

The Enchanted Night – Chapter: 21 – 29

Being My Woman

‘She’s my wife!’

Lionel completely lost his temper as he saw that Rufus had saved Cassandra from embarrassment yet again.

He had borne a grudge against Rufus ever since the man came into the Tang Group. Lionel could not believe that this man – a bastard – had taken his place, and every intimacy between Rufus and Cassandra reminded him that he was being replaced. Rufus couldn’t fool him. Lionel believed that his brother coveted his wife.

‘Careful, Lionel. Don’t forget where we are,’

said Rufus with a faint smile. Compared to his seething brother, Rufus radiated calm. Lionel understood the subtle warning.

This was in the Tang Group, and Rufus was his superior. The icy silence between them seeped through the office, as the brothers sat with their eyes locked on one another.

‘Lionel, did you forget about our lunch date? Let’s go before the cafe gets too busy!’

The tension was broken with the graceful appearance of the woman, who laid a hand on Lionel’s shoulder. Her eyes grazed automatically over Rufus, and she smiled slyly.

Rufus met her gaze for a second. 'I have some businesses to discuss with my subordinate,' he said as he nodded to Cassandra, 'so I'm afraid we'll have to leave now. Hope you have a good day, my vice president.'

Rufus looked in Lionel's eyes as he accentuated the words 'vice president'. Then he turned his eyes to Cassandra.

Understanding his look, Cassandra followed Rufus as he left the room. Humiliated, Lionel slammed the door shut behind their retreating figures.

'How did I do?'

Rufus stopped suddenly and turned to Cassandra. Still revelling in the pleasure of putting Lionel in an uncomfortable position, Cassandra didn't notice that Rufus had stopped walking. She nearly bumped into him. Rufus smirked.

It took Cassandra a moment to realize what he meant. When she realized, she turned her head away to hide her grin.

'No one in the company knows the relationship between Lionel and me.'

Cassandra's voice betrayed a touch of insecurity, and Rufus suddenly felt the urge to protect her. He knew she must be going through a difficult time.

'I do.'

Looking up, Cassandra found that the grin was gone from Rufus' face, and he was gazing straight at her with an inte

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'I did no such thing!'

Ella jumped on the bed and cried out. 'I don't want a scheming woman as my wife. Just sign the paper...

nsity that made her heart beat faster.

'It's okay that you know about it,'

Cassandra murmured. This was not the first time that Rufus had saved her from embarrassment, and for some reason she felt that she could be honest with him. No one else knew the relationship between Lionel and her, so she should be able to continue working at this company as if nothing had happened.

'Yes. Since you and I have such a close relationship.'

Rufus stepped closer as he said this, his voice taking on a different tone. That faint smile was playing on his lips again, and Cassandra feared that if he got any closer, he would be able to hear her racing pulse.

She remembered that they were in the workplace, and took a few steps back, in case anyone saw.

'Rufus, you can't do this here...'

Cassandra glared up at him as he had her backed up against the wall.

The blush creeping across her face brought back Rufus' signature smirk, and he gazed even deeper into her eyes. Then all of a sudden, the playful expression melted from his face. He reached past her to place one hand against the wall, trapping her with a serious look.

'Lionel has neither appreciated you nor cherished you as he should. You shouldn't have to put up with him.'

Cassandra lowered her head, unsure what he meant. Eyes searing, Rufus leaned in close to her and murmured, 'Be my woman...'

He was curious as to how she would react to this.

Upon hearing this, Cassandra's face darkened. As grateful as she was for Rufus' help, she did not feel like to be made fun of.

She had expected better from him.

'Rufus, you are acting the same way as Lionel did. Please pay attention to your behavior and stop harassing me, or I will make you regret it,'

Cassandra raised her chin at him, with a warning clear in her eyes. She pushed past him and walked briskly back to her office.

Still staring at where she had stood, Rufus smirked at the memory of her angry face.

He just wanted to test her, and her reaction was beyond his expectations.

Rufus had never paid such attention to any woman, but Cassandra sparked his lust for conquest.

Nonchalantly, he turned and slipped his hands into his pockets. Watching her retreating figure, Rufus smiled to himself.

As darkness fell outside, a wisp of white smoke floated upward beside a french window in the presidential suite.

‘I want her reputation ruined to the extent that the Tang family has to get rid of her. Understand?’

A woman in a wine-red robe was talking on the phone, exhaling smoke with her fluttering full red lips. Her curvy figure was silhouetted by the dark light and the white smoke.

She was the one who chatted excitedly with Lionel in the office during the day. In G City, their relationship was known to all. Everyone knew she was Lionel’s girlfriend, Ivy.

Ivy hung up the phone, and the cigarette was still burning between her tapering fingers. She stared into the distance fixedly, and her full red lips curled in an evil grin.

The sound of running water in the bathroom suddenly stopped. The beauty stubbed out her cigarette and twirled around with a charming smile dancing on her pretty face.

The man walking out of the bathroom only wore a towel covering the lower part of his body. Lionel shook the drops of water that clung to his hair. The air was thick with cigarette smoke which made him frown.

Lionel walked to the woman. He wrapped his arms around her waist from behind, and whispered, ‘Ivy, please...quit smoking.’

Ivy gave a snort and avoided Lionel’s kiss.

‘Why do you still come to me when your dear wife has come back?’

Ivy asked, green with jealousy. She would never forget Lionel’s words from earlier: ‘She is my wife!’

‘Are you jealous?’ I just did that to warn Rufus. No one can take my woman even if I am not interested in her. You are the only one I love. You know that,’

Lionel chuckled.

‘It’s surprising that your father gave that bastard so much control in the company,’

Ivy squinted her eyes as she mentioned Rufus.

‘The situation is only temporary. The whole Tang Group belongs to me. My father is not a risk-taker,’

Lionel scoffed. He seemed confident of his prediction as if he knew some classified information.

Lionel’s words reassured Ivy and her face relaxed. As long as Lionel didn’t lose everything, her life of opulence would be guaranteed.

‘It’s a beautiful night. We must not let those annoying things ruin it. Ivy, I love you...’

The next morning, at the conference room of Tang Group

‘Cassandra is responsible for our new design project. I want every sec

Drugged one night by her ex-boyfriend, a mysterious man took advantage of her in an ecstatic night filled with sex. To take her revenge,

she married the man, and used him. ‘As long as I’m alive, I’m still his legal wife, while all of you are just his mistresses.’ She remained adamant even when he was involved in scandals with other women...

tor to assist her whenever she is in need,’

sitting in the centre of the conference table, Rufus ordered in a low voice with his eyes sluggishly scoured the room.

The managers of the Tang Group were shocked. It was too risky to leave a new entrant such a vital case.

Even Cassandra herself was surprised by his decision. Lionel objected before Cassandra could speak.

‘Cassandra is a green hand. I don’t think it’s a good idea to have her in charge of such an important case. What if she screws it up?’

It was Cassandra again. Lionel was sure there must be something going on between Rufus and her.

He defended Cassandra in personal matters and now he did the same when it came to office matters.

‘Firstly, even though Cassandra had just joined the company, she is the Manager of the Architectural Design Department. I have learnt that her works had won numerous international awards. She is definitely capable of handling the case. Any objection? Or can anyone suggest a better candidate?’

His low and deep voice echoed across the room with his bitter mouth outlining the shadow of a smile. There was silence, and no one said anything.

‘Thank you, president, for giving me this chance. I will do my best,’

Cassandra announced to the silent room. She stood up and made a deep bow.

‘I will appreciate all your assistance.’

Her perfect confidence and courtesy proved how well-educated she was and left no space for anyone to object the decision. Lionel gave Cassandra a look of contempt. ‘What an arrogant woman!’ Lionel thought to himself.

‘Now that no one objects, I guess it’s been finalised. That’s all for today.’

The pen swirling between his fingers stopped, he stood up and strode to the door. His assistant followed him immediately.

