

TMBA 1221

## CHAPTER 1221 MAKEUP

Tonight was the first time Erica had ever seen Matthew smoke.

And, he looked absolutely sexy doing it. She was smitten all over again. Erica quietly took out her phone and opened the camera app, and brought Matthew into the frame. She zoomed in so she could see him better.

Before she could snap a pic, she met Matthew's eyes through the view screen.

So, he caught her trying to get a pic of the perfect moment.

Erica didn't stop, though. She pressed the button, and the camera took several pics in rapid-fire succession. She had it in burst mode, just in case.

It was not illegal for her to take pictures of her husband.

Erica was used to men smoking. After all, her father was a heavy smoker.

However, Wesley almost never smoked at home or in front of the family. He usually smoked a few cigarettes when he was outside, if he was annoyed, or had nothing better to do.

But Wesley never reeked of cigarettes. Maybe it was because he smoked high-quality cigarettes, or because he didn't smoke too much. More likely it was because he carried disposable wipes to wash his hands with, and breath mints to mask the smell on his breath.

But it still settled on his face, clothes, and hair. So you could tell the man smoked. But it was not too heavy to be repulsive and not too light to be missed.

After a while, Matthew walked around the car to the passenger seat and reached out his hand to Erica.

Looking at his large hand, Erica was a little confused. "What?"

"Your phone," he demanded.

'What's he playing at? Is he going to delete the photos?' she thought. Erica held her phone. "No. And why should I give it to you? I asked to look at your phone twice, but you refused to let me see it. So you can't see mine."

Matthew didn't push the issue. He put his hands back into his pockets and decided to change the topic. He wanted to address some of the stress dividing them. "Tessie and Lenora deserve what they get. I'm not giving in on that."

He couldn't let her have her own way on this, or she'd run into problems later.

"Well, I'm still thinking about it. If you've made up your mind, it's fine, as long as you don't kill them." Erica didn't want to keep fighting with Matthew over this. After all, he had helped her a lot.

'Huh? She caved in easily! What's up with that?' Matthew decided to believe her for the time being. He didn't say anything and sat in the driver's seat.

After he closed the car door, Erica could still smell the faint scent of tobacco wafting from him. It was not overpowering, and mixed well with his cologne.

She took the pack of cigarettes he threw back into the glove compartment and opened it. There were only two cigarettes missing.

She looked at the profile of the glowering man and asked, "Did I make you unhappy?"

The man's sexy Adam's apple bobbed while he replied, "No." He was reflecting on whether he had done something wrong. Why did Erica resist his attempts at intimacy so adamantly?

"Do you smoke a lot?"

"No." He would break out a coffin nail any time he felt upset. Most of the time, he wouldn't smoke at all for one or two months.

"Do you hate me?"

"No." How on earth could he ever hate her? But he could easily turn that question around. He wondered if she refused to sleep with him because she hated him.

"If you don't hate me, why do you keep saying no?" she asked.

Matthew was confused. What kind of logic was that? He really didn't hate her. What else could he say?

"If you didn't hate me, you wouldn't keep saying no all the time. And a few more words wouldn't kill you, either!" His replies to her questions were rather curt.

Obviously, he was being perfunctory with her. She was embarrassed by this. Couldn't he feel it? Matthew didn't say anything. 'God, she's hot!' he thought.

"So we're back to square one. Saturday. Dinner. You going or not?" she asked.

"Yeah, fine."

"What do you want to eat? Do you have anything in mind?"

"Not really. I'm down with whatever." As long as he was with her.

Erica was starting to get annoyed. "But I don't know the first thing about the city. You've lived here all your life, and you can't choose a restaurant? How about a home-cooked meal? I'll cook for you," she said. She had to learn how to cook sooner or later. What if she and Matthew really slept together on his birthday and she had a baby?

Matthew was busy all the time and wouldn't hire a servant. She would have to take care of the baby herself. If she couldn't cook, she and the baby might starve.

'A meal cooked at home?' The idea scared Matthew a little. The corners of his mouth twitched. He tried his best to say a few more words while answering, "I'm not picky. Whatever you want to eat, I'll run with it. Western, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, vegetarian even. Anything you want."

"Know what sounds good? Liuzhou river snail rice noodles. Oh! And how about hot and sour rice noodles, wonton, rice flour noodles, and hotpot. Any of those do it for you?" 'He won't like any of that. I'm one hundred percent sure.

Or will he?' she wondered. His answer was, "I know just the place. I'll call and reserve a table. Just drop by my office and we'll go there together."

'Humph! That's more like it!' she thought. "So it's settled!" she said to him.

"Hmm."

Back in the bedroom of the villa, Erica pointed at the makeup on the dressing table and asked her husband, "Why did you buy all this for me?"

Matthew shrugged off his suit jacket. "Mom asked me to." He didn't even know she was out of makeup. It took Debbie to point that out to him.

Erica's doubts were confirmed. "You don't need to buy me makeup next time. I don't even know how to apply it!"

"I'll ask someone to teach you."

"No, thanks. I'm too lazy to learn." All she wanted to do now was to learn how to be an amazing photographer. Once she did that, then she could work on being famous and internationally renowned.

Matthew took off his suit jacket and threw it aside. "I'll ask Owen to get you a membership in the Photography Association in Deplua. You can go on some location shooting activities with them. It'll be good for you."

"Sounds good! But... " Erica studied Matthew's face. He didn't seem to be in a bad mood, so she ventured to ask, "Can you help Hyatt get a membership too?"

He cast a sidelong glance at her and asked, "Does he mean that much to you?"

"I owe him my life, Matthew. You know if he hadn't called my brother, they could have killed me. I'm alive. How can he not mean a lot to me?"

Matthew thought that incident had happened because of his negligence. After that, he had arranged for someone to follow Erica around in secret to protect her.

Turning, Matthew headed to the walk-in closet and said, "I was actually going to get a membership for each of you."

'Each of us?' Erica smiled happily. She knew that Matthew was very nice to her!

When Matthew came out of the bathroom, Erica sat in front of the dressing mirror, brushing her hair. Hearing the sound of the bathroom door opening, she raised her head and looked at her husband. "Look. What do you think?"

"About what?" he asked, staring at her from a distance. She looked different somehow. When she blinked, he had his answer. She'd applied some makeup.

"What do you think of my eye shadow? I found a tutorial online! It was written by a real make-up artist!" Erica put down the eye shadow disk and jogged over to him, trying to give him a closer look.

Her eyelids were of a golden hue and had a metallic sheen. Matthew didn't know a thing about it, so he didn't say anything.

Knowing he didn't understand, Erica blinked her eyes and explained, "I'm wearing firefly eye shadow. Just tell me, what do you think?" She felt beautiful. Not only had she mastered a new skill, but she thought she looked prettier.

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"Yes," she said. Of course. Otherwise, she wouldn't have asked.

"It looks like you just jumped out of the Eight Trigram Furnace."

"What? What are you talking about?"

Matthew continued to share his opinion mercilessly, "Remember Journey to the West? Fiery Eyes, Golden Gaze? It reminds me of that. So tell me, can you identify evil now, no matter what form it takes?"

'What? Does he mean that my eyes look like the Monkey King's?'

That was so harsh. Covering her chest, Erica held back the urge to flare up. Why did she even bother to ask him?

"If you really want to learn how to apply makeup, I'll ask Paige to find you a professional makeup artist tomorrow. You can learn when you have time," added Matthew.

Erica shook her head in frustration. She had a little interest in makeup, but this man threw cold water on the fires of her enthusiasm.

"What about the lipstick? Do you like it?" She wasn't going to give up. The man had to redeem himself



somehow.

Matthew grabbed her chin and lifted it to get a better look. "No comment." Because he wanted to kiss her red lips so much.

He was afraid he would never be able to kiss her again if he said another word.

She pouted. This wasn't good. 'No comment is worse than any comment, right?' He was just trying to spare her feelings. She must look awful.

#### CHAPTER 1222 MY WIFE IS BEING A BAD GIRL

After Matthew went to the study, Erica eschewed a shower. She sat back down at the dresser, found the foundation, and began to apply it in front of the mirror.

Twenty minutes later

Someone pushed the door open quietly from the outside. Inside the study, Matthew was having a video conference with his subordinates.

He stood in front of the window, his back to the door. He listened carefully to what one of his employees was saying. He didn't feel it necessary to turn around. An aide was giving her report, her tones even and devoid of feelings. She was all business. "Last month, the profits of our branch company were up six percent. It's very likely it will..."

Matthew froze for a moment. He felt someone approaching him from behind. His hand hovered over his phone, held in place.

Erica tried to mask her approach, tiptoeing across the carpet. Matthew's keen senses still picked her up.

Right now, there was no one else in the study except his wife.

He pretended not to notice and wanted to see what tricks she was going to play.

The video conference was still going on. "But the staff turnover in the branch company is not stable and the rate of loss is quite—aahhhh!"

The subordinate who was reading her report out loud suddenly screamed, and a dozen senior executives attending the meeting heard the shrieking. They simultaneously looked up at their own computer screens to see what was going on.

Unexpectedly, more and more people began to scream, until it reached a crescendo. Everyone on that call was spooked.

