smiles and excited faces when police officers came to rescue them.

Aside from the three collections, there were also other photos with different elements that could surely touch anyone's heart. EM was good at capturing the most critical moment of the person's reaction that could make the onlookers feel different emotions.

There was a sudden knock on the door of the study. Looking at the door, Matthew immediately stubbed out his cigarette.

The door slowly opened, and a little head stuck out. It was Colman. He looked at Matthew and asked, "Dad, can I come in?"

"Wait." Matthew walked to the window and opened it to dissipate the smoke before letting Colman in.

Before he could say anything, the little boy pointed at the photos on his computer and asked innocently, "Dad, aren't those photos taken by Mom?"

He looked at him and nodded.

Pointing at the little girl in the first collection of photos, Colman said, "We all know Mom's works. Although we weren't born yet when she took pictures of this little girl, it was Aunt Tessie who told us. This little girl's name is Vera. When Mom found out that her mother was abusing her, she reported it to the police. And before she left, she even gave some money to this little girl."

'Money?' Matthew pondered. 'Rika might have given the money she got in Cass to this little girl.'

Colman turned to the second collection and explained while Matthew listened silently. "I know this too. Mom said that she took these photos from the nearby nursing home two months after we were born. Aunt Tessie said that when Mom exposed his wrongdoings, the director of the nursing home wanted to take revenge on Mom, so he sent some people to smash our home. They even tried to take us away, but Mom scared them with a knife."

'A Knife?' Matthew thought while clenching his right hand into a fist. But he continued to listen carefully to Colman's explanation.

"In this third collection, Mom called the police after she has gotten all the evidence to save those poor women and children. Look at this picture, Dad. Mom took a picture of a disabled mother carrying her dying son on her back while crawling out of the house for help."

When Colman finished explaining the story behind all the photos he saw, he added, "Mom still has a lot of photos that haven't been released. She was afraid that we would be implicated, so she secretly burned many of them."

Matthew touched the little boy's head and asked, "How did your mom raise you?"

"Mom took pictures for people in the village, and they paid her. She could also get money from winning in all kinds of competitions and tasks. But most of our living expenses were supported by Aunt Chantel. She regularly sent us money more than enough to aid us. However, Mom likes doing charity works. She always wants to help poor people. She also invested a lot in photography, so she always used up the money from Aunt Chantel quickly." Colman told Matthew everything he knew.

"Chantel?" Surprise was written all over his face when he asked the little boy for confirmation.

"Yes. Aunt Chantel is awesome!" As an innocent child, Colman didn't know the matters between adults. In his eyes, his father was a great man, so he told him everything he knew.

Matthew was rendered speechless. He didn't expect that Chantel knew where Erica was all these years.

It was all Gifford's fault. He and Chantel hadn't seen each other for years because they were both busy in their careers. Wesley and Blair were the ones who took care of Hugo. The couple would only go back and accompany their son whenever they were free.

If Gifford had paid even just a little attention to Chantel, he would definitely found out something about Erica.

When Matthew remained quiet, Colman couldn't help saying, "Dad, I have something to ask you."

His voice brought Matthew back to his senses, so he said, "Okay, go ahead."

"Uncle Sheffield said that you are good at network technology. I want to learn from you." Because of the

kind of life they had in the village, Colman had never gotten the chance to use a computer. One day, when he saw Carlos playing on the computer, he immediately got fascinated by it.

Coincidentally, Sheffield also came to them at that time. Looking at how the little boy got himself immersed in playing with the computer, he knew that he was interested in network technology. So he told the little boy that Matthew was very good at it, and he could learn from him.

Matthew was amused. His four three-year-old sons were surely interested in learning many things.

CHAPTER 1358 THE BRACELE

First, Boswell had told Matthew that he wanted to learn about business. Now, Colman was telling him that he wanted to learn about network technology. He couldn't help pondering in his mind, 'Should I be happy that my sons are all geniuses?'