Cassandra packed her stuff with a joyful smile. She had been interested in the case but didn’t try for it, since she had just joined the company and felt it would be hard to win everyone’s confidence.

She didn’t expect Rufus would assign her the case at all, which could be a good chance for her to prove herself. Cassandra didn’t want to show off. What she wanted was just an opportunity to shine.

‘I see you are pretty happy. Is it because you got the case or because Rufus favours you so much?’

Lionel scoffed as Cassandra was getting up to leave with her things.

With time, Cassandra had gotten used to Lionel's rude attitude and his constant ridicule.

So, as the little woman took the documents, she swiftly walked out of the room without bothering to take another glance at Lionel. She completely ignored his presence.

Glaring at Cassandra's back as she left, he could do nothing but to curse in fury. From the moment he took over at the helm of the company, he had gravitated towards a reign of terror. No one could challenge his word, and he made employees scamper at his command. He was only a few steps from a completely irrational despot, who would ruin the company if he was not axed sooner than later. Here, he was like an emperor. However, this little, gutsy woman stubbornly refused to toe the line. It was driving him mad.

'Damn! You will regret it!'

Lionel ground his teeth as he watched her walking away.

The spacious office was fitted with crystal-clear floor to ceiling windows that allowed a panoramic view of the outside. After she returned to her own office, she concentrated on her work. She was getting so deeply immersed that she forgot about the time, until it was already dark outside.

'Manager Qin, it's time to go home,' a man's voice gently reminded.

It was Joel, paying a courtesy call on his boss before getting off work.

In the mean time, Cassandra was still working on the design. It was half-way through, and innovative ideas were freely flowing. Afraid that

her inspiration might be gone, she wanted to go on. After all, ideas didn't come easy, and as an artiste, she knew how to seize the moment.

'You go ahead. I will be done after I finish my drawing,' she replied, without taking her eyes off the drawing.

It struck Joel as odd that his new boss - a woman, was such a workaholic. By experience, working overtime was a quality he had come to associate only with men. But this woman was proving him wrong. When she ignored his reminder, Joel stood there, awed by her diligence. After a moment, he nodded in admiration and quietly left.

Then, darkness fell.

Anticipating that she might work late into the night, Cassandra called her father-in-law so they wouldn't expect her to come home early. Horace, though surprised to hear that Cassandra was so keen to work, was impressed with her attitude.

The elegant golden clock, beautifully matching the milk-white wall, ticked quietly. Architectural wonders across the city's skyline put on spectacular displays of various shades of light that lent an enchanting feel to the otherwise dark night. Under the bright light of the office, Cassandra put all her energy into her sketch. She was too absorbed in her work to take note of anything else; she forgot about time, and forgot about her fatigue.

'Hi, Manager Qin, you are still here!'

A familiar voice abruptly interrupted, pulling her out of her reverie. Squinting, she raised her head and was startled to see Joel again.

'I thought you had left...' Cassandra said as she stretched her back and arms, trying to shake off the the strain of sitting in one position for long.

‘What brings you back again?’ she added, feeling doubtful about his intentions.

The drawing was almost done. All she needed was just some fine-tuning, and that would be it. Then she took a glimpse at the wall clock. ‘Oh my! It’s almost ten!’ she thought.

‘I was having dinner with my friends nearby. Then I thought you might still be working, so I brought you some food. I guess you haven’t had your dinner,’

Joel answered. Then he handed the package of food to Cassandra with one hand, and closed the door behind him.

He carried himself so naturally that Cassandra didn’t notice anything odd about him. She eyed her assistant with appreciation and happily took the food he had bought for her. His kindness was so unexpected and timely. ‘It’s so nice of him to bring me dinner, though this is only the first day we met,’ she thought.

‘Thank you, Joel,’ Cassandra thanked the man.

With a grateful smile, she reached for the cup of coffee he brought together with the food. Just then, she suddenly realized how t

Falling from nobility, Zen Luo became a humble slave and served as a human punchbag for his former cousins. Inadvertently, he found a way to refine himself into a weapon and a legend started because of that. With a strong belief in never surrender, he strove for revenges and pursued big dreams. Warriors from various clans contended for hegemony and the world was stirred. Relying on the body that was comparable to a powerful weapon, Zen beat his numerous enemies on his way to the immortality. Would he succeed eventually?

hirsty she was.

Without a second thought, she downed the cup in just a few gulps. Joel closely watched her gobble the coffee, his eyes darted around the room, furtively checking if there was anything that could ruin his sinister motives.

Before Cassandra could put her cup down, while her head was still up, Joel secretly dropped something into the pen container on the table, and walked slowly towards her.

As soon as she drained the coffee, the woman started to feel a burning sensation in the gut. The air-conditioner was functioning and she could feel it spew a steady stream of cool air. Why did she suddenly feel so hot?

‘Manager Qin, what’s happening? Are you okay?’

Joel asked as he was drawing even closer to Cassandra.

Now she could barely keep her eyes open. Touching her head with the back of her palm, she felt feverish.

‘I feel like I’m burning up! I’m also dizzy!’

she murmured, in a panicked, weak voice. Everything around her was quickly turning foggy. Unable to continue to support herself, she leaned back to the high back seat behind, beads of sweat forming over her face.

‘You must be working too hard. Are you feeling tired? Can I give you a massage to calm your nerves down a little?’

A crafty smile crept up his cheek, and without waiting for her consent, he moved behind Cassandra, ready for his nefarious scheme.

Now, not only Cassandra, but the air in the room seemed to turn warm. It was the atmosphere he wanted. As he was about to start his next move, the phone on the table suddenly rang, stopping Joel dead in his tracks.

Vaguely, Cassandra heard the phone ringing, but she couldn't correctly identify where she had placed it, and even if she did, she could not control her own body well enough to pick the call. Luckily, her unconscious movement happened to press on the answer button with speaker mode on. Joel wanted to stop her, but it was a little too late.

'Um...so hot, so dizzy! Help me. Help me, please...'

the little woman murmured, which struck the man on the other end of the call. It was none other than Rufus.

He had heard from Horace that Cassandra was working into the small hours of the night. Out of concern for her, Rufus had come to the company to check on her. He was standing right at the main entrance, and his call was just to confirm whether she was still in the office or not. Nevertheless, whatever she mumbled on phone was hysterical, and very alarming.

'Are you in your office? Heck! I'll be right there,'

a man's deep, raspy voice replied, sounding firm but urgent. Caught off guard, Joel was mortified. That was a close shave! He was near to accomplishing his plot, but the man who called had screwed it all up.

Now Cassandra was lying on the seat like mud, as if she was going to melt. After pondering for several seconds, he had another plan.

The next moment, looking back at the beautiful woman, Joel cursed the accidental caller for busting his scheme. But he managed to leave one

thing behind - the mini camera that he had placed in the pen container, it would be good enough for his next move.

Taking swift action, Rufus rushed to the lift to the floor that housed Cassandra's office. While waiting in the lift, he felt uneasy and couldn't stop worrying about the woman.

When he finally managed to open the door to her office, he rushed to the chair and scooped her into his arms. He cuddled her tightly and quickly cast a glance here and there, alerted that some danger could be lurking in her office.

'I feel so hot...I feel like I'm burning up. Oh Rufus...help me, please!'
Cassandra pleaded.

Like an octopus, she wrapped herself around his wide frame, with both hands and feet. Feeling the familiar hug, she held him even tighter. It was a passionate hug of a woman craving for lust. She was hysterical, distressed, and far from her usual self.

Rufus frowned. He could tell that Cassandra had been drugged.

How could someone have the guts to drug her in her own office! The mere thought of it brought a sudden rush of terrible, blood-thirsty anger through his system.

Are You Expecting Something Between Us

Cold sweats trickled down the man's forehead. Driven by his wild emotions, he was raging with extreme sexual urges. He was puzzled,

however. When looking down, he saw a pen positioned awkwardly on the floor.