"Oh my God! It's a ghost!" another man exclaimed.

"What the hell?"

"Aahhh..." The video conference was a total loss. Someone took his suit jacket off and threw it over his screen. The camera in his square went black.

Matthew finally spun, trying to see what was going on with his staff, when suddenly he saw a white figure standing beside him out of the corner of his eye.

When he took a closer look, his heart trembled violently.

Then he realized who it was; he closed his eyes in despair.

The woman was dressed all in white in a form-hugging gown. Her long black hair spilled around her shoulders and back, and her face was painted bone white, with thick eyebrows and big eyes. She had traced lines under her eyes with red lipstick, like blood was dripping from her eyes.

Her lips were painted with that same shade, red and glistening as if she had just partaken of some blood.

Silently, she stepped into the frame of the webcam on Matthew's computer. In the middle of the night, she looked like a ghost. No wonder his staff was scared to death.

Actually, Erica didn't mean to scare any of the employees. She just wanted to frighten Matthew.

But when she passed by his computer, she heard a voice from the speakers. Out of curiosity, she paused there to take a look.

So everyone attending the video conference saw the "ghost" and was frightened to death.

Matthew pulled Erica out of the frame and said to his subordinates apologetically, "Sorry, everyone. It's not a ghost. My wife is being a bad girl. Please continue."

The executives were gobsmacked. 'Wow! What a brat!

Matthew, you really know how to pick a woman, ' thought many of them.

The employee who hadn't finished her report was still in a state of shock. She motioned for her husband to join her, while she continued to report so she wouldn't get scared.

After confirming that it was Matthew on the other end of the video, and not a ghost, she picked up her notes and continued to recite facts and figures, but her voice was still a little shaky.

Matthew glared at Erica, who looked quite innocent, turned off the mic on his computer and scolded,

"Go wash your face!"

Erica pointed at his computer. "Is this fun? Let me see!"

"No need!" He was afraid that if she showed her face again, his meeting would be completely ruined. Plus, he would have to pay a huge amount of mental damages and medical fees, and also lose more than ten people. Top talent was hard enough to come by.

"Fine!" Erica blinked innocently. Before leaving, she leaned her head over and asked Matthew, "Did I scare you?"

Embarrassed, he covered his camera and answered, "No."

'Too bad! My little makeup job was in vain. My foundation fluid and powder were wasted!' she thought.

After Erica went to the bathroom to remove her makeup, Matthew went back to the bedroom as well.

Hearing the noise in the bedroom, she poked her head out and asked, "So are you done?"

"Yeah. I told them we should call it a night." 'I need to let them get over the shock, ' he thought.

"What a great boss!" Erica sighed.

'It's all your fault!' he thought.

In a village of Deplua

A girl shivered and hid in a car, desperately looking at the inky blackness outside. She wanted to escape, but she couldn't get away. There were two strong men outside, peering inside.

The area was deserted. They'd set out tomorrow and arrive at a heavily wooded forest. It would take three hours to get there, so they decided to pull over for the night.

She struggled to get away the whole way here, but in the end, she failed.

She now regretted trying to mess with Erica, framing her and beating her for money, but it was too late.

The night passed quietly as she repented. On the second morning, one of the men threw two buns, a bag of pickles and a bottle of water to her. "Breakfast!"

Lenora was very hungry, and the two buns sounded really good. Hopefully they would stop the rumbling in her stomach.

On their way to the woods, one of the men got a phone call. After the call, he told her, "We were going

to keep you out here for a month. If you cooperate, you can come back in a week. Mr. Matthew's orders."

Lenora would still have to stay in the woods. But at least her sentence was reduced. As long as she could stick it out for a week, she'd be off the hook.

She chewed the bun in her mouth and swallowed hard. "Okay, okay, I'll watch it!"

The car passed through the deserted area and arrived at the expanse of trees. An old man in little more than rags glanced at Lenora and led the group into the forest.

The road to the primeval forest was covered with loose dirt and silt, making it difficult for people to go on foot, let alone drive through here.

After an hour's walk, they finally saw a small cave entrance.

The old man pointed at the entrance of the cave and spoke in a local dialect that Lenora couldn't understand. "That's it. There's enough food for a week. If you're smart, you won't use it up. If you need anything, you know where I live."

Civilization was pretty far away, including the nearest cell tower. Phones would be useless here. The old man would be waiting at the entrance.

"Thank you, sir!" The two men thanked the old man and led Lenora into the cave.

The closer she got to the cave, the more her fear threatened to overwhelm her. The towering trees and lush green plants were now twisted mockeries of themselves. The rushing stream seemed to be laughing at her.

The scenery was beautiful, but it would be horrible if she had to stay here overnight.

The thin man next to her muttered what he had said countless times on the road. "Who do you think you pissed off? Why did you have to mess with Mr. Matthew? We gotta stay here with you, which sucks—a lot. Mr. Matthew gave us hazard pay. The zeroes are in the right place, at least. If they weren't, we wouldn't be here."

"I...I'm sorry..." Lenora apologized timidly. She was stammering, because now she knew it was all real.

There was no way she'd survive in the forest by herself. If they left her alone here, she would probably die. So she couldn't afford to tick these guys off.

The fat man glanced at her and said to his companion, "You know, we're alone here. How about we...?" He flashed a lewd grin.

Though he didn't finish his sentence, Lenora immediately understood what he wanted. She shivered and was about to cry.

The thin man patted him on the head. "You think I don't want to? But what if something happens to her after we fuck her? Mr. Matthew told me that he just wants her to stay in the cave for a month. So, not a good idea. If something happens to her, we'll get blamed for it."

#### CHAPTER 1223 WILL YOU STOP MENTIONING EVELYN

If Lenora had ended up committing suicide as a result of the two men raping her, then the two would be doomed.

The three of them continued on their way, going deeper and deeper into the open jaws of the cave.

The ground underfoot was wet and slippery with moldy growth. She could feel something slithering past her feet. It could have been a snake or even a centipede, but neither of those possibilities seemed like something she would be happy about.

Soon they arrived at the entrance. The cave was built into the muddy brown rock of the cliff, the stone guarding the entrance was jagged and uneven, arranged in such a way that it would be difficult for passersby to spot.

To enter the cave was to become engulfed in chilling blackness. The thin man had to move around by following the damp wall of the cave with his hands. All of a sudden, a candle sparked to life, lighting up the tunnel ahead and bathing the entire cavern in a flickering orange glow. He must have had some candles stashed away in preparation for this moment.

There was some dried grass in the far corner, and on the grass were a few threadbare quilts, food and water.

Noticing some movement above her head, Lenora looked up and caught a glimpse of hundreds of bats with their wings tucked in tight. Fright consumed every cell in her body almost immediately, swelling them with terror.

"Aahhh..." A scream escaped her lips and she stumbled backward.

Startled by her shriek, the two men rushed out of the cave with her.

The fat man glared at Lenora angrily and said, "What are you screaming for? You almost scared me to death, bitch!"

"Bats... Did you see how many of them there were?" "How am I going to live in a place like this for at least a week? This can't be happening to me!" she cried inwardly.

"Damn it! There's nothing to be afraid of. Besides, you didn't seem too afraid when you were bullying

other people on campus. You deserve it!" The two men returned to the cave, cursing and laughing at Lenora non-stop.

The fact that there was a clean place with dry grass was proof that someone must have been living in that cave before.

The bats weren't even the most frightening part of the story. Came nightfall, darkness was eternity inside the cave, like an invisible force squeezing the life out of anyone that lived there. Lighting up candles was futile as the cold winds would easily blow them out without much effort.

Fraught with fear, Lenora had no choice but to squeeze to the side of the two men, who on most occasions wouldn't refuse, as long as she allowed them to take advantage of her. After all, she was a young woman.

She could only endure it. After all, she had bigger problems to be worried about.

On Saturday evening, Erica got up early in the morning and dressed herself up in a light blue dress underneath a long white coat. As her skin was naturally fair-toned, the clothes she had picked out for today made her face glow.

At Hilton Group

Twirling the red wine in his glass, Sheffield looked at Matthew with squinted eyes. "Your birthday is coming up, huh? You know, we've signed up with a few young models at the Theo Group who have just turned eighteen years old. They are so sweet and innocent. How about I send them here so you can have a good time with them?"

Matthew cast a cold glance at him and said, "You can have them if you want. Don't use me as an excuse. I bet my sister will be okay with it."

'Not again!' Sheffield whined inwardly. "Matthew, will you stop mentioning Evelyn? Every time we talk, you use your sister to threaten me." Sheffield really hated Matthew every time Matthew snitched on him to Evelyn, because she would make him kneel on the keyboard of his computer as punishment.

"My wife will be here soon. You can leave now," Matthew said.

"Oh really? Rika is on her way? Then I'm not leaving until I get to see her." Sheffield just wanted to annoy him.

Thinking of his trump card, Matthew unlocked his phone and brought up Evelyn's phone number to text her.

Judging from the years of knowing him, Sheffield immediately knew that Matthew was about to snitch on him to his wife again.

