

The Enchanted Night by LEIGH COBBETT Chapter 3

The sun beat down hard at the airport in G City, making everyone sweat with its oppressive heat. Summer in G City was always like this. No one ever looked their best; women's hair frizzed up, and their makeup slowly began to slide down their faces. Men bore sweat stains in their armpits, and their clothes clung in places they'd rather they didn't. But at the airport's exit, a beautiful woman, seemingly untouched by the elements, strode out, pulling a huge suitcase behind her. This heat wasn't getting her down. She was in a great mood.

“Cassandra! Here!”

A middle-aged woman dressed in a stunning dark-colored floral print cheongsam waved her arm, calling out to Cassandra. Clearly, she was excited to finally see her. The older woman looked quite elegant for her age and had a shapely body. Her name was Edith Fang, and she was Cassandra's mother.

“Hi, Mom!”

Cassandra immediately spotted her mother through the throngs of people waiting to be picked up by their loved ones, and waved back. Though she hadn't heard it in four years, she was far too familiar with her mother's voice to not recognize it.

Edith Fang was already past 40 years old, but you couldn't tell by looking at her. It was obvious she went to great pains to take good care of her skin and body; she didn't look a day over 30. She wore a loving smile on her face and had a twinkle of pride in her eyes when she looked at Cassandra. The two easily could have been twins; they wore the same expressions on their faces. Yes, it had been four long, excruciating years without any meeting between them. They missed each other like hell. It was hard for most people to imagine the pain of being away from your

family for so long, especially your mom. It was a bittersweet reunion. But at the time Cassandra went away, there simply was no other choice.

Cassandra excitedly ran towards her mother, dropping her suitcase on the ground. She threw her arms around her, hugging her tightly. She never wanted to be away from her mother again. As soon as they touched, tears started streaming down Cassandra's face. She was so choked up with emotion that her voice became shaky.

“Mom, I'm finally back! I missed you so much!”

They locked in an embrace, breathing in each other's familiar scent. Four years ago, Cassandra married Lionel Tang to please her mother. She endured all the harsh conditions and rigid rules the Tang family had imposed upon her but finally achieved her dream of studying abroad.

During the past four years studying abroad, she hadn't been allowed to contact anyone in her own family. For Cassandra, the most important person in her life was her mother. That was why she missed her most of all. She couldn't believe she was seeing her mother in the flesh after all this time. To be able to touch her and see her face brought her so much joy.

“You are back now. That's all that matters, my baby. You are finally back.”

Edith Fang's own voice, too, was shaky and overwhelmed with emotion. Neither of them could stanch the flow of tears from their eyes. Edith Fang looked at her daughter, her vision blurred by the stream of tears. This was really her Cassandra. At long last, her Cassandra was here. Edith Fang gasped, but no words could escape from her throat. Cassandra, too, was speechless at the sight of her blubbering mother, though she flashed a knowing smile to Edith Fang.

The brief reunion was interrupted by the ring of Cassandra's phone. They reluctantly let go of each other, trying to compose themselves. Wiping her tears with her sleeve, Cassandra took a deep breath and reached for the phone in her pocket.

Cassandra subconsciously raised her head and glanced at her mother as she saw the name of the caller on the screen. Cassandra turned the phone so Edith Fang could see the caller's name, as if to silently ask whether she should answer it. Something indefinable flickered in Edith Fang's eyes, but she quickly composed her face and glanced back at her daughter.

"Now that you are back, there are things that you just can't run away from anymore. You just have to face them. But pick up the call first,"

Edith Fang said in a gentle voice. Cassandra nodded her head, picked up the call and put the phone to her ear. A powerful yet gentle voice spoke to her.

"Cassandra, I have a very important meeting today. That's why I couldn't come and pick you up myself. I have already told the driver to pick you up at the airport."

The man behind the voice was Horace Tang, her so-called father-in-law, her husband Lionel's father.

"Oh, that's all right. My mom is already here to pick me up. I can go back myself. No need to bother the driver,"

she said quickly. Her voice was polite but distant, as if she was speaking to a complete stranger, not her father-in-law for over four year

s. Clearly, she didn't consider this man her family.