"Dad, can't I?" Colman evoked him. The little boy began to feel slightly disappointed because his dad didn't respond for quite a while.

Matthew shook his head and was about to say it was fine with him.

But Colman misunderstood his gesture and thought that he didn't agree, so he immediately bargained, "If you teach me, I'll tell you Mom's secret."

"Well... what secret?"

Colman sat on his lap and said in a low voice, "When Mom was taking photos in the nursing home, a paralyzed old woman, who was bedridden, wanted to express her gratitude to Mom for saving them. So, she gave Mom a string of bracelet called Divine Bone Sherpa Bracelet. This bracelet has a long history, and it seems to have come from the royal family of Kuflya. The story was a bit complicated, but it was said that the bracelet could mobilize the royal army of Kuflya."

'The royal family of Kuflya?' Matthew repeated in his mind. Colman was narrating the story mysteriously, and he couldn't help raising an eyebrow. "As far as I know, this kind of bracelet is not made from precious materials. I think it's impossible to belong to the royal family. And you said it could mobilize the royal army?" If it weren't for the fact that Colman was still too young to understand many things although he knew quite a lot of words, Matthew would have doubted if the boy had read too many novels to create such a story. Or perhaps the old woman just remembered it wrongly and told a different story to Erica.

If the bracelet was really that powerful, why would the old woman stay in a nursing home and allow the staff to abuse the elderly? It sounded so inconceivable.

Seeing the dubious look on Matthew's face, Colman got a little anxious. "Dad, it's true. When some criminals took us away last time, Mom asked help from the royal army. It was they who found and saved us. Mom has been living in Kuflya since we were born. Although she has moved to several villages, she

never left Kuflya. It's because the royal army there can protect us as long as she has the bracelet."

Matthew fell silent. He still didn't believe it. Perhaps Erica just made the story up to coax the children to sleep at night.

But of course, he agreed to his request. "If you really want to learn about network technology, I will ask someone to teach you."

"But I don't want someone else, Dad. I only want you." In Colman's eyes, Matthew was the greatest man in the world. Otherwise, he wouldn't have made his company so big.

A hint of happiness flashed through Matthew's eyes when he looked at Colman. Indeed, he could see Erica on him. "Okay. I will be the one to teach you. But let me tell you, your uncle Sheffield's hacking skills are way better than mine."

"What?" Coleman exclaimed in surprise, mouth agape.

"Yes!" Matthew confirmed with a nod. "You can also learn from him if you have nothing else to do," he added. He had too many sons, so he didn't mind entrusting one of them to Sheffield. After all, Sheffield's children had different interests. Godwin was studying traditional Chinese medicine, while Gwyn didn't show any interest in network technology at all. It was good to have someone inherit his skills as a hacker and honker.

"Alright. I will, Dad. But please, take Mom back as soon as possible, okay?" 'I already miss Mom so much, ' Colman thought to himself. 'I want to play all the toys bought by Dad with Mom and let her eat Western food prepared by the chefs.'

"I will," Matthew promised.

It was another dark night in Tow Village.

The rain had just stopped, so Erica seized the opportunity and walked out of the house with her camera.

As soon as she got out, a man suddenly came out of the darkness and handed her a bottle. "Erma, Chantel asked me to give this to you."

Erica knew the man, so she took the bottle and checked it carefully. But since there was no label on it, she asked, "What is this?"

The man stepped closer to her and replied in a low voice, "This is a drug that can make people temporarily pass out. As soon as she got it, she asked me to bring it to you immediately. She also asked me to remind you that the effect of this drug differs from people to people. Someone who takes this drug can be unconscious in three minutes the shortest and ten minutes the longest."

Erica was very happy to hear it. "Great! This is what I need. By the way, where is she now?"

"I'm sorry, Erma. I don't know where Chantel is right now."

"That's alright. Thank you for bringing this drug to me. I have to go now." She put the bottle in her pocket and left in a hurry.

"Goodbye, Erma!"

After making sure that the drug and her camera were all with her, she sneaked into Pike's yard.

