

The Enchanted Night – Chapter: 61

The Kiss In The Lift

Cassandra woke up to the pitter-patter of rain falling outside. It drummed softly on the leaves and blanketed the morning in a rhythmic white noise of nature.

Her eyes were still hazy with sleep, until she came to the sudden realization that she was in Lionel's room. Wide-eyed, and her mind sounding alarms, she sprang up to check her own body.

She was under the cover of the blanket, and her clothes were exactly as they were when she fell asleep. She ran her hands over her limbs, as if in search for a phantom touch that could possibly linger. Convinced that nothing was different, she heaved a sigh of relief. It seemed that Lionel didn't touch her.

The thought of him made her turn her head and scan the room. He was nowhere to be found.

She stood up from the bed and opened the door, treading softly on the carpeted floor. It was still early, and she did not want to make noise and attract anyone's attention. She crossed the hall and went, as quickly as her quiet steps would allow her, to the guest room where she was living in. Then she locked the door, and took a shower. When she finished, she came out with her body wrapped in a bath towel. To her surprise, there was a man standing in the middle of the room, his eyes fixed on her.

Reflexively, she tightened the towel around herself to find any semblance of modesty it could give her, then she stormed to the intruder.

‘Rufus! When did you come in!’ she confronted him.

Rufus remained his standing position, unaffected by her anger. The dim light of the autumn morning silhouetted his face, hiding parts of it in shadows. Despite the absence of light, one could feel a heavy aura coming from him.

He replied to her in a low voice, ‘I have been here. You didn’t come back last night. So I was here the entire night.’

Cassandra felt herself warm with his words as a slew of thoughts crowded her head. ‘Was he sleeping on the my bed? Did he use my blanket?’

Was the bed clean enough? Was my hair on it? Was it comfortable enough for him?’ The questions went on and on until she realized the insignificance of the things she was agonizing over.

‘Wait a second...’ she thought, shaking her head and collecting her wits.

There was a more important question that had to be answered.

‘Why did you sleep in my room last night?’ she questioned. Her voice was firm but the blush on her face betrayed her emotions at the moment.

A playful smile crept up Rufus’ face.

‘I wanted to be close to you. Your bed smells like you. It was really...nice,’ Rufus continued, his voice dropping at the last words.

Cassandra knew all too well that he was teasing her, and yet, she found herself curling up like a cat to his words. Was she...enjoying this?

'Cassandra, how can you stoop so low? How dare you entertain flirtation with your brother-in-law!' she castigated herself. 'You are the wife of Lionel. You are supposed to behave like a married woman. It is unacceptable to keep pursuing an ambiguous relationship with Rufus, ' she went on reminding herself.

Gripping the voice of reason, she spoke in the coldest tone she could muster, 'Well, you can go out now. I need to change.'

Undeterred, Rufus' eyes roamed all over her body as if he was devouring her with his eyes. His eyes glinted with mischief as he asked, 'Why? Are you bothered with me looking at your naked body?'

Cassandra knew the game he was playing. She also knew he wouldn't go out so easily.

Abandoning any further effort to drive him away, Cassandra took her clothes and went into the bathroom, locking the door after her. She dressed herself and came out.

As she expected, Rufus was still in her room. Without so much as a glance, she walked pass him and out of the

'Let's go and register our marriage on your birthday!'

Marrying Daniel should have been her best birthday gift, but everything was ruined the moment when she caught him sleeping with another woman on the day before her birthday.

'He's going to marry that woman! She... was my best friend!'

ady to go down. When the doors of the elevator opened, she was surprised to find a man standing inside. It was Rufus.

Cassandra felt her heart sink to her stomach. 'What is he doing here?'

Some time earlier, Rufus was about to go home and had gone to the underground parking lot. However, he noticed that Cassandra's car was still there, so he went back to his office and turned on the surveillance video.

As he had expected, Cassandra was still working.

He silently watched her work through the screen until she eventually decided to leave. Before she could reach the lift, Rufus rushed to it and waited for her inside.

By this time, he had already fixed his mind on a decision. There was nothing he wouldn't do to stay close to her. He knew that she would resist - it was evident in the determinedly cold way she treated him. But he would insist upon telling her that it was impossible to get rid of him.

Cassandra hesitated to go inside such a small, enclosed space with this dangerous man. She stood there, not making a move to enter, when at last doors started to close. What happened next surprised her. Before the elevator closed completely, Rufus put one leg forward to block the door, which made it automatically open once again.

Then Cassandra felt an arm grabbing her and forcing her in.

Her mind reeled at the all too familiar feeling of his arms around her.

'Let go of me! You...!' she shouted, trying to break free from his embrace.

She kept on struggling and yelling, and without warning, her voice was sealed by his lips.

His hands gripped her wrists to stop her movements. He was strong, and it was almost impossible for her to break away.

She felt a sharp sensation digging into her skin as he grasped her hands, but instead of quieting her down, it was as if the pain fueled her resistance even more.

There were security cameras in the lift. Anyone could chance upon it and it would be a big trouble. Feeling anxiety and anger welling up inside her, Cassandra bit Rufus' lip.

At this, he abruptly pulled away, looking at her in utter disbelief. He raised a hand to his bruised lip and wiped at the blood.

This woman dared to bite him!

He reached out his hand to grab her face, but she slapped it away.

Red bloomed on the bandaged hand, and Cassandra's fury was replaced with worry when she saw the blood staining the white cloth.

The wound must have reopened. Realizing this, the fierce look on her face suddenly vanished.

The Storm

A heavy silence permeated the elevator. Cassandra glanced at the redness spreading over Rufus' hand, and felt her heart squeeze in pain.

She tried to keep the tears in her eyes from running down her face.

'Rufus... You... You asshole!'

The words burst from her. She struggled to get her emotions under control, barely noticing that her fingernails were dug into her palms. Her voice trembled with emotion.