Picking up the pen, he examined it and scrutinized the tiny black object equipped with it. The device was not new to him; it was not an ordinary pen.

It was a pinhole camera!

Rufus was right all along. Someone was putting Cassandra under surveillance and wanted to deliberately frame her up.

With several quick steps, he strode to the water dispenser in the corner of the room. He effortlessly lifted the barrel of water with both hands.

Hesitant at first, he frowned and then poured the water directly onto Cassandra's body, soaking her head to foot. Rufus took no pleasure in doing that, but he had to do so.

The sudden chill made Cassandra instantly open her eyes. But before she could respond, Rufus splashed the cold water onto her again.

Once, twice, three times, he repeatedly splattered her with water. He didn't stop until the barrel was emptied.

Rufus stood beside the table, holding an empty barrel in one hand. Cassandra, lying in the middle of the table, had been soaked to the skin. The drops of water dripped down the corner of the table and flooded the office.

Cassandra turned as pale as death, spitting water out of her mouth. The cold water brought her to her senses, but she was too weak to exert herself.

‘Are you all right? Have you sobered up?’

Rufus asked as he felt sorry for the embarrassment he caused the frail lady. He stretched out his hand and gently tucked her long falling hair behind her ear.

Cassandra opened her eyes weakly, but fatigue totally shut her eyes down before she could catch sight of the man’s face.

When she woke up again, Cassandra found herself lying in a bed. The blank ceiling greeted her eyes. As she was trying hard to open her sleepy eyes, Horace’s face came into view.

‘Where am I?’ Cassandra asked with a feeble voice.

Her head was throbbing with pain.

‘Last night, the company’s security man found you unconscious in the office and sent you to the hospital in time. Cassandra, you are my daughter-in-law. You don’t have to work so hard.’

Horace’s words made Cassandra draw a serious expression. She slowly got herself up and leaned against the bed, her eyes searched around the room as if she was looking for someone.

To her dismay, she was alone with Horace.

Cassandra leaned back blankly as if in a trance. The picture of last night flashed back to her mind. She remembered clearly how Rufus splashed the cold water onto her.

‘Hey Cassandra, wake up!’

Cassandra wrinkled her eyebrows as the memories of last night crowded her mind. She was a bit confused.

'I should blame it to that cup of coffee!' she thought.

'Cassandra, what's wrong? Are you all right?'

Horace asked in a tinged voice full of worry, seeing that Cassandra was dazed.

Horace's voice drew Cassandra back to reality. She blinked her eyes and spoke with a deep nasal voice - she had a cold.

'Dad, did you come alone?'

Finishing her question, she coughed uncontrollably. Horace hurried forward to give her back a slight pat.

'Rufus also came. He's going through the paper works outside,' Horace replied. 'Look, Cassandra, I advise that you don't work so hard after this. If your family knows about this, they might think that our family abuses you.'

Horace gave Cassandra a fond fatherly look. He was please

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d with his daughter-in-law very much. On her first day of work, Cassandra passed out in her office because of exhaustion. 'She must have a hard time at work, ' Horace thought.

'Okay. I promise I won't overwork again. Thank you, dad.'

Cassandra didn't bother to ask about what happened last night, because it had already flashed back to her memory. She didn't know how Rufus managed to solve everything, but she was grateful to him.

Cassandra was in deep thoughts of Rufus when the door was pushed open. She lifted her eyes reflexively and looked in the door's direction. Rufus came in with a wry smile on his face.

'All right, I have to go. Rufus will send you home after you feel better. Luckily, it's just a minor cold. Take care. Cassandra, don't work so hard.'

Horace looked at his watch and bade her goodbye.

'Don't worry, dad. I'll take her home.'

Rufus's voice was as lazy as ever. After Horace left, Rufus and Cassandra were deafened by the silence of the room. She caught Rufus's eye and immediately looked down to avoid eye contact - she was hesitant.

'What's wrong? Has your fever been gone?'

Looking at Cassandra's blushing face, Rufus joined his brows with worry. He sat on her bed, stroked her forehead with one hand.

On their way to the hospital last night, Cassandra's body temperature suddenly mounted - she had a fever as the result of the coupled functions of cold water and medicines.

Rufus's warm palm touched Cassandra's slightly cool forehead. Her head was kept low, and her cheeks were even more crimson.

'Don't worry. Your fever has been gone.'

Rufus breathed a sigh of relief. His strung-out nerves were relaxed.

'Last night, we...'

Cassandra stuttered as she still wanted to figure out the whole story. She raised her head and bravely met Rufus's eyes. There was a sheepish look on her face.

'You seduced me last night.'

Rufus grinned wickedly, and the charm on his handsome face grew irresistible. With a casual tone, he told Cassandra what happened last night in a low voice.

'No, I didn't!' Cassandra contradicted immediately.

She was emotionally agitated. She bit her lower lip and was full of remorse at the thought of the incident. She couldn't convince herself that the cravings and the aggressiveness were initiated by her.

'Do you still remember the way you hugged me? How your slender fingers ran on to my back? Can you still feel the warmth? Eh? I loved the way your body was pressed to mine last night! Do you still remember that?'

Rufus teased her. He watched Cassandra's rich expressions with amusement. He felt excited to see her angry, and the way she was biting her lip raised Rufus's lustful desires.

'Shut up! You mongrel! You gave me a cold bath last night. Do you remember?!'

Irritated, Cassandra got up from the bed and glared at Rufus with her striking eyes. There was a sinister smirk on his face.

'I needed you to stay rational. I had to do that. There was no other way.'

Rufus played innocent, one eyebrow cocked. He showed his teeth in a grin, and his dark brown eyes showed rare pleasure - he was enjoying the moment.

Cassandra was lost for words to respond. This man saved her, but why did she blame him?

'Well, I see... Are you assuming that something wild, pleasing, and erotic happened between us last night?'

She jerked at his words, making her totally distracted. With her back against Rufus, he gently caressed Cassandra's waist and slowly yet passionately wrapped her in his arms...

Abrupt and Unexpected

Cassandra felt her blood pound in her ears as Rufus walked closer to her. The sound of her heartbeat was deafening in the silent room. Her breath came out in short gasps. She gathered up some courage and closed her

eyes, breathing in deeply as she put her hands on his hard chest and tried to push when he stepped up to her.

‘Go away!’

It happened in the blink of an eye, but Rufus seemed to have foreseen her move. He retreated swiftly, still staring at her. A sly grin surfaced on his face. Cassandra lost her balance, staggering forward a few steps. Her arms flailed as she reached out for support.

Just as her body was about to hit the floor, she tried to grasp at anything that would break her fall. Her hands gripped on the sleeves of the man, though it was not her intention. The sleeves weren’t strong enough to entirely support her, so the accident occurred anyway. Cassandra’s firm grip accidentally pulled Rufus forward and he lost his footing. They went down together with a thud.

Clumsily, Rufus fell right on top of her. It all happened so fast that he had no time to catch himself.

Cassandra had originally intended to push him away, but instead pulled him closer. Lying on the floor, she felt his heaviness press onto her and groaned in pain.

‘Seems to me that you’re always coming up with new ways to touch me,’

Rufus teased her, although he knew the fall wasn’t intentional on her part. He flashed her a wicked smile as he looked down at her. They were so close that he could feel her breath on his skin. Before she had a chance to push him away once again, his lips descended on hers.

It was an abrupt and unexpected kiss. His lips moved against hers with urgency.

She kissed him back with fervor, but he pulled away at once.

‘It’s not very appropriate to do this here. Don’t you think?’ He gave her a naughty grin when he posed the deliberate question.

Cassandra opened her eyes as if waking from a dream, suddenly realizing that they had been kissing wantonly. Her face flushed with anger and shame as she pushed his chest once again. This time, she succeeded. Rufus swayed back as she sprang up and straightened her clothes, flustered.