She had been observing this place in the past few months, so she knew that Kirk and Pike would be out for business today, and they wouldn't be back in two days.

Since her sons had left and Matthew had come to her, she couldn't stay here for too long anymore. She had to seize this opportunity today to finish her mission.

As usual, she climbed up the wall using a rope. She then sat on the top of the wall carefully and took out a piece of drugged beef from her pocket.

The moment she threw it in front of the sleepy dog, it immediately raised its head.

She lay motionless on the wall to hide in the dark night.

The dog sniffed the meat and ate it up.

She counted in her mind. Ten seconds later, the dog fell to the ground after finishing the piece of beef.

She threw another piece down to make sure that the dog was already asleep. When it didn't move, she carefully slid down the wall.

There were three men guarding the yard. But someone brought a bottle of good wine and shouted to them, so they all ran to the room excitedly to drink.

From the wall, Erica ran to the nearest window and there, she saw a dozen of men eating and drinking happily.

She squatted at the door, thinking about what to do next.

A few moments later, she went to the kitchen and lit the pile of firewood in there. For all the men to immediately notice the fire in the kitchen, Erica picked up a few burning sticks and threw them under the door where the men were having a good time.

Soon enough, one of them seemed to have realized that something was wrong. As he craned his head,

he saw that the door behind them was already burning.

"Fire!" he shouted. All the men who were eating and drinking stood up in an instant.

Two of them rushed to the door to check. But before they could even put out the fire, they found out that the kitchen was also on fire.

The rest of them ran out to see what was going on.

At this time, Erica had already sneaked inside the room quietly. While everyone's attention was on the burning kitchen, she poured a few drops of the drug on each of the men's glasses.

She initially planned to put the drug directly into the bottle of wine, but since the bottle was sealed, she couldn't open it.

The fire in the kitchen wasn't that big, and it only made the wall a little charred. After splashing a few buckets of water on it, the fire was all put out.

When the group of men returned to the room, Erica quickly found a place to hide.

She waited as the men sat down and continued to drink while talking about how the fire could have started.

Five minutes later, they all fell unconscious one after another.

Some lay on the ground, while some bent over the table. The only one who remained conscious was the man who didn't drink because he was allergic to alcohol. "Guys, wake up! What happened to all of you?" he asked in shock.

CHAPTER 1359 DIE HERE

Erica quietly walked out from behind the cabinet and approached the man. She acted quickly and accurately. When the man heard a noise, he turned around and was greeted by Erica as she sprayed him three or four times in the face.

Before the drug could take effect, though, he shouted, "It's you! Erma!" The next moment, he took out the cellphone from his pocket to notify the others about what was happening.

At the same time, Erica reached out, trying to grab the phone, but the man kept his grip so tight around the device that she wasn't able to snatch it from him.

Luckily, the drug soon began to take effect as he loosened his grip. With his eyes already closed, his body slid down from the chair until it was on the ground.

Erica heaved a sigh of relief and turned off his phone before throwing it aside. Then the room was finally

on the clear for her to look into it.

On the surface, there didn't seem to be anything special about the house, but since it was guarded by more than ten people every day, there must be something hidden inside it.

Erica suddenly regretted drugging that last man. If she had thought about it earlier, she would have threatened and forced him to tell her what the secret they kept in the house was instead.

Yet she didn't have much time to think about it now. The effect of the drug wouldn't last long, so she had to continue to inspect the room before they woke up.

A couple of minutes later, as Erica was fumbling around one of the cabinets, her hand accidentally bumped into something, causing the seemingly fixed furniture to start moving.

Carefully, she took two steps back while she watched the cabinet rotating one hundred and eighty degrees.

When it finally stopped moving, she strode forward and noticed a square-shaped hole on the ground. Taking a closer look at it, she realized there was a way down to a basement.

She was immediately led to believe that all of Kirk and Pike's secrets should be hidden in that basement.

Erica briefly looked back at the group of people still asleep behind her and then went down the hole without hesitation.