Her reaction made Rufus's face soften.

He looked away from her, wanting to conceal the swirl of emotions in his nebulous eyes.

Each droplet of tears that escaped from her eyes splashed straight onto his heart.

His heart became heavier and heavier.

As soon as the lift doors opened, Cassandra rushed out. After a second Rufus realized that she was heading not toward the carpark, but towards the exit.

While he stood there stunned, Cassandra disappeared into the heavy rain.

He dashed to the main gate, but Cassandra was nowhere to be seen.

The swirling sky above him, was dark as ink. A traffic light stood out in the storm, a beacon in the night.

He stood for a second, and then spun back toward the carpark. Climbed into his car, he sped out of the building right away.

The car seared through the thundering weather; the wipers screeching hopelessly against the downpour. He peered through the rain, barely able to see the road. He had no idea how he would find Cassandra.

But Rufus was determined. Slowly, he circled around the block, driving back and forth for some time before finally spotting a bedraggled woman at the corner of the street.

She was huddled under a ledge outside of a darkened shop. The ledge barely kept the rain from her, with water lashing at her on either side.

As he parked the car and leapt out of the door, he saw her sitting on haunches and staring blankly at the rain.

He ripped his coat off and covered her with it.

He crouched down and put his arms around her, almost flinching as he felt how cold and drenched she was.

‘What were you thinking? Do you know how severe this typhoon is?’

Rufus tried to keep the anger and fear out of his voice. The rain streamed across his face, and the wind ripped the words from out of his mouth.

Cassandra gave no indication that she had heard him. The tears streaming out of her eyes mingled with the rain pouring down her scalp.

Just now, she leapt into the rain at the spur of the moment. She was almost knocked flat by the storm, but her need to escape pushed her forward.

Her hair clung to her face, getting in her eyes and mouth and entwining around her throat.

Her clothes were soaked and heavy, and the cold had seeped deep into her flesh and bones.

Cassandra didn't know where to turn. She needed to get away from Rufus, but she had nowhere to run in such a storm.

She couldn't see a way forward. And she couldn't go back either. C

'You're my wife in name only, on paper only. My heart and love will never be yours.'

Edward made it clear to Daisy that she was nothing to him. They were both victims of family greed -- the marriage was arranged for them.

Six years passed. She remained quiet, gaining a reputation in the army as a tough-as-nails colonel. When she walked into his life again, Edward fell in love with this woman...

to come to her aid.

Cassandra's body stiffened. She seemed to have understood what he meant.

'I will do it myself. Thank you Mr. Luo, and you can leave now,' she demanded.

Rufus was not pleased that she addressed him as 'Mr. Luo', but at least it was better than being called 'brother-in-law.'

Seeing how exhausted and fragile she was, he did as she asked and stepped out of the room.

As soon as he was gone, Cassandra sank under the water, trying to bury her humiliation.

'Where do your resolve and determination go, Cassandra? Why is it that all he has to do is to treat you kindly for a minute, and your anger dissolves?' she asked herself in her heart.

'Cassandra, you weak foolish woman! How will you ever escape the influence of Rufus! You have to be firm and strong!' she muttered out loud.

While she spoke, she shook her head, and tried to shake off the guilt and shame.

Little did she know that Rufus had been waiting at the door to make sure that she was alright. What she had said out loud went into his ears, and a trace of smile leaked from his dark eyes.

After a while Cassandra climbed out of the bath, and wrapped herself in a soft white towel. She looked at her clothes on the floor and let out a defeated sigh. They were soaked with water and mud.

There was no way she would be able to wear those now.

Glancing around, she found a shirt on the towel rack.

Luckily, Rufus was tall. This shirt of his could cover her until thigh and be used as her dress.

Well! She decided to just put it on. 'Worst case scenario,' she thought, 'I'll just buy him a new one.'

Seeing her emerge from the bathroom in nothing but his shirt, Rufus caught his breath.

Her skin almost turned transparently white under the light, and her silhouette shone subtly through the cloth.

He wanted to turn his eyes away respectfully, but found it impossible to break from her allure.

Cassandra s Disease

Surely, this was a case of sense over sensibility.

Cassandra was still weak which was why Rufus reminded himself to treat her better, thinking anything less than normal behavior would hurt both her health and her heart.

Neither did he want to be bitten again so he decided not annoy her anymore.

As he stepped outside the bathroom after a long bath, Rufus saw the her lying on the sofa, fast asleep already.

He stared at her sweet face, looking so serene in her sleep it made him smile.

Perhaps, she was dreaming. What could she be dreaming of? Maybe, him? He couldn't help wondering like a teenager.

Gently, he picked her up in his arms and put her to bed. He kept his arms wrapped around her waist and held her against his warm body.

She purred comfortably, and turned on her side, snuggling into his chest.

If only she could remain this way...

Soon, Rufus closed his eyes, enjoying the calm he felt.

With the first rays of the sun, the sky was clearing up after the heavy rain.

Sunlight shone brilliantly, reflecting off the ground, making its way into the room. Cassandra got woken by a single dazzling ray that fell right into her eyes, peeking from behind the curtains.

Her sleepy eyes cracked open and caught sight of Rufus's gentle gaze stuck on her face.

'Good morning, Sleeping Beauty!' he said, softly.

He'd been watching her for a long time, eyes filled with adoration. To him, she looked beautiful even while she drooled like a kid in her sleep.

He'd even taken a picture of her sneakily, snickering at the photo for a while afterwards.

Even in his dreams, he couldn't imagine himself to treat another woman so gently and patiently.

Cassandra was still drowsy and groggy. She had no memory of what had happened last night in the rain.

'What? Don't you remember anything? The passion with which you attacked me last night? Has your memory drifted away with the rain?'

He teased her, amused at her panicked expression.