‘You shameless man!’

she shouted with raising voice. What the hell was he up to? Once again, he had taken advantage of her. Her heart fluttered; whether out of guilt or excitement, she didn’t know. She registered with shock that she hadn’t, in fact, been averse to the kiss. Had she actually enjoyed it?

‘You obviously enjoyed that,’

Rufus pointed out as if he had read the question in her mind. Cassandra blinked at him, too embarrassed to admit the truth. He was trying to put her on edge. She turned her head to the side to show her discontent. Rufus bit the insides of his cheek at her petty behavior. It was entertaining to see her so embarrassed and unsettled because of him.

‘Enough of that! You molested me! Don’t think that I should be grateful to you just because you have saved me!’

His teasing smile flustered her even more and she narrowed her eyes at him. He wasn’t wrong. She couldn’t deny to herself that she had indeed enjoyed the kiss.

Rufus was still looking at her when he was reminded of last night. His slanted eyebrows snapped together in realization. At the moment, he looked like an eagle hunting for its prey. The mini camera on the table, the drug in her drink, and the assistant who was waiting on her, they all added up now. It was a trap, a carefully designed plot to defame Cassandra, Lionel Tang's wife.

It would damage her reputation beyond repair if someone caught her throwing herself at a man in the office.

'She just returned to the city. Who could have possibly done it?' Rufus wondered. Obviously, the perpetrator was able to enter Tang Group at a time of his or her choosing. He or she must be at a high position to have that kind of clearance. Rufus put the pieces together. Cassandra kept waiting for a response as Rufus indulged in his train of thoughts. After what felt like a lifetime, she finally turned to face him again, finding his

When her sister ran away from the wedding, Autumn was forced to marry Charles.

His name had been linked to innumerable ladies.

He had different girlfriends for every day of a year.

Autumn had never thought that she would fall in love with him.

silence bewildering.

'Why are you so quiet?'

she asked with curiosity. Rufus snapped out of his thoughts. The expression on his face turned solemn, replacing the previous carelessness.

Cassandra drew back a little. She had never seen him look so serious before. It made her slightly uncomfortable.

‘Your assistant is gone. Did you know that?’

he asked her out of the blue. After he took Cassandra to the hospital, Rufus took a look at the surveillance recordings of the night. He found that Joel was the only person who had entered her office that night.

Cassandra was stunned. Someone had obviously put the drug in her coffee yesterday, and Joel was the obvious suspect.

However, it was all so strange. She had never met Joel before and couldn’t have possibly caused him any trouble in the past. Why would he do such a thing on her first day of work? At first glance, he had seemed so sunny and amiable.

‘Yesterday was the very first time I met him. Why would he do this to me?’

Cassandra blurted out. She found herself in a conundrum and couldn’t make head or tail of what had happened. Why would Joel hold a grudge against her?

‘There are two possibilities. One is that he was enchanted by your beauty,’ Rufus smirked, ‘the other is that he was assigned by someone else. Of course, the possibility of the former happening is almost negligible. Anyone in his right senses wouldn’t be a victim of such an outrageous thought.’

Folding his arms, he looked over the woman in front of him with an imperceptible smile on his face.

Cassandra flashed him a contemptuous look. Suddenly something struck to her, making her turn pale immediately after.

‘I know who it is!’

She suddenly had an idea of who had orchestrated the entire episode.

‘Oh? Who would that be?’

Rufus asked, feigning interest. He had already knew who it could be. After all, he had just handed out a massive hint to her.

Cassandra was struck dumb. Her lips quivered and she suddenly lost the strength in her limbs. Retreating to sit on the couch, she twined her fingers in her lap and cast Rufus - who himself seemed unperturbed - a worrying glance.

‘We both know that someone put the drug in my coffee. If you had not been there last night, I would not have been sitting here right now. The most horrific thing could have happened and been recorded on the camera. Someone wanted the evidence of me being disloyal to Lionel, so that my reputation would be slandered and I would be kicked out of Tang family.’

She finally had a clear picture of why it had happened, thanks to Rufus’s meddling. Tears began to well up her eyes. She had a name in her mind. Only someone with a lot of hatred and disgust for her could have done something so cruel.

It was someone who truly loathed her, and someone who couldn’t stand her presence in the family.

It could only be one man.

‘You mean, someone wanted to defame you, so you would be thrown out of the Tang household?’

Rufus repeated her words, although he had known that already. He just wanted to prompt her to speak out the truth.

‘That’s probably it. I didn’t know his hatred for me was so great that he would resort to this disgusting method to get rid of me,’

Cassandra stated in a daze. Disbelief still lingered in her tone, although by now she had deemed her assumption to be a fact. Unknowingly, she bit her lower lip and shook her head, as if to deny what she had just uncovered.

A marriage without love, to her, was the most grievous tragedy – where two people bound by sacred law lived like strangers under the same roof.

‘You think it was Lionel?’

Rufus finally brought up the name in her mind.

Cassandra still looked absent-minded. She looked back at him but did not reply. Her lack of response was an answer in itself. They came to a silent conclusion together. Except for Lionel, she couldn’t think of anyone else who could detest her enough to do this. She still found it hard to believe that Lionel could be so cold-blooded. How could he carry out something like this inside the office?

In the box under the feeble light, the smell of the alcohol mixed with the smoke, making the room seem even more suffocating. Suddenly, the curtains were torn open, and a beam of sharp light pierced the shadows.

‘So, you’re telling me that you failed?’

The light fell on Ivy’s mouth, curled into a smirk. She snapped her head around, fixing her gaze on the man behind.

Joel stood fixed to the spot, a trace of panic frozen on his young face. He seemed wary of Ivy, reacting sharply to every move that she made. Last night’s plan had started out perfect. He thought he had made it foolproof. And then Rufus had appeared...

‘I...I’m sorry, sis. It was my fault...I should have been more careful.’ He hung his head, unable to meet her eyes. ‘I didn’t know that Rufus would be there...That man is something else. He somehow smoothed everything out...I don’t really know what happened,’

Joel mumbled his explanation, grasping for reasons as to why he had failed. He couldn’t raise his head.

Joel knew that he owed everything to his older half-sister. She had provided him with everything he needed all these years. She was the one who had arranged his placement in the Tang Group, after he had graduated. He had never actually intended to get involved in her schemes, but at some point he had found himself unable to stop. The more he saw of Cassandra, the more he craved for this woman. He couldn’t seem to keep his eyes from roaming greedily over her, and he thought that last night might be his chance to finally have her. That was...until Rufus showed up.

‘Who do you think you are to call me sis! You careless moron! How could you even mess up such a simple task! You really disappointed me this time...and now the company is suspicious. Luckily, no one knows we are related. We want to keep it that way. If anyone finds out I’m behind this, then we will both be screwed!’

Joel jumped as a wine bottle exploded on the wall beside his head. He whipped his head to see Ivy seething at him silently, her temper as unpredictable as ever.

She had been laying the groundwork of this plan for so long. She had waited for the optimal time where she could deploy Cassandra’s assistant to seduce the Tang family’s daughter-in-law into adultery. Cassandra would lose not only her face, but everything that she had ever held dear.

‘I am sending you abroad, to lay low for a while. Don’t come back until I give the word, understood?’

Joel nodded silently. The look in Ivy’s eyes made it clear that there would be consequences if he failed at this. His inability to control himself around Cassandra had nearly cost them both everything. Now she could no longer use him within the Tang Group. She had lost a valuable tool. She had to come up with a new plan.

‘Rufus...’

Ivy slowly sat herself down on the sofa, rolling the man’s name across her mind. She frowned, crossing one long leg over the other. She reached for the crystal goblet of wine on the table beside her, unable to get the name out of her mind. Her glossy red nails clicked on the wooden armchair.