At first glance, she noticed the place was quite spacious. On the long table at the center, there were all kinds of bottles at disposal. Two people had their backs to her, and they didn't seem to have heard her coming down. Anyway, she had no clear sight of what they were doing so intently.

When Erica took her final step down, the cabinet restored to its original place, sealing the basement entrance once again.

With no way of going back, she quietly hid behind a shelf and took out a dagger in case she needed to protect herself.

Erica's attention was immediately grabbed by lots of white powder in several airtight bags over the shelf. She bent over to smell one of them but didn't find a scent.

All of a sudden, one of the two men turned around with a glass tube in his hand. However, Erica couldn't name the kind of chemical liquid which was inside it.

She took the opportunity to photograph them anyway.

Gladly, her camera was soundless, or else she would have been caught.

She also took photos of the stuff on the shelf. She could tell they weren't good news. If her feeling about them was right, these were the type of powder that couldn't just destroy a man's body but also his spirit.

She registered everything within her reach. As she quietly moved, she inadvertently saw a huge cage hanging from the ceiling.

'What's that in the cage? Wait! Is it a person?!

Erica was suddenly so frightened that she had to bring a hand over her mouth in order to muffle a shriek.

The person was lying unconscious in the cage and covered in blood. She couldn't tell whether the person was dead or alive.

But before she could take any action, a big noise came from above the basement. The cabinet moved again, freeing the access downstairs. "Go down and take a look!" someone shouted.

"Yes, sir!"

Erica cried in her mind, 'Oh no!'

She quickly stepped back and hid herself in the corner.

Two men hurried downstairs as one of them shouted, "Hey, did you see anyone come down?"

The men, who had been working in the basement, turned to them and looked around before they shook their heads and said, "No."

They all began to search after her in every corner of the basement. Even if Erica tried her best to shrink herself behind a shelf, she had nowhere to run. It was a matter of time until she was found. Soon, a man was looking into Erica's eyes as he shouted, "The widow is here!"

Immediately, Erica rushed out with the dagger and kicked the man who had found her.

However, she didn't go very far. The next moment, she found herself surrounded by three men who came down running her way.

By the time everyone had heard where she was, more people started to come down. Each one of them had a vicious look on their faces and a dagger in their hands.

"Kirk is right. There is something wrong with this widow!"

"How dare you sneak into here? You're dead meat today!"

"Brothers! Not so fast! We're going to have some fun with this bitch before we kill her!"

The man's words caused a burst of laughter among the others. "Ha-ha! That's great!"

Erica gritted her teeth and rushed to the two men in front of her with the dagger. At that moment, more than ten men in the basement were fighting against the woman.

In ten minutes, ten men were lying on the ground, whimpering in pain. Erica pressed the dagger on the neck of the last one she had defeated and ordered him coldly, "Take me upstairs!"

With the blood-stained dagger on his neck, the man didn't dare to breathe. "Yes... Yes!"

After he opened the basement door for her, Erica pulled him down before he could climb up, and then she hurried upstairs.

But, what she didn't expect was to find even more people waiting for her once she came up.

Now there were over thirty men in the room holding sticks and daggers against her. Meanwhile, Kirk sat in a chair, calmly having a smoke. The moment he saw her, he laughed and said, "Little widow, I must recognize you're quite skillful."

From the beginning, he had known there was something wrong with this woman. That night, he deliberately changed his plans and didn't leave the village. He had been waiting nearby just for her to fall into his trap.

Erica, on the other hand, was ready to fight her way on her own, but Kirk suddenly took out a black object that was attached to his waist and placed it on the table next to him.

Erica didn't fail to notice it was a gun.

However, she never thought that Kirk had access to this sort of weapon.

Putting away her dagger, Erica smiled at him. "Kirk, how about we talk about it?"

Then they both laughed at one another.

Kirk then crooked his finger at her and said hoarsely, "Come here and let me have a look at you." Suppressing the sick feeling in her stomach, Erica took two steps forward. Everyone present was instantaneously watchful of her every move.