She racked her brains to recall what had happened and it didn't take long for her to realise she was being pranked.

Cassandra glared at him but upon meeting his gentle and affectionate gaze, her own anger melted. She didn't know in what manner was she supposed to look back at him.

'You put on my clothes, leaving me no choice but to wear no clothes and had me fighting the temptation to touch you the whole night. How will you make it up to me?'

Cassandra slapped the hand he had on her jokingly but was shocked by a sudden shriek.

Damn! It was his right hand, wrapped in gauze. Her face changed immediately, overcome with guilt and concern.

'I am so sorry, I totally forgot about your hand.' she murmured apologetically.

But then in a flash, it occurred to her she was the one being joked upon this entire time. Her defence was justifiable and there was no need for her make the apology.

Annoyed, it dawned upon her how she wasn't herself whenever around him.

Realizing she had better distance herself from someone who made her feel so small about herself, Cassandra got up and rushed into the bathroom to change. Her own

'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.

The mark of that affair was so deep in Horace’s heart, he shook with anger at the memory of it.

‘Whenever I tried to discipline him, you always took his side, crying you would die for your son. And I am the one not taking responsibility? You better reflect on yourself first,’ he said, slamming the table.

Cassandra and Cloris looked at each other awkwardly while Rufus looked nonchalant, listening silently.

In comparison to all the stories he knew about Lionel, this bringing-girl-home affair was simply nothing.

Even though Cassandra was Lionel’s wife only in name, this was still a little embarrassing for her.

On the other hand, Cloris reassured herself for being in love with Rufus, who shared no characteristics with Lionel.

Just then, Lionel stepped into the living room.

Immediately, he noticed her mother’s red, wet eyes. He could imagine what might have transpired.

‘So you finally got back? I couldn’t get through to you last night, especially because it was raining so heavily. Cassandra always calls me if she is working overtime and isn’t coming back for dinner. Why not you?’ Horace said, at the verge of thundering at him.

Lionel had spent the entire day with Ivy the previous day, but he dared not mention it at the time. If he did, it would surely lead him to a reprimanding.

‘I also worked late last night. I called you, Cassandra, right?’

With that, he took a seat next to Cassandra and wrapped his arm around her shoulders, with a look of phony affection all about his face.

‘Don’t try to fool me again! Do you think I know nothing about the things you are up to?’

Horace pounded the table, getting more irritated by his casual behavior.

‘Keep screwing around with those whores! I’m really ashamed of having a son like you! You are not worthy of Cassandra! I can’t imagine you ever wanting to work despite of being ill!’

Lionel got puzzled, and turned to look at Cassandra.

‘You’re ill? What happened?’ He asked. She opened her mouth to speak but couldn’t go on. He asked again, almost yelling, ‘Tell me what it is!’

Cassandra Happy Birthday

Horace grew angrier when he saw the confused expression drawn on Lionel’s face.

‘Cassandra is not in a good shape, she’s not feeling well. She must not be disturbed so that she can fully rest. So don’t quarrel with her anymore! Do you understand?’ asked Horace.

Lionel creased his eyebrows in confusion after hearing his father’s demands.

He examined Cassandra closely, hoping to clear his confusions. Her face was a little pale, it could be that she had been having fevers frequently. Aside from that, she was perfectly fine. Maybe Cassandra had some disease they didn't know about.

Horace handed Lionel a medical record, the diagnostic proof of Cassandra's illness. Lionel examined and read the paper thoroughly. However, he was still confused.

'What is the meaning of these words?'

His eyes rolled around the room inquiringly. Finally, his eyes fell upon Jill. He was expecting that he would get an explanation from his mother.

Jill spoke with a crying voice. She explained everything to Lionel while sobbing.

After his mother's explanation was synced up, Lionel completely froze. His eyes were full of disbelief as he looked upon Cassandra's hopeless face.

He dreaded Cassandra, but couldn't help feeling sorry for her for having such condition. On the back of his brain, a ghastlier plan sufficed. 'So that means... the child inside Ivy's womb now would be the only grandchild of the Tang family?' he thought.

Lionel's pitiful heart towards Cassandra was replaced by joy after weighing the odds. He would be more troubled if he would carry out his original plan. Luckily for him, Cassandra got such kind of disease. It would be great for him as if the universe was working on his side. They only have to wait a few more months till Ivy would give birth to his baby. Then everything would be okay, everything would work according to his plan.

‘That’s okay, Cassandra. Just take a good rest. Anyways, we are still young, and it would be fine with me. We can have the baby after your disease is treated,’

Lionel pretended to comfort Cassandra, but deep inside his heart was an inexplicable joy. He rejoiced over Cassandra’s misery.

Words of comfort from Lionel was all that Cassandra needed. She took the opportunity to make an innocent facial expression and said, ‘Sorry, Lionel...But don’t worry. I... I’ll take good care of myself.’

Horace felt relieved and was happy to see that they were reassuring each other.

As the evening progressed, Cassandra went to rest in the guest room. Lionel did not force her to stay with him. It seemed that the crisis of baby-making had already passed.

The days after the news of Cassandra’s disease, she went on with her usual routine and immersed herself in work.

Cassandra worked hard day and night. She was busy with all kinds of materials and design drawings. After all, this was the biggest project she had received since she entered the Tang Group. This was a big deal for her. And she was taking it seriously, leaving no stones unturned.

The design and the architectural layout were spearheaded by her. And she had never missed visiting the site every week to make sure that everything was aligned according to her plans.

It was a surprise for Jenks when he saw her design proposals. He was held in disbelief at the uniqueness and beauty of the drafts.

The architectural style was the post-modern style, which he liked a lot. Spaces were fully maximized and the exterior of the buildings was also striking.

The interior

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?

th in surprise, not knowing what kind of expression she should show or what to say.