'What was this man like?' Anyone that she knew so little about immediately roused her curiosity. 'Why was he still at Tang Group at that late hour? Besides, why brought him to that woman's office interrupting our plan?' From what she had seen, and what Lionel had told her, anytime when Cassandra had a problem, Rufus just happened to be around to save her.

Ivy wondered about the relationship between Rufus and Cassandra, 'Why would he come to her rescue if they had only known each other for a short period of time?' There must be something between them that she didn't know about.

Ivy pondered, and her eyes fixed on a spot far away. After a moment, her hand tightened on the goblet, nails scraping against the crystal. She narrowed her eyes and threw the wine down her throat all in one go.

At the Tang Group

Lionel strode angrily into a room. 'Rufus and Cassandra, neither of them came to work today?'

He looked around accusingly for an answer. He wanted the details about the case that Cassandra had been working on, in going to her office he found it empty.

Lionel hadn't gone home the previous night, but had assumed that she was there the whole time. The discovery that she had gone somewhere without his permission enraged him.

'Yes. I heard that Manager Qin worked overtime last night and fainted in her office due to exhaustion. She was found by a patrolling security guard, who then called Mr. Luo. It was the president who took her to the hospital in time.'

The assistant was puzzled. He did not understand why would Lionel be so angry at such a small mishap - when employees got sick, they would need a day or two off.

Hearing this explanation, Lionel's hands balled into fists. Rufus, again! It could not be a coincidence that wherever Lionel searched for Cassandra, Rufus was there! Was it really a coincidence?

Rufus and Cassandra had returned to G City around the same time. They had entered the Tang Group the same time. And...most suspiciously...he knew that they had both spent several years in Rome.

And suddenly they were so close...and inseparable. Where the one went, the other followed. A thought occurred to Lionel that made his expression grow dark.

It all starts on that fateful night.

When Ella, who is the dear sister of Samuel's best buddy, sneaks into the hotel where the drunken Samuel resides and gets pregnant...

'I don't want a divorce!'

'I don't want a divorce!'

'I did no such thing!'

Ella jumped on the bed and cried out. 'I don't want a scheming woman as my wife. Just sign the paper...'

Could it be that Rufus and Cassandra had known each other before arriving here? Had they known each other in Rome?

'Find out which hospital Cassandra is in,'

The change in Lionel's tone made the assistant uneasy. The man speaking before him was cold and controlled, opposite to the furious man from before, as if the person who was so furious just now was not him. Lionel raised his head and looked into the distance, still absorbed in his thoughts. Something unreadable flashed through his eyes.

Why Rufus? Even though Lionel wanted nothing to do with his wife, he would do anything to ensure that Rufus could never lay his eyes on her.

The room was soaked with the smell of disinfectant. Her fever already abating, Cassandra had started to sort through her things. She wanted to leave the place as soon as possible.

The fuss around her was frustrating. She had been dealing with these small bouts of sickness her entire time living alone abroad. If Rufus hadn't been taking her to the hospital, she would have simply gone home to sleep it off -- she didn't need to be taken care of.

Rufus had left the hospital a few minutes ago, answering a phone call that had made his face fall.

Cassandra was alone in the room. She thought about the events of last night. 'It must have been Lionel,' she thought. She had told Rufus about her suspicions, but to her surprise he said nothing.

Cassandra packed her things roughly, slamming the briefcase once she was done. How could he have done something so vile? Even knowing how Lionel hated her, she couldn't believe that he was capable of this. After all, she was still his wife. They were still a couple -- or at least people thought they were. If his plan had succeeded, and word of her having an affair had gotten out, wouldn't it shame him too?

Cassandra just couldn't understand it. Would Lionel really shame himself and his family, just to humiliate her? What kind of monster was he?

'You work for one day and drop down as if dead...Are you really that fragile? You're useless, nothing but a piece of crap.'

Cassandra froze at the voice that pierced the room. She whirled around to face him, determined not to be intimidated.

'Speak of the devil, ' Cassandra cursed Lionel in her heart. He was the last person she would expect in her hospital room.

As she stared at him, it occurred to her that he hadn't even bothered to knock, simply storming into her room. Her eyebrows creased. 'How dare he.' She watched as his eyes roamed around the hospital room, as if searching for something.

Cassandra fumed. She wanted nothing more at the moment than to stride across the room and slap him, but she decided this would be unwise. She steeled herself to talk to him.

'What are you looking for, Mr. Tang?'

'She's alone in here? How can it be?' Lionel couldn't help but furrow his eyebrows in confusion. 'Why wasn't Rufus here?'

'I wonder if my wife is so desperate that she will cheat on me and hide another man in her room?'

Lionel took one step closer to Cassandra, and then another. He wore his usual cruel smirk, eyes fixed on the woman standing in front of him. His voice was low and teasing. The trace of danger in it showed that he wasn't joking.

‘Lionel. I thought we had agreed that we would live our separate lives and not bother one another. Isn’t that what you want? That I don’t bother you?’

If Lionel wanted to have it out, she was fine with it. She was not his property and she would not let him treat her so viciously.

‘Ha ha. You’re a naive little girl, aren’t you? Oh, wait a minute. How foolish of me! How can you be naive? You are clearly a calculating and cunning woman.’

The disdain was clear in Lionel’s eyes. He came to stand in front of her, breathing down on her and smirking still.

All the fear that Cassandra had felt about Lionel was seared away by the rising anger within her. ‘How dare he mistreat me! How dare he set me up! How dare he come to me and try to intimidate me!’ Her hands tightened into fists, and she dug her nails into her palms to try and keep control.

‘I am your husband. I will do whatever I want, I will sleep with whoever I want to sleep with - there is nothing you can do to stop me! But you...all you will ever be is just Mrs. Tang. Unloved, lonely. No other man will ever touch you. I have told you this from the start: You will get nothing but an empty marriage!’

Cassandra’s stubborn silence only served to infuriate Lionel more. He seemed to have forgotten why he had come here in the first place - he wanted nothing more than to see her flinch.

‘I know that. Now, if you have nothing else to say, please leave.’

Cassandra drew a deep breath. Now was not the time for things to get nasty. And yet, she could not keep the disgust from her face. She turned her head away.

‘You’d better keep your distance from Rufus. If you don’t, you’ll find out the consequences for meddling in the Tang family the hard way. Or if I find out there is anything between you two, be sure, Cassandra, that I will make you suffer!’

Cassandra could no longer stand the menace that Lionel injected into his words. The sound of her slap rang throughout the room all of a sudden.

She, Cassandra Qin, had slapped Lionel Tang in the face!

Are You Missing Me

There was a dull sting on the hand that Cassandra had just put down. It was expected, as she put all of her strength in that one slap, making sure that her retaliation would mark its way into his skin. Lionel was glaring at Cassandra, and their heated gazes met. He could feel his skin warm with irritation.

It was not the first time she hit him. He resisted the urge to bring a hand to his cheek to provide some relief for the biting pain on his skin. It would definitely leave a mark, but he refused to allow her the pleasure of seeing him affected by it.

Placed at the center of his silent but evident fury, Cassandra began to feel uneasy, her earlier grit wavering. ‘You insulted me first. I just returned the favor,’ she said, trying to modulate her voice to keep it from shaking.

She could sense his anger. It seemed to rise and thicken the air around them. She took a few steps back to create a distance between them. Lionel's eyes did not leave her even as he remained in stoic silence. 'Did I overreact?' Cassandra wondered to herself.

'Cas-san-dra Qin,'

he finally spoke, pronouncing her name syllable by syllable, as if taking each syllable in his mouth and crushing it, then walked towards her step by step. He moved forward; she retreated. It was a slow chase as the distance between them gradually shortened. Cassandra could feel fear occupy the crevices in her chest.

Her hands grew cold as they touched the wall behind her - she had no more space to back up to.

Cassandra had nowhere left to run. She raised her head in defiance, clenching her fists at her side and meeting his eyes. Her heart was hammering in her chest, awaiting his next move. 'I have hit him anyway. Nothing can change this fact. There's no use worrying, I'll see what he will do,' she thought to herself.