Kirk stared at her for a long time until he finally nodded. "Good. I'll give you two choices. The first one is to be my woman. And the second is to die here."

As she had found out their secret, there was no way they could keep this woman alive.

'Be your woman? Do you honestly think you deserve me? Screw you!' Erica smiled, pretending to be amused by the offer. However, she was indeed cursing the man inwardly the whole time.

The gun was right next to her now. As long as she was fast enough, she would be able to reach it out.

Yet she couldn't fool Kirk. Seeming to understand her intentions, he stretched out his hand to get the gun.

Erica gave him a quick kick on the wrist before she moved to grab the weapon.

However, as soon as she reached out for it, one of the other men beside the table raised his dagger and stabbed her hand, forcing her to retreat and give up on the idea altogether.

Immediately, she had to come up with a new plan.

So, she turned around and rushed to the door. But all she could find was a closed door, at the same time someone came and attacked her from behind. In order to protect herself, she had no choice but to deal with these people first.

"Erma, if you move again, I'll shoot you!" Kirk's face was still pale after the kick he got. Yet, with his uninjured left hand, he raised the gun and aimed at the woman at the door.

CHAPTER 1360 THE CHILDREN'S FATHER IS DEAD

'Damn it! I'm trapped now!'

Erica raised her hands above her head and surrendered obediently. She slowly turned around to confirm her predicament. Yes, Kirk was pointing a gun at her.

Kirk stood up from his seat and grabbed the dagger from the hand of his goon. He stalked toward Erica brandishing the knife, his expression dangerous like a jungle cat.

"Hey, Kirk. What are you doing? Let's not be hasty here! Didn't you ask me to be your woman?" Erica couldn't laugh anymore, seeing the gun and dagger in his hands. She was almost hysterical, so she forced herself to try and calm down.

Kirk pressed the tip of the dagger against her chest and slowly moved up. At last, he pressed it against her smooth chin. With an evil smile on his face, he said, "I could cut your garments to ribbons. I might even cut you in the process. Should we do this here, or maybe go somewhere more...private?"

'Damn it! You bastard!' Erica couldn't help cursing in her heart. 'You've gone too far this time! Try it, try anything, and I'll make you a eunuch!' "Of course..."

Before she could finish her words, someone kicked in the door behind her.

Fortunately, she had already backed away. Otherwise the door would have flattened her.

A group of bodyguards in suits and leather shoes polished to perfection rapidly filed in, forming two rows once they got inside. They cornered Kirk's men, having unholstered their guns before they came in. The bodyguards spooked the goons into silence.

All eyes turned to look at the tall man who strode in last. Even if they couldn't see him clearly, everyone felt his noble aura.

Even Kirk was astonished by the man's imposing manner. He strolled over to Kirk, and kicked the gun from the man's hand.

As Kirk dug into his jacket for another weapon, the other man already had a Glock 19 Gen5 pointed at Kirk's temple. He knew exactly what he was doing, since he'd clearly customized the frame size with backstraps and removed the finger grooves from the grip.

The man was efficient yet smooth, all actions taking place without missing a beat. Erica was charmed by how cool he looked.

She looked at the man, eyes full of affection. It was obvious she was very much in love.

Kirk's gun had landed near a bodyguard who stepped on it. No one was getting that one back.

Erica was so excited that she screamed and hugged the man who had subdued Kirk. "Matthew! Matthew!" Her Matthew was like a *deus ex machina*—a god that came down from the sky to save her again!

One hand holding the weapon aimed at Kirk, Matthew held the woman with his free arm and said coldly, "She is a lovely woman. I can understand why you might desire her. But she's mine. Did you think you could take her away from me?"

Kirk was dumbstruck. He found his voice after a moment and asked, "Erma, you told everyone you were a widow, that the father of your children was dead. How—"

'I'm dead? She's a widow?' Matthew's eyes became colder, and he silently swore in his heart that he would settle accounts with Erica later.