Today was her birthday. But no one remembered it except Rufus. She, herself, almost forgot her natal day.

Altogether, there were 22 candles on the cake. The soft glow of the candles brightened their hearts. It lightened Rufus smiling face while Cassandra couldn't help her tears from falling.

Tears trickled down from her beautiful eyes. Her nose suddenly turned red and her heart melted with gratitude.

‘Thank you so much, Rufus.’

Cassandra was overjoyed. Today was a good day for her. She successfully led Jenks to sign with Tang Group. And now, she was celebrating her birthday with a birthday cake. Although there were only

the two of them and not so many people were present to congratulate her, she still felt very glad.

The busy work made her forget her birthday. But how did Rufus know that?

‘Silly girl, why are you crying? There is nothing to cry about. Come on, make your wish!’ said Rufus in a big smile.

Cassandra nodded tearfully. She closed her eyes and started making wishes on her mind.

Rufus’s eyes turned deep as he looked on her innocent face. Under the candlelight, she glowed so beautifully, exuding a luminescent radiance that attracted Rufus even more.

The flickering candle was like his unsteady heartbeats. He was curious about what she had wished for and whether it had anything to do with him.

Cassandra slowly opened her eyes and blew out the candles.

Rufus made the dinner himself. He prepared the steaks and opened a bottle of wine he had treasured for years.

The rich fragrance of the dark red wine was enticing as Rufus poured some into their wine glasses.

‘Rufus, cheers! Thank you for the surprise!’

Cassandra boldly lifted the glass and drank all the wine in one big gulp. Rufus burst out laughing.

‘How could you drink the wine like water? Do you always act like that? No wonder you were so drunk the night when we were in Rome.’

Hearing him mentioning about that night, her mind went back to the moment when they were entangled together. She did not know if it was because of the wine or the memories between them, her face turned red.

Rufus was satisfied to see her speechless.

He tasted the wine triflingly and asked, ‘Aren’t you going to say something about my wine?’

Almost

The candlelight quivered. The charming smile across Rufus’s face made her face burn.

In the warm atmosphere, Rufus’s question flickered through her mind. It seemed to carry more meaning than it appeared on the surface.

As she looked at him, the candlelight was reflected in her eyes, flickering with emotion.

She lowered her eyes and tried to hide how nervous she was feeling.

Rufus chuckled shortly and decided to drop the issue. He could see she was uncomfortable discussing it.

Cassandra focused on her steak. Rufus had cooked it to perfection, medium rare with just a hint of pink on the inside. When she lifted it to her lips she found it tender and succulent. She closed her eyes in delight and savored the taste.

He knew that Cassandra's birthday happened to be on the same day as the submission date of the proposal.

Rufus had asked Victor to prepare the table beforehand, and he had even taken the time to hire a baker - not to bake the cake for him, but to teach him how to do it himself. But the steak was his crowning achievement.

It seemed that his efforts had paid off. Rufus felt himself warm at the blissful look on Cassandra's face. This kind of satisfaction was different than the one he normally felt, better than excelling in the workplace or winning a bet.

Any one who knew him well would have their jaws dropped to the floor if they came to knowledge that he had done cooking and baking for a woman.

He doubted anybody would even recognize him now that he had taken off his business suit and tied an apron around his waist. 'Imagine if they see me washing dishes!' Rufus thought to himself.

It was clear that he had not done this many times before. Unsure of how to properly wash dishes, he sometimes let the plates slip from his hand.

Leaning against the kitchen door and watching him, Cassandra wasn't sure if she wanted to laugh or cry.

This seemed like a snapshot from the life she had always dreamed about.

She had dreamed about having a family life like this - eating together with her husband, cleaning up together afterwards, sharing the chores everyday.

When Rufus had finished, Cassandra decided to keep her promise.

‘Alright, where should we watch the movie?’ she asked.

She was a woman of her word, although, she had to admit, the lingering taste of the steak in her mouth might have had something to do with it.

Cassandra wondered if anyone else in the world had ever had the honor of having Rufus cook for them.

Rufus’s eyes twin

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ork separately, and barely interacted at home. It was only when Horace was present that they acted like a real couple. Only then would Lionel show affection toward his ‘dear wife’.

That was strange! Way too strange!

And now today, Cassandra and Rufus had left together with the proposal. Determined to get to the bottom of this, Cloris had excused herself, and followed the pair.

She had been shocked to witness that, after leaving the hospital, Rufus had brought Cassandra to his cottage - and the two spent the night together!

Cloris was not naive. She knew what these signs all meant. The man that she loved was having an affair - with her own sister! Cloris felt rage rising up inside her. She wanted to lash out, punish them. For a moment she was tempted to reveal their secret.

But, she couldn't.

If Cloris unveiled their secret, Rufus would be defamed.

Her dream was to stand proudly beside Rufus, have them be the most important person to one another. She wanted her man to maintain his status and power, and for herself to share in it.

No...She would have to be cleverer than that. The pain that raged inside her unleashed a cruelty that she had never shown before. The innocence in her face was washed away with it. Cloris felt herself grow cold and vengeful.

Gnashing her teeth, she was engulfed by fury.

'Just you wait, Cassandra. I'll take your place in Rufus's heart, just as I took your place in the hearts of our parents!' she muttered.

Outside the car, the wind scraped a handful of dried eaves across the pavement. The streetlamp flickered and died. The car was engulfed in darkness.

The coldest winter ever was approaching...

Winter was coming, along with the howling north wind. A branch snapped off a tree in the wind, while another branch of the same tree showed no signs of weakness. In fact it seemed to have been strengthened by the fall of the other branch.

Tang Group was as same as the unaffected branch. Stable in the face of difficulties, the company had become better under Rufus's leadership.

It was time for most companies to invite bids in the winter and Rufus was not only winning bids in G City but also expanding and scaling up operations in other cities.