Lionel towered over her and bent his head. 'No woman has ever dared hit me. And you have already done it twice,' he hissed. 'Are you sure you're ready for the consequences?' He was leaning forward so close that she could feel his breath on her skin.

He wore a brutal expression. The coldness of his eyes as he looked down on her rivaled that of a winter storm, and Cassandra could almost feel herself freeze under his gaze. She was petrified, unable to move. Fear was gripping her heart, squeezing it with cold, clammy hands.

Despite this, she did not avert her gaze and challenged, ‘I can’t change the fact that I slapped you. It’s already done. If you feel that it’s unfair, you can hit me back. If you’re a man then act like one. I’m not like those who would use despicable moves to frame others.’

It was the only thing Cassandra could think of to make things even. She did not expect any graciousness from him. She raised her face, as if preparing herself for what was to come, and her eyes met his with all the audacity she could muster.

‘You think I’m not going to do it?’ he threatened her back.

His anger rose to uncontrollable heights. The nerve of this woman! He had never hit a woman before nor thought about doing it – he was better than those lowlifes who would raise their hands against women – but his patience was sorely tried by this one particular woman in front of him.

‘Then do it. If that would make you feel that we’re even. But please, consider your actions better in the future. Even if it’s just on paper, I am still your wife in name. Are you that eager to see me getting into a relationship with another man? Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?’

Cassandra hurled her anger at him without holding back. Lionel was baffled by her words. ‘What the hell was she talking about?’ But before he could question her, she started throwing an onslaught of questions which allowed him no chance of speaking.

‘I know you hate me. Do you think I wanted this? If not for my own family, do you think I would have married you? I don’t care what you want to do. I won’t bother your life, but can’t you at least leave me alone when we’re at the company?’ She was breathing hard, and tears were running down her cheeks as more words fled from her lips. ‘I won’t even

ask you to treat me well, but don't you think that it was too much to try to drug me ?'

The last question sounded pitiful, even to her own ears, but Cassandra could not stop the anguish that was boiling inside her chest. It was just wrong. She did not even think he was capable of that.

If not for Rufus, there was no telling what sort of scandal would have ensued. 'Was he that bent on destroying her ?'

'What the hell are you talking about ?' Lionel snapped, cutting her off from her thoughts.

He put a finger under her chin and forced her to hold his gaze.

At this, she gave out a bitter laugh. Now he was refusing the responsibility. 'What ? Mr. Tang, I didn't know you had such a bad memory ?! What a pity, right ? Sadly, your plan fell through. Were you expecting me to end up at the hospital with a bottle of champagne so you can celebrate ? Too bad.'

Her laugh was a scathing sound in the room. Her tears still streaming, she heaved, trying to catch her breath as the reality that she was alone dawned on her. She was barely keeping herself upright on her own two feet. 'What have I done wrong exactly ?'

'Cassandra Qin, what exactly are you talking about ?'

Lionel grew more and more perplexed with every passing second. He had absolutely no idea what she was talking about.

He had spent his night with Ivy, so it was just impossible for him to have done anything to her. He was callous, true. But she should have been used to that by now.

Lionel felt himself being pushed back and he disentangled himself from his thoughts. 'Get off me,' Cassandra spat. 'You disgust me.'

Cassandra already knew that he had hated her from the beginning, but everything that happened was a low blow. She tried to be as civil as she could, despite his attitude towards her, but if this was how he wanted things then she was pre

'Who does she think she is? I won't marry her even if she is the last woman on earth,' said Hiram Rong.

'Marry into a family with tens of billions of assets? How lucky I am! I won't be so foolish as to break off the engagement. At worst, I can receive money as part of the divorce settlement,' said Rachel Ruan.

Their great-grandfathers made a pact about their engagement a hundred years ago...

pared to return every favor. Grabbing her things and turning around, she hastened to leave, not wanting to even be in the same space with this despicable man.

But before she could get to the door, Lionel had moved to block her. 'Tell me clearly what did you mean,' he demanded.

He was not letting her go without getting to the bottom of this, and he would make her tell him.

Cassandra wiped a hand harshly on her cheeks to dry her tears. Then, she met Lionel's eyes, the fire of her rage burning.

'Last night, the assistant you assigned to me drugged my drink. I lost consciousness and my sexual desire was heightened. He put a mini camera in the office. You should know the rest of the story,' she said

accusingly. 'If you want a divorce, then please talk to your father. If he agrees, I certainly won't say no. I won't hold you back. In fact, it would be a blessing to be free from all this. You think I like you? You think that I want to marry you? You absolutely disgust me!' she screamed at him.

Her eyes were ablaze with wrath and resentment. She had enough of everything, and she would let him know now.

Lionel's face turned thoughtful.

But before he could speak, Cassandra shoved him aside furiously and walked out of the room.

Lionel was left inside, alone and nonplussed. He scrunched his eyebrows as he tried to make sense of what she had just told her, the words bouncing off repeatedly in his mind:

'If not for my own family, do you think I would have married you...

You think I like you... You absolutely disgust me...

If you want a divorce, then please talk to your father...Don't you think that it was too much to try to drug me?'

Her face appeared back into his mind. She looked tired, defeated. Lionel felt his chest tighten as an unfamiliar feeling came to him. He hated this woman, so why did what she said matter? It unsettled him how her words impacted him. He felt strange, then confused, and irritated. Choosing to focus on the matter at hand, he decided to divert his attention to what had happened.

'Drug? Sex? Camera?' he thought to himself.

He stood motionless as he thought for some time. Finally, he slowly took out his phone and made a call, giving out direct instructions, ‘Help me look into something.’

...

Darkness fell and embraced the city in somber colors.

Inside the Tang family’s house, Horace had finally returned after some time of absence. Rufus, however, was no where to be seen.

Dinner proceeded in silence, save for the occasional clinking of tableware. The young husband and wife ate wordlessly, not exchanging even the smallest of glances. There was an obvious tension between the two, but it was as if the older couple who sat with them had already grown accustomed to the awkward atmosphere that they brought with them. They continued their meal as if everything was perfectly normal, until the older man spoke, ‘Lionel, Cassandra, you two are not young anymore. You should be making plans to have a baby soon.’

The words were just a murmur, but Cassandra felt as if she heard porcelain shattering in the silence of the room.

It was unexpected, and the subject had never been brought up before. She was so caught in surprise that she almost coughed her food out. A baby with that man? They could not even stand to be in each other’s vicinity without negative feelings, let alone touching each other. It was out of the question. Lionel, on the other hand, was much more composed and continued his meal without responding to his father.

Jill however, did not take kindly to Cassandra’s reaction. ‘What? You are not willing to? Four years ago you wanted to study in Rome, and we said yes. Now that we have granted you that favor, don’t you think it’s your turn to give back by giving an heir to the family?’ she derided.

Cassandra found herself unable to reply.

Her eyes wandered, as if there was something missing. It was then that she realized that a space in the table was unoccupied. Rufus wasn't back yet. It was strange. She wanted nothing else but for him to be away from her when he was around; but now that he was absent, she felt somewhat uneasy and worried.

Unable to bear the situation she found herself in at her mother-in-law's words, Cassandra decided to take her leave. 'I'll think about it,' she replied politely. 'I'm done. Thank you for the meal. May I be excused?'

She carefully put down her chopsticks, and stood up to walk to her room.

Lionel didn't say a single word at all throughout. He ate and listened, and when Cassandra rose to leave the table, he watched her from the corner of his eye.

'Look at that woman. What's that supposed to mean? As if we owe her something!'

the old woman scoffed the moment Cassandra was out of earshot. Horace just warned her with a glance hinting her to stop. She fell quiet at once and continued eating.

Cassandra opted to take a shower to calm her nerves. When she finished, she dressed herself in her sleepwear and rested her head on the window frame, her thoughts wandering. She felt a mist gradually creeping on her eyes, as if she was in a mirage.