“That’s nice to hear. Then I don’t need to worry about your transportation arrangements. I’ve already arranged for us to have dinner together. Spend some time with your mother. I know that you haven’t seen each other in a very long time.”

Horace’s tone was still gentle and caring, just like how it usually was.

“Okay. See you later,”

Cassandra hung up the phone. She tried to pretend the call hadn’t taken her aback, that hearing her father-in-law’s voice hadn’t rattled her. She slipped the phone back in her pocket, and acted like nothing happened. She clung to her mother’s arm tightly like she was still a young girl waiting to see what her mother would surprise her with next.

“Mom, come on, let’s go. There are so many things I have to tell you.”

Edith Fang glanced at her daughter with adoring eyes. She knew the past four years had been tough on Cassandra, but she didn’t know a fraction of the things Cassandra had endured. Her heart ached for her daughter. She didn’t mention Horace’s call and didn’t try to pry with any questions. All she wished for her daughter was to have a happy life. That was all she ever wanted.

Cassandra and Edith Fang got in the backseat of the waiting car. During the drive, Cassandra regaled her mother with funny stories and interesting things that had happened to her during her years abroad. Edith Fang listened intently, even laughing here and there at some of Cassandra’s tales. Seeing her daughter’s happy smile after four years, Edith Fang’s eyes couldn’t help but redden again. She felt guilty.

She knew Cassandra wasn’t happy that Edith Fang married her off to the son of the Tang family. But seeing Cassandra had finally achieved her

dream of studying abroad, Edith's guilt diminished a bit. Cassandra's educational goal was her only solace.

"Cassandra, tell me. During your years abroad, have you ever..."

Edith Fang's voice trailed off. She scrunched her face because she knew she really shouldn't be asking this question.

Cassandra's pretty smile suddenly disappeared when she realized what she was asking. The handsome stranger's face flashed through her mind, and she was suddenly reminded of the hot night of their passionate lovemaking. Cassandra grew flushed and panicked.

"Mom, of course not! What are you talking about?"

Cassandra placed her hand on Edith's to comfort her. She looked uneasy, but only for a moment, so Edith Fang didn't notice. She calmly smiled at her mother through the panic inside her.

"Cassandra, I'm so sorry. If it weren't for me, you wouldn't have had to..."

Edith Fang's eyes welled with tears again. The mix of the awful past and the joyful present was a jumble of emotions Edith Fang couldn't quite parse. Cassandra immediately interrupted Edith Fang before she could finish her words.

"Mom! It is all in the past. Besides, it was my own choice. I have a good life now, and I will continue to be happy in the future. Please don't worry about me."

Cassandra held her mother's hand tightly. She didn't want her mom to feel guilty over things that couldn't be changed now. Cassandra had made her way back home to her and everything would be fine.

Yes, she didn't really have a choice in her marriage. That was something she couldn't control. But it didn't mean that her life would automatically be a tragedy. Marriage was simply a part of her life, and she still had plenty of other things to concentrate on.

She believed strongly that as long as she worked hard enough and became powerful enough in the future, she could break free from all her shackles and provide her mother and herself with a fabulous life.

Meanwhile at the presidential suite of a grand hotel, two lovers frolicked on a big red bed.

They made out with a fiery passion and then took a breather. The woman, lying seductively on the bed, began to pout to the man in an overly sweet voice.

"I heard that Cassandra is back? Huh? She still came back, after four years?"

The man scoffed and snorted.

"That's not important. Why do you care?"

The man's voice was breathless from their rigorous activities. But she discerned the disdain and coldness in his voice at hearing his wife's name.

"Of course I care. She is your wife, Lionel."

But the woman's mood immediately lightened after hearing Lionel's cold attitude towards his wife, and her now sing-song tone reflected that.

"She is just a puppet. She has nothing on you,"

Lionel said with a smirk on his face. He didn't bother waiting for her reply. He just flipped her on her back and started kissing her passionately while his hands explored the rest of her body. Instinctively, she pushed her body against his and moaned seductively. The air in the room began to feel like a sauna again.