After he finished the remainder of his wine in one swig, Sheffield stood up and buttoned his suit jacket, gritting his teeth angrily. "Fine! You win, Matthew! You'd better not ask for my help again or I won't hesitate to let you know that I can be a bad-tempered man too."

"Mr. Sheffield, good-bye!"

Sheffield pushed his hair behind his ear with his right hand and strode forward, waving his hand. "You don't have to see me off, Mr. Matthew. I know the way out."

Silence returned to the office once again and Matthew was happy to get back to his work.

As soon as Sheffield went downstairs, he ran into Erica, who had a camera in her arms. Pretending to be surprised, he said, "Hey, Rika, what a coincidence!"

As soon as Erica saw him, she stopped and asked, "Sheffield, what are you doing here?"

Staring at Erica's innocent face, Sheffield began to plot something in his mind. He decided to let Matthew know how it felt to kneel on the keyboard as payback. He lowered his voice and said, "Let me tell you a secret, but don't tell anyone that you heard it from me."

Erica nodded seriously. "Okay! Don't worry! I won't tell anyone."

"Matthew's birthday is coming up in a few days, isn't it? I don't know where he got the news that my company had just recently signed with several young models. He hinted that I should send them to him on his birthday."

'Young models? Is Matthew really going to date young models?' she wondered.

Sheffield looked sympathetically at the silly girl and asked, "Rika, is Matthew always like this? You have to discipline him before it gets out of hand. Actually, you could learn a lot from Evelyn. Just make Matthew kneel on durian shells or something like that."

'I'd like to see Matthew kneel on durian shells,' he thought with amusement.

"That's an interesting thought!" Erica nodded blankly.

"Anyway, go on, don't let me keep you! Just don't tell Matthew that you met me," Sheffield said with a smug smile on his face.

"Okay! Bye, Sheffield."

When Sheffield saw Erica nodding her head foolishly, a sense of guilt suddenly crept up in his heart. 'Dear God, please forgive me. I'm sure it's a sin to lie to an innocent girl like this.'

But Matthew needs to be taught a lesson! I can't let him get away with everything!

In Matthew's office

Erica opened the door quietly and poked her head in. She didn't come in until she was sure that there was only one person inside.

Matthew raised his head to look at the woman who had just walked in and he tried to draw his sights back, but he couldn't. The expression on her face told him that something wasn't right. "I'll be done in two minutes," he said.

Erica nodded. She walked to his desk and stared at the expressionless man. "Matthew," she said seriously.

"Hmm?" He preferred her to call him honey instead of Matthew.

"I want to ask you a question."

Matthew signed his name on the last page of the document; the project was worth more than a hundred million dollars. "Go ahead!" he said curtly.

"Have you gone to visit Phoebe recently?"

"No, I haven't." 'Why would I see Phoebe? I'd rather be with Rika and spend the rest of my life bickering with her, ' he thought.

As long as Phoebe's baby was safe and healthy, there was no need for him to see her.

"Oh! No wonder..." 'Phoebe is pregnant so he can't have sex with her. Since I won't allow him to have sex with me, I'm not surprised that he wants to date young models, ' she thought.

Puzzled, Matthew asked, "And then?"

"Well..." Erica moved closer to him and in a low voice, said shyly, "Don't forget to take protective measures when you are out there having fun. It's not easy to raise a child. If one day several children start showing up in front of you, claiming you to be their dad, both of us will be in a lot of trouble."

Matthew sat there in utter amazement, finding it difficult to process Erica's words. He stopped sorting out the documents and frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"I heard about the young models. Apparently, they're only eighteen years old. I feel bad for them because you are so much older than them. Be sure to give them extra money for their trouble! You



shouldn't cheap out on something like that." Money wasn't something Matthew was particularly short of, and the only reason those women would be willing to sleep with him was because of his money.

#### CHAPTER 1224 ERICA NIUGULU

Matthew was a smart guy. Nothing much got past him. He already understood what was wrong as soon as he heard Erica utter her first sentence. Damn that Sheffield. He must have told her.

And what did she mean? He had his own thoughts on the matter, but he wasn't sure he was right. 'Is she saying she isn't going to care if I fool around with other women?' Matthew thought angrily.

"Erica!" he called in a cold tone.

Erica immediately stood at attention. Stiff, hands at her sides, eyes straight ahead. "Yes, my lord!"

When he heard her joking around, Matthew was no longer in a bad mood. He asked helplessly, "Do you seriously not care if I have an affair? That's not like you!"

Erica wanted to nod and shake her head at the same time. Anger rose inside her. But when she thought about it, she calmed down a little. Why should she be angry? She did, in fact, discuss the idea of a harem with him. Why should she be mad about something that was her idea?

She looked troubled, and so did Matthew.

After a while, she suddenly slapped her hand on the desk in front of him. "Matthew!"

The slap was so hard even Matthew jumped. His first reaction was to look at her hand. That must have hurt. Her hand should be red and swollen.

"You must be forgetting something. You're married. Where would you come up with an idea like that? Who do you think I am? Erica Xitala?"

she demanded furiously. Matthew was confused. "Why are you pissed all of a sudden?" Hadn't she been calm a moment ago? Where was this rage coming from?

Erica retorted, "I'm made of anger. Didn't you know that?"

Matthew didn't know what to say to that. 'I get it, ' he thought.

Erica glared at the man and continued, "How could you even think of cheating on me? I feel like a Niugulu!" She was referring to one historical drama where the woman was nice at first, but because of all the betrayal she became a cold, heartless woman.

Matthew, who had never watched palace dramas, was completely confused by her. Why did she call herself Xitala one minute and then Niugulu the next? What did she mean? He was getting upset. This

was too much for him to take in.

Matthew massaged his temples. "I thought you didn't care."

"Who says I don't care? I'm Mrs. Hilton now. If you start going off and having affairs, can you imagine how embarrassed I'd be?"

"So, is this just about your dignity?"

Erica blinked. "What else?"

Matthew's heart ached. "Nothing. Let's get some dinner!"

"Wait just a minute. You need tell me whether you intend to cheat on me or not. Of course, if you do..."

Matthew suddenly turned and stared at her.

Erica finished, "If you do, then that means I can start my harem, right? Turnabout is fair play, they say. Ha ha."

The office was dead quiet for two seconds. The man opened his thin lips, and the coldness in his eyes was like an arrow shooting at Erica. "I don't think so!"

Well, did he have to look so serious? "Then you have to promise not to have an affair," she haggled. It made sense. Why could he fool around, but not her? That would be unfair.

Matthew pulled the woman into his arms. With their foreheads against each other's, he told her slowly, "I promise I won't cheat on you!"

He looked like he wanted to tear her apart and eat her up!

Getting what she wanted, Erica straightened the man's tie to please him, and comforted him gently and softly, "Okay, okay, I know. Don't worry. With a handsome devil like you around, why would I ever cheat?"

Matthew's expression softened.

He kissed her on the lips and said, "Wait for me. I need to go change!"

Looking at his pressed clean navy blue suit, she was confused. "You look good. Why do you need to change your clothes?"

Without saying a word, he took her hand and walked into the lounge.

He opened the closet, selected a black leisure suit and handed it to her. "Hold this."

"Oh! Okay!" Erica hurried to grab hold of his expensive suit.

The man took off his suit and then put on his new pants slowly in front of Erica. Maybe he did put his pants on one leg at a time like everyone else, but he looked so good doing it. Her face was flushed, her heart racing.

Erica swallowed and thought that the man must have done it on purpose. What other reason was there to change his clothes in front of her? Obviously, he wanted to seduce her!

Then Matthew took off his white shirt and grabbed the only blue shirt in the closet.

When he was about to put it on, Erica stopped him. "Wait a minute!"

The man turned in confusion, exposing his shirtless torso.

Holding the suit in her arms, she ran to him and ran her hand over his abdominal muscles with a smile. Her eyes lit up at once. "Wow, you are so hot! I should thank my parents for arranging this marriage!"

Matthew was speechless. Shouldn't she thank him for keeping himself fit and trim by regular visits to the gym?

After a while, the man's hoarse voice rang in her ear, "Erica, I think that's quite enough for today." His voice was magnetic and sexy.

"Not yet... Okay, now that's enough!" In fact, she wasn't done, not by a long shot. But she was afraid that Matthew would get annoyed, so she had to stop.

The next moment, he lifted her into the air, and his suit jacket fell from her arms to the floor.

"W-what's wrong?" She wrapped her arms around the man's neck tightly.

Without answering, Matthew threw her on the big bed behind them, and then leaned over. "I thought I'd return the favor. Erica, you are so enthusiastic. I'll make you feel even better."

Erica was startled. She didn't want to go all the way! Ah! She struggled in vain. He was heavier and stronger than she was. Huh?

When his passionate kiss fell on her ear, she found it feel pretty good.

'Forget it. One kiss then. Just one.'

However, after a while, she thought, 'One more kiss won't hurt...'

A few minutes later, she thought to herself, 'This feels so wonderful...'

Around fifteen minutes later, Erica thought to herself, 'Hold on! This has to stop. I invited him to dinner! Time to get going.' "Mat—"

"Shh... Call me 'honey'!"