'Where is Rufus?' she asked herself. In the hospital, she had already sensed that something was wrong. There was traces of panic in him, far from his usual composure. To make matters even stranger, he didn't return home tonight. Horace never mentioned him as well.

'Where has he been?' she kept thinking.

Cassandra sighed.

There was a very strange feeling in her chest as she realized how much she had been thinking about him. Since when has she started to care about that annoying man?

'Are you missing me?'

a masculine voice spoke from behind, flowing in smooth octaves, as if from a dream. She spun around. For a second, she thought her ears were playing tricks on her.

But she was wrong. There was Rufus standing behind her. 'Gosh! How long has he been here and how did he get in?'

The Silent Farewell

'How did you find your way into my room?'

Shock written all over her pretty face, Cassandra sprang up. Feeling dazed, she blinked, unsure whether she was in a dream or not.

Gazing at her with lustful eyes, Rufus sauntered to her, with a mischievous half-smile on his lips as usual.

'What...are you up to, Rufus?'

As soon as he stopped beside her, he spread out his arms and wrapped her in such a tight embrace that made her blush and instinctively lower her voice.

Without uttering a word, moving or blinking, Rufus kept her in his arms. For the moment he just enjoyed the warmth with a playful smile on his lips.

The air around them began to fill with passion. Caged in his tight arms, she was forced to lean against his chest. She could hear his heartbeat, which was very steady. 'Is he distressed? Tonight, he looks restrained, unlike his usual cheerful self.'

She gave up the attempt to break free from his arms, not sure whether it was because she feared he'd blackmail her or she actually enjoyed the warmth of his hug. With an innocent look, she lifted her eyes to read his moods, but the blank look on his face gave no secrets away.

'What's wrong with you?'

unable to hold herself back, Cassandra finally asked.

Narrowing his eyes, Rufus replied, but apparently not to her question, 'I like the fragrance of the perfume you're wearing.'

The charm of his deep, husky voice completely disarmed her, sending a tingling of electrical current through her body. Her heartbeat raced up.

Blushing at her unintentional response, she struggled and quickly freed herself from his arms. She innocently rolled her eyes at him.

'Rufus, it is very late. Someone might find out about your coming here if you don't leave now. I just hope you're not planning to embarrass me that way,'

she muttered, well aware that deep down she was beginning to long for his affection, almost like an addiction.

In an attempt not to meet his eyes, she looked away.

With his sensual eyes, Rufus scrutinized the girl's face, a captivating smile spreading over his face.

In a low whisper, he assured her, 'You don't have to fear anything. By the look in your eyes, you've fallen in love with me, and it will only be fair if we stop hiding.'

At his remark, Cassandra shuddered. Involuntarily she jerked up her head, and through knitted eyebrows she wondered why she was nervous instead of angry at this moment.

It felt like her deepest secrets were being laid bare before the whole world.

'You are so brazen! Get out right now, or I will raise an alarm!'

Cassandra said in a panic, throwing her hands up in frustration. To suppress the turmoil inside her, she tried to feign indifference.

'As you please. I don't mind,'

Rufus shrugged. A look of amusement lightened up his face temporarily as he walked toward Cassandra.

'I'd advice that you stop right there,' she warned.

But she didn't raise her voice, feelings of love already clouding her judgement. The biggest worry on her mind was for anyone in the Tang family to find out Rufus and her stayed in one room late at night.

'There's nothing much I want other than simply hugging you, just for a short while,'

Rufus said, trying to calm her nerves. In all honesty, he had no ill motives.

Somehow, his tone softened, although Cassandra couldn't stop wondering what was wrong with him. Something about him was out of place tonight.

Self-consciously, she reached out to fiddle with her long hair, darted her eyes everywhere, while avoiding his face.

Meanwhile, Rufus observed her, a hint of a smile making his lips curve at the corners, and his eyes gleaming with sincere adoration for her.

Suddenly, he threw his arms around her waist, and pulled her into his arms. When she raised her eyes to meet his gaze, she felt a flutter of pure affection in her heart.

In haste, she looked away blushing. Her pulse raced up, heart aching to be forever wrapped in his loving arms.

'Cassandra,'

he sweetly whispered her name, and Cassandra's heart skipped a beat. So as no

'Do you still want to run away after what happened last night?'

Their relationship changes overnight. She tries to keep her distance from him, while he comes closer and closer.

Spoiling her, he gives her everything she desires. His only wish is to keep her around. The whole world is envious of what she has.

'Never rush in a relationship,' she says calmly.

t to let Rufus know he had swept her off her feet, Cassandra changed the subject.

‘Are you drunk?’

She asked with genuine concern.

‘No, I’m not,’

he answered in a gentle voice, a faint smile forming on his lips again.

Looking fluttered, Cassandra was at a loss for words. Through misty eyes., she kept her gaze on him.

‘We are at the Tang family house, you know...’

she reminded him for obvious reasons. At heart, she wondered what drove her to entertain his advances over and over again. There was no question that she’s been steering him in the wrong direction – slowly opening her heart to him when she wasn’t even sure about his intentions.

And she felt like an Idiot, for the audacity of getting involved with this man, while she was still legally married to his brother.

‘You silly,’ after watching her mulling for a moment or two, Rufus chuckled, then leaned forward and gave her a brief, gentle peck on the forehead.

In an instant, Cassandra froze. The way he went about, hugging, touching and kissing, just swept her off her feet.

Everything about him had the feel of a prince charming and made her wish she was not tied by marriage to his ungrateful skirt-chasing brother. Fantasies of Rufus and her in the rose bushes played through her mind –

The dappled shade dancing on his body, pollen falling all over them and softly settling on his eyelashes.

Involuntarily, she closed her eyes and savored his kiss, feeling the thrill course through her lips to cheeks and sending a jolt power through her head. High voltage power that threatened to literally blow her mind.

When she opened her eyes after a minute that seemed like an eternity, Rufus realized the brilliance of her gaze was subdued by a hint of tears.

Puzzled, he frowned, eager to know what was going through her mind. Was it this one little kiss that had moved her to tears?

‘What’s wrong?’ he asked, trying to read her mind, although he was genuine in his intentions.

The question, and his now affectionate, soothing manner only prompted her to freely rolling tears. A floodgate had flung opened!

With inconsolable sobs, her shoulders began to shake so violently that Rufus panicked.

‘What is the matter?’

he asked, gently wiping away her tears with his fingers.

‘Can you...just stay away from me, please?’

Suddenly she lifted her face, eyes puffy and red from crying.

She was fearful, and uncertain; afraid of falling in love with this man, and confused because he was supposed to be her brother-in-law.

It was his unannounced appearance into her life that cost this little woman sleepless nights and highlighted her frustration with Lionel. Not

sure how to best comfort the woman with her head drooping and shoulders hunched, Rufus watched her silently. He wished he could scoop her into his hands, wipe away all her tears, allay her fears and hug her forever in his loving embrace.

But he was careful not to overstep, so he simply stood there watching, until she finally spoke between her sobs, wishing him a good night.

Then, ignoring her words, he reached out his hands and cupped her chin gently between his huge palms.

After a moment, Rufus reluctantly shifted his eyes off her, and quickly walked to the window. Before Cassandra could realize, his flexible body had leaped out of the window.

Cassandra was shell shocked. She tried to scream, but all she could muster through her parched mouth was a muffled hissing. Rubbing off her tears, she called out hoarsely, 'Rufus!'

Without a reply, he just gave her a smile before turning around and heading toward the gate. In the faint light, she spotted some cars which seemed to have been waiting for long.

A sense of doom suddenly crept over her.

Recalling his words, his kisses and his look earlier in her room, she realized he was bidding a farewell, only that she had failed to read his mind. 'Where is he going...' A barrage of questions began to run through her mind. Hard, nudging questions that she didn't have the slightest idea on how she was going answer.