She exclaimed in her heart, 'Oh no! I've been found out!' She reacted quickly and kicked Kirk hard. "Who told you I'm a widow? Go ahead, spread that rumor. I'll kill you!"

With one hand on his chest, Kirk asked Matthew with difficulty, "Who-who are you?"

The cold man said slowly, "Shut up! You don't deserve answers!"

Kirk didn't know what to say. He raised his head and looked at Erica, "Is this the salesman who sells clothes and houses?" Judging from the man's imposing manner, he was definitely not the ordinary salesman Erma made him out to be.

'Shit! Can't this man shut up? He's going to die but he's digging my grave too!' Erica thought.

'A salesman...who sells houses and clothes?' the bodyguards thought. They wanted to laugh out loud but dared not; the muscles on their faces were constantly trembling as they tried hard to hold back their guffaws.

Matthew's face darkened as he stared at the woman.

Erica was truly worried now. She tried to distract Matthew by saying, "Watch these guys, I gotta go do something. It's in the basement. I'll explain later!"

Now that her husband was here, she could dig up the evidence and expose their crimes.

Matthew moved his foot off of Kirk and ordered his bodyguards, "Tie him up!" He hadn't forgotten that Erica had played a part in this. But he bided his time. He could wait.

"Yes, Matthew!"

Then he saw that Erica was having trouble moving the cabinet. He could guess the reason why she was doing it. Finally, he simply ordered one of Kirk's men, "Move that cabinet!"

Soon, the cabinet was moved away, revealing the entrance to the basement. Erica went downstairs again, but this time she had Matthew with her.

Two bodyguards followed them down.

In the basement

When he caught sight of the powder on the table, Matthew scowled. While Erica shot some photos, he rubbed some powder between his fingertips and sniffed it. He knew what that powder was simply by its scent.

She turned and patted him on the arm. "Matthew, look, there's a person in that cage! Call the cops!" She didn't have a phone with her now, so she had to urge him to do it.

She was going to hand over the photos she had taken to the police after she got out of here. They could investigate this.

But she hadn't thought Matthew would find her. Since he was here, she could rely on him.

Matthew withdrew his eyes from the cage and glanced coldly at the woman who was still excited about gathering the evidence. It was like she didn't understand what kind of danger she was in. "Do you know what this powder is?"

"Not sure! But it must be something bad. And they have a hostage down here too." She had thought that the white powder might be drugs, but there was too much—maybe even several tons, so she was not sure.

They left the basement. Matthew asked his bodyguards to call the police and keep an eye on the group of thugs while he took Erica back home.

She put the camera back to its original place, and then tried to put her arms around him. Matthew pushed her away. He stared at her in disgust and said, "Go take a shower."

The woman lowered her head and took a look. Then she realized she was all covered in dirt. She was filthy. "Okay!" But before she went to shower, she ran to him and kissed him on the cheek happily.

The man's disgusted eyes gradually turned gentle as he watched her scamper off.

By the time she had taken her shower, it was already one o'clock in the morning. Matthew sat on the edge of the bed, engrossed in a phone call. She shooed him off the bed so she could put down fresh sheets and blankets.

Not long after that, he hung up the phone. She couldn't wait to ask, "Why are you here again?"

Matthew was speechless. 'What else could I do? Because you haven't left yet!' he sighed inwardly.

Besides, he had already guessed that it would be dangerous for her to stay here, so he came here with a group of bodyguards, intending to leave the bodyguards here to protect her. However, as soon as they arrived at the Tow Village, Tessie told them that Erica had gone to Kirk's place. So, he hurried there to help her.

Matthew didn't answer but asked, "So, you're a widow?" 'Did she mean I am dead?'

Erica didn't expect him to bring up this topic at all. Seeing the warning in the man's eyes, she smiled awkwardly, held his head in her arms, and tried to muddle through. "I don't know. They were just talking bullshit. By the way, how are our kids doing?"