More and more of the projects also brought Cassandra and Rufus chances to work together.

'Rufus is charming when he's focused at work. He stands out from the crowd by his confidence and charisma. When he speaks at meetings...'

Cassandra shook her head to stop her train of thought. 'He is the last man I could fall in love with.'

Distracted, her thoughts wandered to Lionel, who rarely showed up in the company these days.

'It's a good thing, ' thought Cassandra, as she would have more time and motivation to work.

Beyond the question, Horace was satisfied with Rufus. Although it was the first stint for Rufus working with the Tang Group, he was quite able as a leader. Everyone looked up to him and believed he was someone worthy of staying at the helm of the company.

Going by how well the company was doing, Horace believed that Rufus was better suited than Lionel for leadership. In a short time, Rufus had

come up with a new proposal for expansion – a move which would see the Tang Group diversify to other areas beyond real estate.

The increasingly busy schedule for Rufus however got Horace concerned that the young man might have little time to think about marriage.

‘Rufus, there is a wine party next week,’ began Horace, careful in broaching the subject. ‘I think it’s a great event for meeting young people of your age. Who knows, you could find yourself a wife at such events,’ he added, carefully watching Rufus’s reaction.

As much as he could, Horace tried to keep the talk causal. Although he was being implicit, everyone at the table had realized what he meant.

Knowing that Ivy’s tummy was getting bigger and bigger day by day, Lionel thought he had the game in his hands. ‘I’ll take her for an ultrasound scan. If it’s confirmed to be a boy, I’ll gain an advantage that could take me way ahead of Rufus.’

When she heard Horace’s words, Cassandra slowed down, eating as if some invisible powerful claws had gripped on her heart.

But her sister, Cloris was excited. Right off the bat, she requested, ‘Uncle Horace, may I go to the party?’

Although Cloris’ politeness had left a good impression on Horace, it was not enough for him to make the decision at once. In addition, although she hadn’t made any terrible mistakes at work, her manager still rated her as impatient and lacking in creativity.

Horace knew

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...

iting for you in this room.' As directed, Cassandra opened the door and entered in, Cloris following closely after her.

All around they were awed by the collection of evening dress designs of every color and size imaginable!

There were also collections of lace, gauze, rhinestones, jewelry, gold and silver...

All expensive, fashionable accessories chased after by women filled a section of the room. Michelle really built a paradise for woman.

'I... I feel like I'm in a dream now...'

murmured Cloris.

Michelle Ling's dressing room was like a gigantic locker room filled with all luxury items that most women coveted.

However, Cassandra seemed calmer than Cloris. She was not obsessed with those dresses.

A woman with a svelte figure and long curly hair was scrutinizing a dress on a dummy with her arms crossed over the chest. When she heard the door opening, she turned around to see who was coming in.

Cassandra and Cloris were surprised by the woman's elegance.

Running a business empire with more than twenty years on the market, they hadn't expected her to be so stunning still. For her age, she was surprisingly graceful.

Her hair was black and full, styled into a beehive, with bangs at the front swept to the side and held in place with hairspray, giving her a very retro look. Her clear eyes sparkled with an oriental slant.

Her long and cute lashes flashed with enchantment.

In her early 40s, Michelle Ling could still pass for a younger lady in her 20s.

To complete her stunning looks, she was wearing a white suit that accentuated her graceful figure.

The aura of power around her made her look a little too official to get along with.

'Like an Ice Queen from Snow Country, ' Cassandra thought.

But when Michelle Ling put on a graceful smile and greeted them, Cassandra and Cloris felt they were relieved by the warmth of her tone.

'Welcome to my studio, Her Royal Highness Princess.'

The exquisite gown was sure to catch everyone's attention. Cassandra was as calm as ever, looking at the mirror. Her beauty was breathtaking.

She politely nodded her head to the designer.

'Michelle, thank you so much. May I get my tailored dress?'

Michelle nodded in acknowledgment. She pointed to one of the inner rooms proudly.

'It's there in that room. Try it out and see.'

Then she looked at Cloris, mildly curious.

'You are... ?'

Cassandra was about to introduce her sister to Michelle, but before she had a chance, Cloris extended her hand and introduced herself, 'Nice to meet you, Michelle. My name is Cloris. I am the younger sister of Cassandra!'

To her surprise, Michelle didn't shake her hand. She just nodded, acknowledging Cloris in a half-hearted manner.

Cloris pulled her hand back in embarrassment. She was dreaming of connecting with this famous designer but got a flat-out rejection. She couldn't believe it, having been the center of attention all her life.

Cassandra had heard about how proud Michelle was. Now she had witnessed it in person. This side of Michelle was really unique from other people.

'If Rufus hadn't asked the favor from Michelle to customize my dress, I might have not even been able to see her.

But... How did Rufus get to know about Michelle?' Cassandra wondered.

Pulling herself back from the reverie, she spoke to break the awkward silence, 'Cloris had heard about you a long time ago. She is an admirer of you! I have brought her to ask a favor from you. Could you help her select a gown to the wine party next week?'

Cassandra glanced at the luxuriant dresses hanging in the room, beaming with adoration.

'It is an honor to have the opportunity to wear a dress designed by you,' she added.

Michelle looked at Cassandra from head to toe, then at Cloris, paused for a short while, and turned to retrieve a dress.

'If you are asking for a tailored one, it would take at least one month. It's impossible to make it this soon. So I will select one from my collection. This one should suit her style,' Michelle explained, unemotionally.

The dress was full of Chinese symbols, with lace strips decorating the waist and the chest. It was both tidy and solemn.

Michelle gestured towards the fitting room and told Cloris, 'Try it out first. I will see if I need to adjust anything.'

Cloris happily took the gown and dashed to the fitting room.