"Honey," she called out in a soft voice. Her big eyes, which used to be full of mischief, were filled with confusion now.

Matthew was in a good mood. Very horny, but sated for now. He was looking forward to the day when he could make love to her.

He finally let go of the woman under him and smoothed her long, messy hair. "You should reward me for the waiting in the future and make it worth it!" It was hard, he wouldn't deny it. While she kept telling him no, he had to be close to her every day. It reminded him of what he couldn't have but desired above all else.

When the day finally came when she gave herself to him, he'd make sure it was worth it. He wanted to ensure their first time making love was unforgettable.

She nodded, only half understanding what he was talking about. "Okay."

In Evefield Restaurant

Evefield Restaurant, owned by Theo Group, was located downtown. It was decorated lavishly, combining industrial and rustic vibes. It had just been designated a one-diamond restaurant.

It was the right place to enjoy top-level Chinese food and desserts. The chef was an excellent cook who had won countless international awards.

Matthew left the car first, and then made his way around the car to open the door for Erica in person. The restaurant manager greeted him with a group of ushers. Matthew held Erica's slender waist and entered the restaurant.

As soon as they stepped inside, they became the focus of attention. Matthew wore a black suit jacket with a blue shirt underneath, and Erica a white coat over a blue dress. They looked as if they wore matching couples clothes.

Matthew sported a blue handkerchief and lion-shaped sapphire brooch in his left jacket pocket, which matched Erica's icy blue dress.

CHAPTER 1225 WATCHING THE NIGHT SKY

Before Matthew and Erica entered the private room, two people walked over to them, heading in the opposite direction.

Erica didn't notice anyone special as she was taking in the luxurious decor. A man in a green suit greeted them. "Mr. Matthew, Erica, what a coincidence!"

It was Watkins and his friend.

Erica was surprised to see Watkins there. She smiled happily and said, "Hi, Watkins. I didn't expect to see you here!"

Meanwhile, Matthew pulled her closer to him.

The four stood face to face and greeted each other cordially.

Matthew glanced at Watkins indifferently and just nodded at him.

But Erica was a great deal friendlier. She continued to chat with Watkins. "You also here for dinner?"

Remembering the last time they met up, Watkins put his hand in his pocket. He tried to shake hands with Matthew on that last occasion, and the rich young man turned him down. Watkins nodded at Erica. "Yeah. We got here earlier. We're done now! I thought we'd order some drinks. Have you eaten yet?"

"No, we just got here!"

"Then you go ahead. We're in the private club upstairs. You and Mr. Matthew are welcome to join us." Watkins didn't dare look at Matthew, but stared at Erica.

Erica was excited to hear that they could drink and party. Now this was an evening out! But Matthew didn't like the way Watkins was staring at Erica. He quickly answered for Erica, "Thanks for the invite, Mr. Watkins, but we really can't. We're going to watch the stars after dinner."

'Eh? Watch the stars?' Confused, Erica looked back at the calm man. Why didn't she know he had that planned?

Caught off guard by Matthew's refusal, Watkins was bewildered for a moment. Then he smiled warmly and replied, "Sounds like a romantic evening. Then we won't disturb you. See you later, Erica!"

"Okay! Bye!"

Watkins and his friend left first. As he looked back at the couple, a complicated light flashed through Watkins' eyes. He saw the way Matthew held her, almost like a possession.

Matthew had always paid careful attention to his image. He was always alone in public. It was rare to

see a woman standing beside him, not to mention one he was holding so intimately.

Nonetheless, he was now holding his wife in his arms, possessively, as if he were afraid someone might snatch her away.

'Matthew seems to love her a lot!' Watkins thought.

The manager of the restaurant led the Hilton couple to a well-decorated and secluded private room and held the door for them. "Mr. and Mrs. Hilton, this is Mr. Sheffield's private room."

"Okay. Thanks." Matthew nodded slightly and walked in with Erica.

Once seated, the couple was treated to a beautiful view of the city at night, even the downtown office buildings of Hilton Group and Theo Group.

The manager came by to check on them personally before pouring the wine. He asked the waiters to start serving Matthew and Erica.

When they were left alone in the private room, just the two of them, Erica couldn't wait to ask Matthew, "Are we really going to look at the stars? Where do we get a good view?"

This was intended as a surprise, a grand romantic gesture. But the way Watkins was looking at his wife was unsettling. So he showed his hand early.

"The top of Fragrance Mountain," he answered.

'Fragrance Mountain?' Erica thought for a minute. The name sounded familiar. "Are you talking about that place that's famous for stargazing? That Fragrance Mountain?"

"The same."

"Wow!" Erica was surprised, but then wore a frustrated expression. "But I didn't bring my large aperture wide-angle lens." The lens on her camera was for everyday use. This would have been a great opportunity to capture the night sky on film. If she didn't have the right equipment, it wouldn't turn out nearly as well as she hoped. Ah well, she could always adjust the shutter speed. 20 seconds should do it.

Matthew didn't want to disappoint her. With a smile altering the corners of his mouth, he said, "I brought along a professional-level camera and a lens. I trust that's acceptable?"

"Really? What kind of lens?" She wanted to check if Matthew had really done his homework on this.

"I consulted a professional photographer. He recommended a Stone Sea 24mm F1.4 Art. It's easier to operate."

Erica really wanted to hold Matthew in her arms and kiss him. She was so excited to capture the brilliance of the Milky Way and the night sky. "Then let's eat!"

"Do you still want to go drinking?" Matthew asked. The night was so wonderful, and a taste of wine would be just the thing. She'd wanted to go out and have some fun, but Matthew was kind of a homebody.

Erica picked up the glass of red wine in front of her decisively and smiled at him sweetly. "There's wine here. Why go somewhere else?" She lifted her glass in a toast. "To long life and happiness!"

Matthew smiled in satisfaction and clinked glasses with her. Erica tossed her glass back with aplomb, gulping it all down at once.

Then Erica poured another glass of wine for herself, and at the same time, she also filled Matthew's glass. She raised her glass again and said solemnly, "Matthew, thank you for your help. I don't know how to thank you. All I could think of was to invite you to dinner." The restaurant Matthew picked out was pretty high-end, and on the pricey side. She was afraid this meal might cost everything she had and then some.

Matthew didn't move. "Don't worry. The drinks can wait. Let's have dinner first." He was afraid that after a couple of glasses of red wine on an empty stomach, she would get drunk. He remembered what happened the last time she got drunk. It was burned into his brain. If she got drunk this time, Erica might wave at the night sky and said, "Matthew, look! This is the night sky I drew for you!" He really would rather have a romantic evening than a silly one.

Regardless, thinking of that made the smile on Matthew's face grow bigger and bigger.

She had picked up the wine of glass to make a toast to him, but he refused. Erica smiled awkwardly and sneered at Matthew's unromantic behavior.

It was so embarrassing. But she decided to let it go. There were only the two of them in the private room, and nobody was watching them anyway.

The meal was prepared in advance. Within two minutes, several waiters came in and put several plates on the table. The scent was mouthwatering.

"Mr. and Mrs. Hilton, these are the fried crab claws made by our head chef. It's made from big meat crabs that weigh two and a half pounds. Only the freshest and most tender crab claws are used to make this dish. The claws are wrapped in smashed tiger prawn, and then we fry it up." Erica noted the golden yellow color, and nodded her approval. The waiter continued, "We added scallops, shrimps and crispy bamboo shoots too. The second course is sauteed pumpkin with scallop and dried lily bulb..." The manager described every dish on the table in detail.

In Erica's opinion, every dish was super delicious, but there wasn't enough of it. For example, there

weren't enough fried crab claws to divide between them. It would be perfect if the portions were a little larger!

However, she knew this was business as usual in fancy restaurants like this. In order to show how rare these dishes were, they didn't give you much at all.

Since she hung out in fancy restaurants a lot, she wasn't surprised by that.

It took them two hours to finish eating. The two of them left the restaurant and headed for Fragrance Mountain. By the time they arrived, it was already nine o'clock in the evening.

It was a sunny day, and a clear night. The sky was full of stars.

At about ten o'clock, Matthew and Erica reached the top of the mountain.

There was no one else there. The lamp light was dim. Erica asked Matthew in confusion, "Why didn't anyone else come to see such a beautiful night scene?" She couldn't think of a good reason.

Matthew glanced at her and explained, "I asked the rangers to clear the place for us in advance."

There shouldn't be anyone else on their date.

"What? You can do that? How did you manage that?"

But she knew the answer as soon as she asked. Based on how Matthew handled Tessie, Erica realized he was quite powerful. He wasn't afraid to use that power, either. She was impressed.

## CHAPTER 1226 NOT SO BAD

Matthew grabbed the bag that had all the camera gear he had kept for Erica and slowly started taking out all the equipment inside. "I can do whatever it is that my heart desires," he said. For instance, marrying her.

In truth, even if Carlos hadn't asked him to marry Erica, he would have married her sooner or later.

Although Erica knew deep down in her heart that Matthew wasn't putting on an act, she was still somewhat surprised by his cockiness, the combination of arrogance and provocation. The sheer effrontery was thrilling to witness.

Erica went to help him. She took the folding tripod and found a good angle to unfold it.