The morning came.

Rufus took off last night, leaving Cassandra in the arms of a restless sleep.

She opened her eyes at first light. Still too early, but it was impossible for her to go back to sleep. Cassandra lay awake in bed, waiting for the tell-tale signs of morning to rouse her from her half-asleep state. That morning at breakfast, there was still no trace of Rufus. Hadn't he returned last night?

On the table were only two people - Horace, wearing a glum expression and Jill who was her usual grumpy self. Lionel's seat remained empty, too. Cassandra had no idea where he was.

'Good morning,' she greeted the older couple politely.

Neither of them responded, as if they didn't hear her. Cassandra proceeded to sit down uncomfortably, watching her motions as if fearing that the smallest movement would disturb the two. She took a glass of milk and drank it with uncharacteristic attention, as Horace and Jill continued to sit wordlessly.

After a while, the silence became too excruciating and Cassandra could not help but ask, 'Where is Rufus? Haven't seen him lately?'

Jill's head shot up at her words, as if she had said something unforgivable. She looked at Cassandra, her eyes silently speaking in daggers.

For some implacable reason, Cassandra felt as if she had made an offense. She lowered her head, waiting for Jill's reproach, although it was not

clear what upset her. But instead, Horace spoke, letting off a heavy sigh as he looked at Cassandra.

‘He is not here. He probably won’t be home for a long time,’ he said sorrowfully, his eyes drowning Cassandra with an unknown grief. He closed his eyes and continued, ‘This is all my fault.’

It was rare for Horace to be in such low spirits. He seemed to be holding in something.

‘What happened?’ Cassandra pressed.

She had not been able to shake the feeling from last night. She had been ill-at-ease, as if something was not right.

‘Don’t blame yourself. That woman died of illness. You are not to blame,’

Jill, who had been quiet, said with a sour tone. Cassandra’s paled at her words.

That woman? Died of illness?

Horace turned to Jill sharply and said, ‘You! Do not involve yourself in matters that do not concern you! Rufus is preparing his mother’s funeral abroad, so he won’t be home for some time. I owe him and his mother everything...’

Horace heaved another rueful sigh, and Jill spoke nothing more of the matter.

At this time, the atmosphere turned from uncomfortable to claustrophobic. Cassandra’s mind reeled from the realizations, and somehow, a part her ached.

Rufus's mother died. It was no wonder he acted so oddly last night.

Although Cassandra didn't know much about their relationship, she guessed that Rufus wouldn't take the circumstances well. It was clear, especially last night, that he was grieving. There was a tight squeeze in Cassandra's chest as she remembered his lost expression.

'Dad, will you attend the funeral?'

she spoke too quickly, not having time to think her words over. The moment she uttered her words, she realized her mistake. Jill was glaring at her. Cassandra could almost feel herself burned by her angry stare.

'Cassandra Qin!' she said coldly. 'May I remind you that you are Lionel's wife. Why are you so concerned with that? This is none of your business. You are NOT in a position to talk about these things!' Jill admonished, placing a fist strongly on the table.

Cassandra looked down once more, if only to avoid the woman's eyes. 'Jill is really unreasonable. Why be jealous of a dead person?' she thought to herself, but wisely kept her mouth shut.

The two women were startled when Horace burst out exclaiming, 'Why are you yelling at Cassandra? I don't want to hear you speak of Rufus that way ever again, watch your mouth!'

Jill flinched at the anger in his voice, said nothing but to give Cassandra a resentful glance, her tears quivering in her eyes. She stormed upstairs, wiping at the corner of her eyes.

At the sight of the usually callous woman's tears, Cassandra felt guilty. She didn't know it would upset her that much, and voiced out an apology, 'Dad, I'm sorry. I had no idea...'

She turned back to the food on her plate. Even the rest of her meal looked cold and unappetizing, as if it had caught the bitterness of that morning's tension.

'No, you could not have known...' Horace replied gently, his eyes growing distant as he continu

It all starts on that fateful night.

When Ella, who is the dear sister of Samuel's best buddy, sneaks into the hotel where the drunken Samuel resides and gets pregnant...

'I don't want a divorce!'

'I don't want a divorce!'

'I did no such thing!'

Ella jumped on the bed and cried out. 'I don't want a scheming woman as my wife. Just sign the paper...

ed. 'Even I want to see her one more time, but Rufus wouldn't allow me...'

Horace stood up, slowly shaking his head and walking away from the table with heavy steps that echoed through the room. Cassandra watched him leave the room. His hunched shoulders made him seem much smaller and older.

Left alone on the table, Cassandra blinked absently, a strange feeling brewing up from inside her.

At the company

The day proceeded as usual, and the halls were filled with footsteps and murmurs of employees going over their tasks. It seemed as everyone was blissfully unaware of the events that transpired last night. No one even mentioned a word about the seemingly abrupt change to her assistant. It was as if everything had settled back into its old flow, and as usual, there was plenty of work to be done and deadlines to beat. The buzz of the activity calmed her as Cassandra effortlessly melded with everyone else and continued to work.

The assignment Rufus had given her was almost finished, and she completed the rest that day.

Now all she needed was his approval. After his review, the design would be ready to be delivered to the clients.

If they found the design satisfactory, it would mark the successful completion of her first project in the Tang Group. She lightened up at the prospect, leaning back on her chair and smiling to herself.

However, her thoughts unknowingly drifted, and she found herself thinking about Rufus again.

Images from last night flashed in her mind - his tired, dispirited eyes, and the silent desperation when he held her in his arms. A frown subconsciously appeared on her face.

She could not even imagine the depths of his sorrow.

From her stay in the Tang's house, what little she knew about him consisted mostly of that he was Horace's son, with another woman, and that he had been living alone with his mother. It must be a heavy blow for him to lose the only one person he could call his family.

At first glance, he appeared to be lazy and evil, like he cared about nothing, but Cassandra could clearly see that Rufus was definitely not a simple man. This time, he was willing to return to Tang Group, probably with his own purpose.

'How is he doing now. Is he alright?'' she wondered. Cassandra's thoughts occupied her brain. She was biting her lip subconsciously, the delicate lines of her face drawn into confusion and worry.

An abrupt knock on the door brought her back to reality.

Cassandra jumped a little from her seat at the sudden sound. There was a man standing respectfully at the door, as if waiting for her attention.

'Hello, Manager Qin, I'm Mr. Tang's assistant. He is asking for you in his office,'

he said directly.

Lionel. Upon hearing his name, Cassandra felt slightly disconcerted.

What would he want now? As far as she was concerned, they had nothing to talk about. Giving off a small sigh, she rose from her chair and answered, 'Alright. I will be there.'

Cassandra pushed her personal feelings aside as she walked to his office. She was his employee, and in the company, she had to act accordingly as his subordinate.

It was better to draw a clear line between private and business matters. This was one of her basic principles, and she was determined to be one of the best in her field.

‘Mr. Tang, Manager Qin is here,’ the man announced when they arrived at the door of Lionel’s office.

His assistant opened the door and she walked inside, seeing Lionel busy playing shooting games.

Once she was inside, the assistant closed the door behind and silently left. Now, there were only the two of them in that wide office. Despite the big space, Cassandra felt constriction in the atmosphere.

‘You asked for me?’

she asked in a cold and distant tone, getting straight to the point.

Lionel stopped playing and met Cassandra’s cold stare with his own. Unceremoniously, he stood up and went to his desk, taking out an envelope from a drawer.

She narrowed her eyes, trying to make sense of what he was doing.

He turned to her and flung the envelope on the table.

Cassandra wordlessly looked down, and gingerly picked up the envelope to see what was inside it.

‘Take a look,’ he said, smirking.

Her fingers shook as the image that came into view was the photo of Rufus, with his arms wrapped around her.

Her eyes went to the rest of the photos in envelope, revealing more images of him and he