Cassandra was now in a conundrum. 'If cus

When her boyfriend betrayed her, all light and joy was gone from Cherry's life. Deserted, bereft of hope, she married a man that she had barely met, but she had never expected him to be her ex-boyfriend's uncle.

Cherry thought that she had finally found her happiness, but she had no idea about the dark secrets that were bound to unfold and haunt her forever...

e another request. It seemed more like an order rather than a request.

She nodded again without giving it a second thought. Then, winking her eyes intentionally, she put up a sly grin and spoke with her innocent voice, 'Rufus, I am married...'

Upon hearing that, the hand around her waist suddenly tightened the grip, which made her scream out, 'Ouch!'

Rufus had a look of sadistic pleasure, as if he was enjoying the reaction from Cassandra.

'Good that you know it hurts. I believe you know how to reject the invitations from others,' he said.

Cassandra pouted, thinking to herself, 'Why does he always behave this way?'

'There's another thing. Your sister will be accompanying you. Just be careful..' Rufus randomly gave her a reminder out of a blue.

Nonplussed, Cassandra wondered, 'Be careful of what?'

Rufus didn't speak more, but just rubbed her head instead. After all, Cloris was Cassandra's own sister, who always had her trust. If she ever

came to know that her kindness towards her sister was paid with jealousy rather than gratitude, she would surely be grief-stricken.

‘Just be more cautious. Sometimes, the person who is the closest to you will be the one that hurts you the most,’ he reminded her again.

Michelle had told him about what she had discovered at her place today. The best he could do was to subtly remind her. He had no evidence, after all, to show that Cloris would carry out more sinister moves against Cassandra. The action of hers today was just a manifestation of jealousy and didn’t cause any real harm.

However, if she dared hurt Cassandra in any way, he would certainly make her pay!

I sm Willing To Wait

Enchanted by Rufus’ voice, Cassandra found his hug irresistible.

He whispered into her ear, in a gentle, soothing manner, giving her goosebumps. She wished that she could have immersed herself in his love forever.

‘You look stunning at the last banquet. This time, you’re going to shine even brighter. But beauty aside, you will also have exceptional skills. They’re your most valuable assets which you could capitalize on. Use them wisely.’

Carefully, he wanted to elevate her in subtle, informal ways that wouldn’t make his intentions too obvious. That was why he bought her a fancy dress to mark her out for attention.

After all, people were easily influenced by what they saw. If by glamour she could grab their attention, they'd be naturally curious about her. And that curiosity was the human weakness that Rufus wanted to exploit for Cassandra's advantage.

Though she was a capable woman, she was still fairly new in the architectural design industry. If she could win the admiration of some of the bigwigs in the industry, it would be much easier for her to climb up the career ladder.

Finally, Cassandra realized why Rufus had lavished the expensive dress on her.

Initially, she believed that Rufus asked the celebrity designer to make her a gown, just to shower her with his affection. Now she discovered there was more to his move. It was for her self-development.

At the thought, her eyes became teary.

It had been ages since she felt cared for like this.

The last person to have ever cared about her so genuinely was her wet nurse. When she was a little girl, the old granny was ever so caring and treated her as a grand-daughter. She would go to all lengths to satisfy Cassandra's wishes. Growing up, however, she had woken to the cruel reality of a world where even her parents wouldn't protect her. When they forced her into marriage to a heartless man, she was devastated. Four years of that marriage had left her more and more disillusioned. But now, here was a man who believed in her. A man that genuinely cared for her, often with extravagant shows of his affirmation and affection. In a short time, he had challenged her belief that she'd forever be lonely, scorned and abandoned. The gentle but firm man that Rufus was found a way into her heart. Willingly, Cassandra would drown in his love.

For a moment, memories from childhood flooded her thoughts. Although she hadn't enjoyed parental care as much as her younger sister did, she learned to get by without throwing unnecessary pity parties.

Life in the small town then, was, in fact, quiet and soothing as she found solace in nature. On some occasions, though, she hoped a day when her parents would take move the family to a better city and give her a warmer home.

Not that she was an extravagant kid who wanted fancy stuff. No way in hell did Cassandra lust after more than the simple things she needed to get by. Clothes to cover her and food to survive would do. For as long as she had those two basic needs, plus a roof above her head, she was perfectly OK. And she found great contentment in her small, down-and-out family, imperfect as it was.

But her humble prayers went unheard. One eerily cold night, fate took away the little that she asked for. A part of her life snatched away by the cruel hands of poverty, at a time when she was least prepared.

She acutely remembered the day when her nightmare began. Ironically, it started with a rare sumptuous family meal — the beginning of her indignity, marked by an occasion that should have brought joyful laughter at the family table.

During the meal, her mom and dad kept exchanging glances silently, as if waiting for someone else to start speaking. She couldn't have possibly guess

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?

ecture from different countries.

Representatives from the contract awarding side kept nodding while he spoke. As Cloris listened to Arthur's presentation, she couldn't help but marvel. With a bit of reluctance, Leon had driven her to the conference. Now, she anxiously gripped at his arm, blown away by their competitor's presentation.

'Why do I have a feeling that they are going to select his plan? Goodness, he's so convincing, he makes me fear we might lose!' she exclaimed.

'Don't worry. I came here with my best preparation!'

Declared Cassandra declared confidently, who was only one seat away from her inane talking sister.

Lightly, she pressed at her folder and felt for the USB drive. All her weapons were ready for the decisive battle.

As if the pressure for Cassandra's job was on her shoulders, Cloris rose and excused herself.

'I'm so anxious, although I'm trying to calm my nerves. I need to go to the washroom now. See you later!'

Then she left the conference hall at once.

Unimpressed, Cassandra shook her head. Why was Cloris acting so unprofessional and stressed out? Anyway, she ignored her younger sister's antics, choosing instead to focus her energy on what she came

here for. She'd need lots of patience to help Cloris, and that would include bringing her to more events like this for exposure.