After busying himself with the gear for a while, Matthew handed a heavy camera with a wide-angle lens to her and said, "Try this one out."



"Okay!"

Erica lifted the camera to her eye as she adjusted the focus and aperture before she pointed the camera towards the sky.

She glanced at the picture of the starry sky she just took and said, "It's not bad. It does feel better with a wide-angle lens."

The way Erica's eyes lit up when she spoke so passionately about photography brought a satisfied smile on Matthew's face.

The special arrangement he had made for her tonight was well worth it.

After taking a few more photos, Erica turned around suddenly and caught him staring at her. She smiled and said, "Perhaps being married to you isn't so bad, after all."

"What makes you say that all of a sudden?" he asked. 'Not so bad? That doesn't sound good enough.'

Erica adjusted the IOS value on the camera and smiled at him. "Haven't you heard the saying? Photography makes a family poor for three generations, and a single-lens reflex camera will ruin one's life." This was a popular saying in the photography circle.

Raising his eyebrows, Matthew asked, "Why is that?" He had no idea what she was talking about. After all, he knew very little about the photography circle before.

"Do you know how much this camera costs?" Erica pegged the price of the Stone Sea camera to be at least fifty thousand.

Matthew pondered for a while and answered, "Eighty thousand." He had asked one of his men to buy the camera, but he clearly remembered that the price noted on the invoice was eighty thousand.

"That's correct. And the lens? It will obviously be more expensive than the camera, right?"

Matthew nodded. Erica was speaking the truth. The lens cost him one hundred and eighty thousand.

Erica explained, "A professional photographer needs to be equipped with lens that has a permanent F2.8 maximum aperture; lens with a permanent F4 maximum aperture; Canon L lens; Nikon's golden-ringed lens; Sigma 70-200 mm F2.8 HSM lens; Canon EF 70-200 mm F2.8 L USM lens and many other lenses as well as tripods, stands, external flashes and so on. Only then will you find a drastic improvement in your shooting technique. But meanwhile, you will also realize that you want even more sophisticated equipment, such as a screen that gives higher image resolution. Basically, a photographer's demands are endless. One could spend over a million dollars on lenses alone."

The last figure made Matthew laugh. "So, did you mean that one million could make three generations

poor?"

"Exactly! If it weren't for you, I would never be able to afford any of these good lenses. Only you can spend a million on camera equipment without batting an eye. Ergo, it's not so bad being married to you. Even if I spend a few more millions of your money, you will still be rich." As a matter of fact, an ordinary family wouldn't even be able to spend a hundred thousand, let alone a million on camera gear.

Matthew put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her closer. "So, Erica, how do you feel about marrying me?"

Erica was already used to the way Matthew expressed his affection. She rubbed her head on his shoulder and smiled as her eyes narrowed like two crescent moons. "Of course, good. At least, we don't have to experience so many hardships like those poor couples!"

Erica had seen many such couples who lived a hard life because of poverty. In some cases, it would affect their relationship. Erica once thought that if her future husband didn't have a lot of money, she wouldn't mind. But she had to make money; a lot of money.

If neither of them could make money, then she would wait to get married until they were rich enough. In any case, they both couldn't be poor at the same time.

The first sentence of Erica's reply pleased Matthew. He lowered his head and kissed her on the cheek. "Well, put the camera on the tripod. Get ready to take some fabulous photos!" The night sky became more and more beautiful at this moment.

"Okay!" Although the photos she had taken were not bad, they were a little blurry. If she put the camera on the rack, the new photos would not be like that.

After carefully taking tens of photos, Erica decided to take some rest and wait for the sky to change.

Matthew was seated on a stone bench and Erica sat down next to him.

The man suddenly pulled her up and sat her on his lap. He slowly tucked some hair behind her ear and explained casually, "You're still on your period. The stone bench is too cold. It's not good for your health."

Erica's heart felt warm in an instant. No man had ever treated her as well as Matthew did.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her cheek against his. "Matthew, will you bring me to take photos of the aurora? If you think the camera gear is too heavy to bring along, forget about the photos. Let's go and just enjoy the view."

Erica had asked Wesley countless times, but he never granted her wish.

Either he was too busy, or the season was just not suitable.

"Aurora? The aurora borealis or the aurora australis?"

"Either is okay as long as it's the aurora! There's a small village in Mipburg where people can also see the aurora, right? There will be fine." Erica wasn't asking for too much. All she wanted was to take some photos of the aurora.

Matthew wrapped his arms around her waist and asked, "Do you really want to go?"

"Of course!" This had been one of her biggest goals ever since she started studying photography.

"All right!" Matthew would accompany her to the ends of the world.

Erica kissed the man on the cheek and asked, "Will you have time?" After all, he seemed busier than Wesley.

"Yes!" For Erica's sake and happiness, he would make time for her no matter what the cost.

Erica's eyes lit up and she hugged him tightly. "It's a deal. You can't go back on your word now!"

In truth, Erica thought that Matthew would ask her to wait until they had consummated their marriage. Clearly, she didn't expect him to agree so easily.

The man was completely enchanted by the woman. "Okay, it's a deal," he promised.

Erica was astounded at how easy-going he was at that moment. She jested, "Do you want to go to the deserted area in the border area?"

The place she was talking about was not the same one where Lenora was. Erica was talking about a place that had the biggest salt-water lake in Deplua, where the water changed colors with the seasons all year round.

"So, you want to go there?" Matthew asked. 'Isn't she adorable?'

Erica cocked her head cutely and stuck out her tongue. "Will you go with me?"

"Of course, I will," he replied.

"But what about your company?"

After thinking for a while, he suddenly held her in his arms and whispered in her ear, "How about you give me a few sons so I can let them take over the company as soon as possible? After that, I'll accompany you to take photos of the sunrise and sunset; the ends of the earth; the South Pole and the

North Pole; the starry sky and the land..."

Erica blushed. Giving birth to a few sons was one of her jokes and she was surprised that he still remembered it. "How am I going to give you many babies? I don't think I'll survive that many childbirths."

There was an old saying to the effect that if a woman loved a man, she should give him a few daughters, but if she hated him, she would give birth to a few sons for him.

However, Erica did not hate Matthew and therefore, she would give him several daughters! Moreover, it was too expensive to raise a son. An ordinary family had to spend one million to raise a son. Erica estimated raising Matthew's son could cost them tens of millions! In that case, she would become penniless.

There was a snicker in Matthew's eyes. "I have to work hard to make the babies. I'm not afraid of being exhausted to death. What are you worried about?"

Erica replied immediately, "I'm afraid you won't have that much energy."

CHAPTER 1227 MOST IMPORTANT WOMAN IN THE HILTON FAMILY

'Does she think I am that weak?' Matthew mused.

He felt as though it was time to let Erica know his real strength!

A gentle sigh of content escaped Erica's lips as she glanced at the stars in the sky. Tightly enveloped in Matthew's embrace, she felt safe and loved like never before. After a brief moment of silence, she asked, "Matthew, what are your plans for the future?"

"I will work in the company and continue to manage the Hilton Group for another twenty years. During that time, whatever free moment I have will be spent with my family. When those twenty years finish, all of my time will belong to my wife," Matthew replied. In truth, Matthew wouldn't hesitate to spend every moment with his wife because she meant more to him than his work.

A sense of disquietude surged through Matthew when he thought about the life he wanted to build with Erica. He realized that life was too short and there just wasn't enough time!

"You genuinely care about your wife!" Erica chuckled as her cheeks blushed crimson. It felt good to be cherished.

"Well, yes. After all, we will be spending the rest of our lives together," he said. 'You will be the one and only woman I love for the rest of my life.'

The smile on Erica's face widened. "I didn't expect Mr. Matthew to take his wife so seriously. Aren't you afraid that your parents will be jealous?"

Erica's heart soared with the love and devotion Matthew felt for her. What more could a wife ask for?

"Why should they be jealous? Everyone knows that the bond between a man and his wife is greater than any other relationship between two human beings. As long as the two can live as one, life will only know peace and happiness. I hope you realize the importance of our relationship!"

Erica was over the moon and pleasantly surprised to hear Matthew speak this way. Unsure of whether he was teasing her or not, she timidly asked, "So, you're telling me that I am more important to you than your parents?" Was he serious?

"Theoretically, yes." There was still one thing missing in their relationship.

"But, in fact?" She gently nudged Matthew to share his thoughts with her.

"After you and I consummate our marriage, we will become a real couple. Then, you will enjoy a higher status than my parents. So, Mrs. Erica, do you want to be the most powerful woman in the Hilton family?"

"That can wait until your birthday. It's just a few days away. There is no rush." Erica giggled as she replied. Over time, her attraction toward Matthew had intensified, and she struggled to contain her passion. She wished that his birthday would come sooner!

Matthew subtly glanced at Erica. She didn't look or sound anxious, but the anticipation was killing him. How could she be so in control? Either way, he didn't want to pressure her. "What's your plan?"

"Mine?" Erica thought for a while before answering truthfully, "Marrying you was an unexpected development. Before our union, I had planned to be a travel blogger or an international photographer. I wanted to travel the world with my camera. But our marriage changed everything." To be exact, all her plans had been disrupted the moment she brought Ethan home.

"Did you make new plans after we got married?" Matthew asked.

"Not yet. I'm in no rush. As I'm still a student, I want to explore all my options." Erica had several reasons for being candid. It was important for her to be completely honest with Matthew. Equally, she didn't want to have a baby too soon as she hoped that Matthew would let her resume her previous plan.

"You should consider renewing those plans," he told her. As long as she was with him, she loved him, and when he missed her, she made time to be with him, he would not stifle her dreams.

"Really?" Erica's expression reflected the astonishment coursing through her. Matthew had read her mind!

The man lovingly laced his fingers in her long silky hair and nodded. "Yes, I'll take you with me on

business trips from now on."

Mathew had handed over the responsibility of business trips to his special assistants or other senior executives as he wanted to see Erica every day.

"I see..." After a moment's thought, she asked, dissatisfaction in her tone, "Why can't I travel alone?"

"It's too dangerous."

"You're right! Okay then. I'll hold you to that promise the next time you go on a business trip!" Erica chuckled as she teased Matthew. She couldn't wait to see the outside world!

"Okay!" Matthew responded.

Erica freed herself from Matthew's embrace and reached for her phone. After taking a picture of the sky, she posted it to Weibo with the caption, "Life has added cream for me, the little puff."

Matthew didn't catch a glimpse of her full post. When she clicked on send, he saw the word, puff. "Puff?" he wondered.

"Yes, all of a sudden I have a craving for puffs!" She hadn't eaten puffs since she had gotten married and moved to Alorith.

Matthew thought for a while and used the same excuse as the last time when he wanted to make macaroons and chocolate for her. "Gwyn likes eating puffs too..." He was contemplating whether or not to tell her that he could make puffs.

Erica then remembered what Gwyn told her the other day and said, "Gwyn dislikes macaroons. She didn't even know that you could make chocolate. Didn't you know that?"

A trace of embarrassment flashed across Matthew's face, but he soon recovered. "I don't know. Maybe I remember it wrong."

"Oh." Misunderstandings could happen to anyone. So Erica didn't doubt his explanation.

As it got colder on the mountain, Matthew took off his suit jacket and draped it on her shoulders. He was only wearing a shirt.

Erica shook her head when she noticed. "I'm not cold. You wear it." His embrace was warm enough for her.

"Just put it on. I'm feeling a little hot!" To prove that he wasn't lying, Matthew unbuttoned his cufflinks and rolled his sleeves to his forearms.

Erica smiled at his gesture. She knew that he was polite. It was only around ten degrees on the top of the mountain. How could he expect her to believe that he was feeling warm? How could he not feel cold in that thin shirt?

At this thought, she reached out and entwined her fingers in his. Then she pulled him closer and wrapped his arms around her waist from under the suit that he had draped around her shoulders. She snuggled closer to him in his arms and acted like a spoiled child. "I'm a little cold. Hold me tight!"

Matthew couldn't help laughing as a strong sense of happiness coursed through him.

It was already two o'clock in the morning when they returned to the villa.

Erica threw herself on the bed and didn't want to move anymore. But, she remembered that the man who shared the same bed with her was a neat freak. She whined, "Matthew, I'm so tired. I don't want to shower, brush my teeth, wash my face, or wash my feet. Is that okay?"

"It's fine. Sleep tight!"

Pleased, Erica quickly took off her clothes and crawled under the blanket.

'She is indeed still a little girl.' With a smile and a quick shake of his head, Matthew made his way toward the bathroom.

A moment later, he stepped out with a basin of warm water. He placed it by the bed and gently pulled her feet out from under the blanket.

Although asleep, Erica vaguely felt as though her feet were being put in water. Then, big hands gently massaged her feet, just like the last time when Matthew had washed her feet in the bathroom.

She mumbled, "Matthew..."

"Hmm."

It was him. "Didn't you say that I can sleep without washing my feet?" His penchant for cleanliness was a little unusual!

"Go back to sleep. I'll wash them for you."

"Okay." She was so sleepy that she couldn't remember when he finished wiping her feet and putting them back into the bed.

In another villa of the Pearl Villa District.

In the bedroom, Sheffield hugged the woman, who was applying a facial mask. All the tiredness coursing

through him disappeared, and he felt rejuvenated. "Honey, your dear husband is back!"

Evelyn applied the remaining essence of the facial mask on her neck and hands evenly. Then, she turned and patted the man's face with a gentle smile as usual. "Honey, the keyboard is ready. Go ahead!"

The man was confused. "Why am I being punished this time?" 'Did Matthew tell on me again?

He is moving faster than before.'

Sheffield knew that he would have to kneel on the keyboard whenever Evelyn wanted.

"I always support my brother,"

Evelyn answered frankly. The reason was so simple and crude.

Sheffield had snitched on Matthew. What he couldn't understand was why Matthew's wife was so easy-going. She not only didn't ask Matthew to kneel on the keyboard but also went to Sheffield and Evelyn's restaurant for a romantic candlelight dinner.

#### CHAPTER 1228 MATTHEW IS RUTHLESS

Shamelessly, Sheffield pulled Evelyn into his arms. "Honey, I was just kidding with Rika. Neither she nor Matthew was really angry. They had dinner at Evefield Restaurant. They are probably enjoying their romantic night right about now. It's late. Why don't we enjoy our night as well?"

Evelyn shook her head. "Matthew said that if you don't spend the night kneeling on the keyboard, he will tell Dad that you tried to separate Rika from him. He already has the surveillance video of you and Rika chatting in the company. He threatened to send it to Dad if you don't listen to him."

The surveillance video of Hilton Group was of high-definition quality, and unlike ordinary CCTV cameras, the audio was also crystal clear. If this matter reached Carlos, Sheffield wouldn't even be able to deny what had happened.

'Matthew has become more ruthless than his father! I got no luck!' Sheffield thought to himself with a sigh.

Carlos was openly satisfied with his daughter-in-law. If he ever came to know that Sheffield had tried to drive a wedge between Erica and Matthew, Sheffield would surely meet his end.

With another long sigh, Sheffield headed to the keyboard on the balcony and knelt down on it.

Two minutes later, Evelyn came over with a plate of fruits. She put an apple slice into his mouth and said, "I'm free now. Shall we talk for a while?"

Chewing the apple, Sheffield sullenly flipped through his messages on his phone and replied to a



customer's query. "I swear you could never find another CEO who is as miserable and diligent as I am!" he complained. Where would anyone find a CEO of a large company kneeling on a keyboard shamelessly and having to work while being punished by his brother-in-law?

Evelyn sat on a chair next to him and nodded, "Hmm. Mr. Sheffield, why do you always have to provoke Matthew knowing something like this would happen?" This was Matthew's favorite punishment for him. Every time Sheffield pissed him off, Matthew would ask Evelyn to make him kneel on the keyboard.

Evelyn wondered how Sheffield managed to keep his position as the CEO of Theo Group after all that he had done. It seemed that his father didn't mind at all.

The man smiled guiltily at his wife. Although he knew that this was all his fault, he could never admit it in front of her. "It's all because your dear brother can't take a joke," he scoffed.

"Since you know that he can't take a joke, why do you make fun of him? It's still your fault!"

'How is that my fault?' he cried in his head.

Sheffield opened his mouth, and Evelyn fed him a strawberry. After a moment's thought, she took out her phone from the pocket of her pajamas. She secretly recorded a video of Sheffield on the keyboard and sent it to Matthew.

She wrote under the video clip, "He is reflecting on his mistakes."

"Thank you, Evelyn."

"He is quite busy with work, and he is going on a business trip tomorrow afternoon. How about letting him off this time?" Evelyn asked, feeling sorry for her poor husband.

"He is your husband. Do as you wish," Matthew replied.

Evelyn put away her phone and smiled at Sheffield, who was still texting his customer. "Call me darling," she said.

Every time he was finally allowed to get up from the keyboard, Evelyn would say those words. Sheffield's eyes lit up. He immediately stood up from the keyboard and hugged Evelyn. "Darling! You're the best.

I love you so much!"

He carried the woman into their bedroom. Evelyn still had her facial mask on. She patted him on the shoulder and said, "Don't mess around. Go take a shower first!" Her mask needed to be on for another ten minutes.

"Yes, ma'am! Wait till I get back! I will serve you deliciously and make you the happiest woman tonight!"

Evelyn shook her head. 'Oh God! We have been married for so many years. Why is this man still so full of energy?' she thought with a smile.

At that same time, in an unknown hotel

In a room, Julianna looked shockingly at the man with the yellow hair standing in front of her. She asked, "Why are you here?"

She had gone out to the supermarket when she was suddenly brought here. Her face had been covered the entire time. She had no idea that her kidnapper was this man.

He was Julianna's ex-boyfriend, the hooligan who had hit her so hard that she had a miscarriage.

The man casually smiled and said, "To tell you the truth, I don't know either. Someone found me and offered to give me cash if I slept with you. So, here I am! Came all the way from Askor just to find you!"

Julianna's eyes widened. They hadn't seen each other in a long time. He was still that same idling punk, only untidier than ever.