Finally, it was her turn. Taking a deep breath, she stood up, touched her folder to confirm if the USB drive was still in place. Everything was intact. Her game was on.

Rufus, who was sitting to her left softly clasped her hand to show his support. Though he didn't say anything, the meaning was well conveyed.

'Go girl!' he said with deep conviction in his heart.

Standing on the podium, she started with a proper introduction of herself, followed by a highlight of the key features of her design. Then, she inserted her USB drive into the port to begin her slide show. But when she clicked 'open.' ...

nothing showed.

Cassandra was a bit surprised, thinking she might have clicked the wrong button. Once more, she clicked on 'open.'

But still there was nothing. .

Then she bent down to check the state of the USB drive, only to find that the signal light for connection was off. But even after she re-inserted the USB drive in, the light didn't turn on.

Unbelievable! 'Beyond a shadow doubt, I remember checking the USB drive, as well as everything inside before I locked it in my drawer. Why would it suddenly fail?' she wondered.

Cold sweats were running down Cassandra's forehead. She didn't know what to do considering that she was the center of attraction and everyone was staring at her. She stood awkwardly alone on the rostrum with her face as pale as the bare walls. Obviously, there was something wrong with her.

Arthur knitted his eyebrows in confusion and anxiously leaned back in his chair.

'What's going on with her?' he tilted his head to his assistant and asked.

His assistant, however, just shrugged his shoulder because he had no idea what was happening. Judging from their previous experiences in doing businesses with the Tang Group, they had witnessed what Cassandra was capable of and they dared not to underestimate her.

They had come and prepared for whatever Cassandra had in store for them, but now it seemed that it was the other way around. Something wrong was happening to her.

Rufus sensed the oddity in the way Cassandra held the flash disk on her clenched fist. He stood up without any hesitation, walked to the organizers and whispered something to them.

He was planning to ask them to give Cassandra another thirty minutes. That would buy Leo some time to go back and fetch a backup copy. He was surprised when Cassandra had braced herself and snapped back right away.

She waved up the flash disk for everyone to see and slowly explained her tight spot.

‘It seemed that my flash disk has decided to leave me hanging alone, and it’s not good timing,’ she spoke in no hurry as she shrugged her shoulders with a helpless expression on her face.

Everyone present in the room smiled at her frankness.

‘The reason I bought this flash disk was that it got the coolest, most attractive, and had the most unique appearance amongst all the products of the same brand, but it turned out that it didn’t serve its purpose. It has a nice appearance but of little use,’ she continued.

The room was filled with laughter.

Rufus straightened his back and fixed his eyes on Cassandra interestingly.

He was curious about what she would say next.

Then, she changed the topic.

‘When I was a little girl, I thought that the most important thing in a certain design was an attractive appearance, but the longer I worked in this industry and the more I learned, the better I understand that the final purpose of design is practicality. The utility should not be sacrificed on behalf of beauty,’ she narrated emotionally.

The audience she was speaking to was a group of experts when it came to design and architecture. Thus everyone seemed to get the implication of her statement as they nodded their heads in approval.

They had seen the designs of both Tang Group and Dawn Star Group in the past. The former was conservative and practical while the latter focused on the novel appearance. To cover up the unexpected emergency brought about by her broken flash disk, Cassandra compared and

contrasted the two design plans taking the example of her own experience.

In the next few minutes, she briefly introduced her design and the reasons behind such a proposal.

Attracted by her vivid introductions and the small incident earlier, all the attendees were absorbed in the picture she portrayed.

About ten minutes later, someone from the company gave Leo another flash disk and he handed it to Cassandra immediately. Finally, all the attendees were able to view a concrete example of the design plan.

It was a wonderful experience for them to see with their own eyes the things they heard slowly unfolding in front of them. They had been impressed by her description, and the pictures gave them another visual shock. They praised the design plan

‘Let’s go and register our marriage on your birthday!’

Marrying Daniel should have been her best birthday gift, but everything was ruined the moment when she caught him sleeping with another woman on the day before her birthday.

‘He’s going to marry that woman! She... was my best friend!’

ed to be Rufus assistant and not the ‘assistant’ that Arthur was implying.

On the other side of the city, Lionel received a call from Ivy, and she sounded excited.

‘Honey, the doctor said that it’s a boy!’ she rambled on the other side of the phone.

Lionel suddenly felt exuberantly happy as if the horizons opened up for him. All this time he had wished and wanted for the baby to be a boy, and thankfully it had met his expectations. He thanked God for the favor, sincerely.

Being an excited father as he was, he couldn't help but tell his mother about Ivy's pregnancy. Jill was stricken dumb by the news and it took her a while to weigh things over and accept the fact that she would be a grandma.

Ever since Rufus returned, Lionel was almost invisible and no one paid any attention to him. Jill was so annoyed and Horace chose to stand by Rufus every time she and Rufus were in conflicts. She couldn't persuade herself to accept that truth.

Thus, when Lionel told her his plan of overpowering Rufus with Ivy's pregnancy, she agreed with him and thought that it was a good plan.

Despite their best-laid plan, Jill had her own worries. Cassandra was Lionel's lawful wedded wife but he was having an affair with Ivy even before their marriage. That would make Lionel the unfaithful husband.

'That sex video of you and that woman was played at the banquet last time, and it made your father felt humiliated. I don't think that he could accept her,' she told Lionel her worries.

The excitement on Lionel's face was still blooming, and he was overwhelmed by the delight of kicking Rufus out of the Tang Group.

'Mother, please don't worry. We'll do things one step at a time. As long as Ivy can give birth to a boy, Father will favor me again. Remember how my grandpa valued him because you had me and all his other sons didn't have a baby boy,' he comforted his mother.