But she was no longer the silly girl she used to be. She didn't want anything to do with him anymore. She could never let him touch her! "Who asked you to do this?" she asked angrily.

"Uh, I heard someone call him Owen. Anyone you know?" he asked with a laugh.

Julianna began to rack her brains, searching for someone whose surname was Owen, but she didn't know anyone by that—

'Owen Williams!' she remembered. He was the one who had brought her and Lenora to the Campbell family residence that day. 'Matthew's assistant!

So, Matthew paid this man to sleep with me to avenge Erica.'

That man really did know how to deal with people without showing any mercy. She hated her ex-boyfriend and Matthew arranged this deal to make him sleep with her!

Julianna had an idea. She calmly offered, "How about this? We pretend that we slept together and tell them that we really did. That way, you can have the money."

The man sneered, "Why would I do that?" He rubbed his dirty hands together and approached her with an obscene smile. "After being with a few other women, I realized that no one could make me happy like you did. Come on, let's have some fun."

He pulled her towards him and quickly stuffed something into her mouth before she could protest. The

substance melted in her mouth in no time. It was tasteless.

She looked at the man hovering over her body in horror and yelled, "What did you give me?"

"Something that will make you very horny. I was going to give it to someone else, but I didn't expect that I would be meeting you. I'll let you have the try first!" He knew that being with Julianna like this was a rare opportunity, which he might never get again. He had spent a lot of money on the pill, but this would be worth it.

Julianna screamed, "Let go of me! Mmmph!" She felt an inexplicable current shuttling back and forth throughout her body.

In a little while, her body became numb, and her cheeks were slightly red. The scream gradually turned into light moans. "You bastard..." There was no threat in her voice; it was nothing but a tender welcome.

The man pushed her onto the bed behind her. He grinned as he climbed on top of his drugged ex-girlfriend.

The second day at Alorith train station

It had been cold in Alorith these past days, and the weather was unusually cloudy.

A black Emperor car slowly came to a halt at the entrance of the station. The young couple in the car did not fit in with the surroundings.

Erica's eyes fell on the square not far away. Camille was in a beige suit. She carefully tucked a loose hair behind Tessie's ear. Tessie was crying; her eyes were swollen.

The two bodyguards beside them kept their eyes on Tessie's every move, as if she were a prisoner.

Erica saw that Tessie had become much thinner in the last few days.

Matthew asked, "Don't you want to say goodbye to her?"

Erica didn't say anything. She watched the two sisters silently.

After a long time, Camille left. Erica opened the car door and got out.

"Tessie!" she called, as the bodyguards were about to lead her into the station to check in.

Tessie turned around and saw the girl walking towards her.

Erica was still the same girl from her memories. She was dressed in an expensive pink long windbreaker, with a white handbag in her hand and a crystal hairpin on her long black hair. She looked like a princess.

Tessie bent down to look at herself. She was wearing worn-out jeans and a coat bought from a shop at half-off. She was so young, and yet, she looked like a ragged middle-aged woman.

#### CHAPTER 1229 BE WARY OF MY SISTERS

Erica and Tessie stood face to face in silence.

In a way their lives were mirrors of each other: one lived in a paradise while the other was in hell.

Tessie finally forced a smile and broke the silence. "Well, Erica, look at the state I'm in. Are you feeling happy now?"

The other woman's smile was entirely real. "Yes, I'm happy now! You've done a lot of harm, and it's finally catching up to you, Tessie. You didn't think things would turn around so quickly, did you?"

In fact, Erica hadn't expected things to be resolved so quickly, either. It had only taken a week to go from her investigation to dealing with Tessie and her companions.

Thanks to the man in the car, her innocence had been proven in short order.

The thought of Matthew, and of the victory he'd won her, widened Erica's smile.

Naturally, Tessie could not fail to notice. "Erica, I really envy you!" she said.

Erica seemed to have everything. She'd been born into a rich family, had parents who loved her very much, and now she was married to Matthew, the most powerful man in Alorith. As her life went on, it would only get easier, and no one dared to offend her.

But as for Tessie?

She smiled bitterly. Life was so unfair to her! She hated everyone in the Campbell family; she hated Tam and his daughter...

But in spite of everything, she felt sorry for Erica and Ethan.

Now she couldn't see Ethan, and Erica had turned against her, leaving her quite alone in this world.

Erica eyed her one-time friend coldly, as though she could read her thoughts. "You've ruined your own future for yourself!" By far, Ethan was the most pitiable one in this whole incident. Tessie was his biological mother, yet since running into Erica again, she hadn't so much as mentioned the baby once, let alone asked to see him.

It was sad to think that Ethan had such a mother.

"Erica, can't you ask Mr. Matthew to let me go?" Tessie asked quietly. "As long as you don't send me to the slum, I'm willing to serve you my whole life. I'll do anything for you."

Erica shook her head. "No, I don't need anything from you. Just behave yourself and live your life there for a while. Maybe one day when Matthew forgets all about you, you will be free."

Tessie suddenly took a step forward and said, "If I tell you a secret, will you ask Mr. Matthew to show me a little mercy?"

"What?" Erica asked warily.

Tessie stared into her old friend's eyes, her manner deadly serious; this warning was the last thing she could do for Erica. "Be wary of my sisters."

With that she went off, leaving Erica confused and deep in thought. 'Her sisters? Does she mean Phoebe and Camille?'

Of course she would be wary of Phoebe. After all, they were rivals in love. But, what about Camille?

Erica racked her mind, trying to figure it out. She remembered that woman in her immaculate, creamy white garb; she'd seemed to be a noble and generous woman, much like her mother, Fanya. Erica had last seen Camille in the Campbell family residence. In fact, that was the only time they had crossed paths. They were barely even acquaintances, and didn't know each other at all.

So why would Tessie warn her to be careful about Camille?

Erica's face was still blank and drawn with worry when she got back in the car. Seeing it at once, Matthew said, "What's wrong? I wanted you to come see her so that you could enjoy the victory."

True enough, Erica wanted to enjoy it as well. But try as she might, it was impossible. After all, Tessie used to be her best friend. Deep down, she couldn't help but feel sad.

She hugged Matthew, seeking a sense of security from him. At length she said, "Matthew, why am I unhappy?"

Carefully, he smoothed her long hair. "Because you are too kind."

She shook her head. "Tessie and I have been friends for a long time, even longer than I knew Rhea. You know, one of the most vivid memories of my life is from my third year of senior high school. It was right after the State Holiday—Tessie was with me. When the festival was over, we didn't go back to the dormitory. Instead we sat by the river and watched the moon in the middle of the night. You know, when they're best friends, kids always make promises at times like that. Ours was that we would treat each other's children as our own. Who knows, we might even become in-laws when our children grow up."

After Tessie gave birth to Ethan, Erica did keep her promise and treat him as her own son. However, she didn't expect her friend to have cheated her.

Erica draped an arm across her eyes to hide the tears she felt coming. "I thought when my hair is grey, I would have my husband, my children and my best friends all with me..."

She had imagined a sweet and happy life in her old age.

Now, though, it seemed that the future that she had imagined would never be; she'd had to end her friendship with Tessie today.

Matthew looked down and kissed the top of her head. "Don't cry. I promise you. I'll ask someone to keep an eye on her there. If she changes for the better, we'll just leave her alone, and then she can go anywhere she wants. Okay?"

Like he said, his wife was too kind for her own good.

"Okay!" Erica sobbed, nodding.

Even if Tessie had cheated her, she couldn't just sit by and watch her suffer too much.

They stayed there for a while, with Matthew comforting his wife, hoping that someday, perhaps, she wouldn't let herself be hurt so easily.

But eventually they had to leave the station. Matthew dropped her off back at the school, then went back to his company.

After settling in his office, he called Paige in. She came in to find him framed before the large window, staring out into the city. With a slightly theatrical air, he turned around and asked her, "What's the significance of the surname Niugulu?"

Paige was speechless for a moment. 'Is Mrs. Erica being naughty again?' she wondered. Last time, Erica had called the CEO "Matthew Xitala." To confirm her guess, Paige asked tentatively, "What is the first name before the surname Niugulu?"

Matthew simply answered, "Erica Niugulu."

Paige held back her laughter. Mrs. Erica was so naughty and cute. "Mr. Matthew, there is a famous female leading character in a historical TV series. The setting is in the imperial palace of the ancient times," she explained. "The heroine used to be a simple and innocent girl. But after experiencing many intrigues in the imperial household, she became a very intelligent and shrewd empress and was granted the Manchurian surname of Niugulu by the emperor. After this series became popular, people on the Internet turned the name Niugulu into a kind of meme. It refers to an innocent and weak girl who

changes in order to become scheming and manipulative against her enemies."

Mrs. Erica was such a weird girl. Paige silently thought that she had to watch more historical dramas after she went back home.

'So that's what Erica Niugulu means?' Matthew mused to himself.

'Erica wants to become a scheming, manipulative woman?' It was one of the most bizarre ideas he'd heard in a while. He really couldn't imagine his wife becoming that.

"I see—thank you, Paige," he said. "Go ahead with your own work."