Lionel's idea won over Jill, and they began discussing how to tell Horace. They believed that he would cherish Lionel's baby because this was his first grandchild. Cassandra, however, was their pain in the neck.

If Lionel was single and Ivy was pregnant with his baby, it would be easy for Ivy to marry him, but now things were complicated because Cassandra, Lionel's wife, was chosen by nobody but Horace himself. It would be impossible for Lionel to divorce her by his own will. They needed to think over a perfect plan for Horace to accept Ivy.

Secret Revealed

Taking a glimpse at Lionel, Jill hesitated for a moment, and finally spoke out, 'I know you don't like Cassandra, but she was selected by your father. It won't be easy for Ivy to replace her as your wife, Lionel.

Maybe, we should talk to Ivy. If she agrees to carry the pregnancy to term and give you the baby, we can pay her off with a huge sum of money. We can make the whole sum negotiable, so as to find a fair deal for both sides.' Lionel didn't even know how he felt about that decision. Ivy had been with him for so many years, and he had promised her a lot of things. Right now, it seemed that the marriage he had promised her wasn't going to come true.

To add to that, there was no way she could face the possibility of being stripped of the right of a mother. It would be too cruel for her.

Carefully studying the hesitation on Lionel's face, Jill knew that it was hard for him to break up with Ivy, in whom he had been emotionally invested for years.

But Jill persisted, regardless of his feelings. ‘How about, you let me do it on your behalf, if you feel too bad about talking her into the deal?’ she suggested.

Given the current state of things, the best person to carry out this task would be Jill.

However, she underestimated the resistance the pregnant girl would put up.

‘This baby is mine. No one can take it away from me!’ Ivy shouted.

To her, Jill must be kidding. She had been waiting for the day, when she would become a legal member of the Tang family, for so many years. If she was just after the money only, she could have chosen a sugar daddy, anyone wealthy enough to shower money on her. What she really wanted wasn’t the small pay-off that Jill was offering. It wasn’t even mere love from Lionel that she wanted. The girl had her eyes set on the capture of entire Tang Group.

As a common trend in the society, a woman could turn her life upside down by a good marriage. For seven years of her relationship with Lionel, Ivy had painstakingly planned for her turning point. How could she just give up for the paltry pay off that Jill was proposing?

Over the years, Ivy had come to know that Jill was a cunning woman and not someone to deal with easily.

That emboldened the girl more. ‘Whether the baby will bear Luo or Tang as the surname, is yours to decide,’ Ivy threatened. There was no way she was going to let Jill have the last word on this.

Inside, she told herself, 'I don't really care what the surname of the baby is. What I really care about is getting legally married to Lionel!

Now this baby is my last chance and my bargain chip. I have to make full use of it.'

'I'm pregnant with your son's baby, Madam. The only thing I want is for him to be responsible and give me a home. Given the complications I'm having with the pregnancy, I only want to live with him until the baby is born. After that, if Tang family doesn't approve me as a daughter-in-law, I'll leave the baby to your family, go overseas and never come back again!' Ivy declared her terms with her teary eyes.

It was difficult for Jill to tell whether the tears were genuine or she was just being melodramatic.

'All these years I have been with Lionel, believing we were meant to be a perfect couple. That was until Cassandra Qin came in and ruined our relationship. Now I have realized that Lionel and I may be just doomed to part our ways. The only thing I ask for now, is to have him take me in for the next few difficult months of the pregnancy. Is it too much to ask just for a few months of him taking responsibility?' Ivy challenged.

This

Jean Wen sacrificed herself for family interests. Before her husband divorced her, she made every effort to please him.

'You are inexperienced in bed,' he said coldly.

'You! Give that land to my family, or I won't agree to divorce,' Jean replied furiously.

'Fine. It is exactly what I am thinking about,' he sneered.

finished speaking, she turned around and walked briskly away as if escaping from Rufus.

An involuntary smile formed on Rufus's face. From the corner of his eye, he noticed that Cloris was also following Cassandra into the washroom.

His eyebrows creased with suspicion, and he signaled to Victor with a wink.

Cassandra was too shy to be under the intent gaze of Rufus, and she kept worrying that there were something wrong with her make-up, lipstick, or mascara.

Women always wanted to present their perfect selves to their men. And Cassandra was no different.

Looking at herself in the mirror, she could see clearly that she was blushed all over the face.

Abruptly, another figure appeared in the mirror. It was Cloris.

With a lovely and innocent smile, she slowly walked towards Cassandra, and asked, 'Cassandra, are you here to fix your make-up again?'

With a dotting smile, Cassandra reached her hand to help Cloris tidy up her hair and answered, 'Yeah. It's an exciting party, isn't it? I just saw Mr. Zhuang invite you for a dance.'

Now, Cloris blushed as well. In excitement, she shared with Cassandra, 'Mr. Zhuang is a real gentleman. He even mentioned that he appreciated your talents. We also talked about college life, and I was surprised to find out that he actually graduated from the college I'm studying at!'

Amused by the cute red face of her younger sister, Cassandra couldn't help teasing her, 'Then he surely should take care of his dear junior. Ask him to show you around to meet more people. He must know more people than I do.'

With a meaningful laugh, she whispered into Cloris's ear, 'Mr. Zhuang is an outstanding man as well. If you have any feeling for him, I will help you!'

At that Cloris felt a tinge of embarrassment. Blushing again, she avoided looking back into Cassandra's eyes.

When she lowered her head to dodge Cassandra's gaze, there was also a sign of derision flashing across her eyes.

What Arthur had told her was more than that. And what she had revealed to Arthur was also much more than what she had told Cassandra.

'Cassandra, why are you blessed with all the good things? Why must men always ignore me, only to fall for you?' Cloris accused in her heart.

While Cassandra was concentrating on applying her make-up, Cloris surreptitiously took out something from her purse. It was a small pair of scissors.