"Yes, Mr. Matthew." The woman disappeared, leaving Matthew pondering.

"Erica Niugulu..." he said to himself quietly. The more he thought it over, the more he suspected he would have to keep an eye on his wife in the future. She was smarter than she appeared to be, and ran really fast. Where could he find her if she ran away one day?

One afternoon, after class, Erica wanted to go shopping with Hyatt before going back home. But as soon as she arrived at the school gate, she saw Matthew's Emperor car—and that car was hard to ignore.

With a hasty goodbye to Hyatt, she ran up to the car somewhat excitedly. This was very unusual!

She hadn't yet reached the car when Matthew emerged from it and personally opened the back door for her. They both sat in the back seat.

With a sweet smile, Erica looked expectantly at her husband and asked, "Why do you have the time to pick me up today?"

Matthew cleared his throat. "I'm going on a business trip tomorrow. But I'm not busy this evening, so I thought I'd pick you up and go cook us something at home."

Erica clapped her hands—she couldn't help herself. 'Matthew's cooking tonight? That's great!' She cried, "Oh, my! What are you going to make?"

"Well, what would you like to eat?"

"Hmm...anything is okay," Erica said with a shrug. "How about you make something you haven't made before, and we'll see how it is?"

He paused, then nodded, "Okay!"

Back to the villa, Erica watched TV as usual, while Matthew kept busy in the kitchen.

Unable to stay on an empty stomach, Erica was munching an apple. At the sound of the electric stirrer, she twisted around on the sofa to look into the kitchen. "What are you doing?" she called.

"Cream," he answered laconically.

"What? I thought you were making spaghetti," remarked Erica. 'I'm pretty sure you don't put cream in spaghetti,' she added silently.

"Well, don't you like cream puffs?" Matthew asked.

'So he's also making puffs?'

Erica put on her slippers and rushed toward the kitchen, only to be stopped at the threshold by Matthew. "Keep a distance, please!" he urged. "Stay at least three meters from the kitchen!"

"I'm just curious why you'd make cream puffs," said his wife. "Does Gwyn like those?"

CHAPTER 1230 THROW IT AWAY

"Yes, Gwyn likes it a lot," Matthew said simply.

"Oh, I see." Erica nodded without thinking too much.

Matthew, the busy CEO, was such a loving and attentive uncle. He could cook anything his niece liked.

She leaned over the counter opposite him, eating an apple. "Where are you going tomorrow? How long will you be gone?"

"England, for a week."

Her eyes lit up. She wanted to go to England too. "Hey! Didn't you say you were going to take me with you on those business trips? I wanna go!"

"Not this time. I'm on a tight schedule. I'm only in England for half a day, then I'm headed to France and Italy. Maybe next trip I'll have more time, and you can come along." He also wanted her with him, but they'd spend most of their time on the plane. She liked to walk around, take pictures, visit the mom and pop shops, and his schedule wouldn't let her.

Tonight's dinner was pretty simple. 15 minutes of prep, 45 minutes cook time. So, an hour later, two plates of spaghetti, some cream puffs, a colorful fruit platter and a plate of dried fruit were sitting on the table.

Erica picked up a puff and put it in her mouth. Before she could even take a bite, Matthew chided her. "Wash your hands!"



"Well... okay!" She swallowed the part of the puff she was chewing. She savored the taste for a bit before walking off to wash up.

After dinner, Erica decided to relax by watching TV in the living room. She asked Matthew to join her. After a couple shows, the two of them walked into the bedroom.

She took a shower first, and he went to the walk-in closet to change his clothes.

As he unbuttoned his shirt, Matthew looked over at the door to Erica's wardrobe. He saw it was still ajar. He was about to close it for her but something caught his attention. He saw a wine red nightdress hanging in her wardrobe. He walked over and took it out. It was sexy, but he never saw her wear it.

Without a word, he pulled it off the hanger and put the hanger back in the wardrobe. Just as he turned around, something in the corner caught his eye.

It was a rectangular box. He would never have noticed it if he hadn't touched the nightdress next to it.

He grabbed the box and had a closer look.

Half an hour later, Erica came out of the bathroom in patterned pajamas. They had characters from the popular cartoon Boonie Bears plastered all over them.

In the bedroom, Matthew stood beside the bed, hands in the pockets of his pajamas. He stared at the two items on the bed intently.

"Hey, Matthew. What are you looking at?" Curiously, she walked over and saw the wine red nightdress Debbie had bought for her. She felt embarrassed to wear it so she kept it in the closet. She never took it out.

So why was Matthew so interested? 'Wait! What is that thing beside the nightie? It looks familiar...' she thought, confused.

Matthew was wearing his poker face. By now she knew what that meant. He was angry. He picked up the box and asked, "So, is this the reason why you won't make love to me?" It never occurred to him Erica wouldn't sleep with him because of this.

Erica's face turned bright red all of a sudden when she remembered what was in the box. It was the sex toy Debbie bought her the other day! She lunged for the box, trying to wrest it from his hands. "No! It's not..." She was so flustered she could barely speak.

Matthew wouldn't give it to her. He raised it in the air and stared at the agitated girl, still expressionless. "Why are you so upset?" he asked.

How could she not be, now that Matthew found the box? "Look, get your mind out of the gutter. Mom

bought it for me. She and Dad went abroad, saw it in a shop window and dropped money on it. I wanted to throw it away..."

"Then you found a use for it, right? Is that why you didn't throw it out?"

'What the hell?' She had never used it; she didn't even know how to use it! "I-I... I forgot it in the closet. Please! Give it to me! I'll throw it away, okay?" 'Oh my God! How embarrassing!' She really wanted to cry. How could she forget to put it in the garbage?

Instead of giving it to her, Matthew opened the box and took a look at the oval-shaped thing inside. "We could use this tonight. What do you say?"

Erica was about to cry. "No, Matthew. I really didn't buy it. I didn't use it either." 'Boo...hoo...Mom, you've really screwed things up.'

Matthew calmly closed the box lid. "Oh, I thought you couldn't wait any longer. It seems I misunderstood you."

"Yes, you big oaf. Why would you think I want something like that?" If it weren't for Debbie, she wouldn't even own one. She'd have no idea where to get it, even. 'Boo...hoo...'

"But..." He paused, smiling evilly. "I think it's better to keep it. It might be useful..." And it might. A bit of spice for their sex life. Matthew was getting more ideas, even though they hadn't actually slept together yet.

"Quit playing around, Matthew. Give it here. I'll throw it away! Give it to me!" Erica jumped up and down in front of him for a long time, but couldn't reach the box held high in the man's hand. She was anxious, angry and shy.

But Matthew didn't give it to her. He took the box and walked out of the bedroom. He was going to make sure she didn't throw it away. He felt the safe might be a better place for it.

Erica grabbed his sleeve and begged pitifully, "Matthew, let's talk about this. Don't do that!"

"Honey, we're already talking. If I didn't want to talk to you, we'd be in bed now." When he saw the sex toy, Matthew really wanted to rush into the bathroom and make love to her, but he managed to hold his desires in check.

"Then give it to me. Please?" she begged.

"No way!"

At the door of the study, for the first time, he stopped the girl from going in and then locked the door from inside.

No matter how hard Erica knocked on the door, he didn't open it until he successfully locked the box inside the safe.

When he came out again, Erica looked at his empty hands and felt like crying.

She was in a bad mood that night and she made sure Matthew wouldn't be able to sleep well either.

The two of them lay side by side in bed. Erica didn't let him turn off the lights. She stared at the ceiling and stewed.

Matthew had to take out a blindfold and put it on to screen out the light.

Erica sat up and yanked it off him. He shot her a look that said "What the hell?" She answered him in a justified tone, "I don't feel safe when you sleep with the blindfold on!"

"Why don't you feel safe?"

"Because if you put on the blindfold, you can't see me. I feel safer if you can watch me sleep!"

"What... What are you talking about?" 'What is that strange logic?' He was confused.

'Forget it. He had a hard and exhausting day.' Erica's heart softened and she turned off the lights.

In the darkness, she lay beside the man, widened her eyes and asked, "Matthew, say I'm the red rose and your goddess is the pure white rose. Now that we're married, do you like the red rose or the white rose more?"

Matthew thought for a while and said, "Every girl has different charms and different sides. They can be the pure white rose and the sexy red rose at the same time. Only a man who knows how to love can make the woman he loves more and more beautiful. That's the thing—I don't love you for who you could become, I love you for who you are."

Not everyone could see the true beauty of a woman. The man who loved her would see her as the most beautiful creature. The woman who loved someone would show off her most attractive charms to them, like a peacock.

Erica sighed in her mind that Matthew knew who he was and how to control his emotions. He knew how to avoid her question. But she wasn't going to give up. "So do you like the red rose or the white rose?"

A caring look flashed in his eyes. "I like both."

"What? Can't you just decide on one?"

Matthew just smiled and didn't explain. She would understand sooner or later.

Erica sighed, "Know how to figure out whether a man is horny or not?"

"No. Tell me."

"Put your finger under his nose. If he's still breathing, then he's horny!" This was true. As long as a man lived, he would be thinking about sex. Matthew was no exception.

Matthew was confounded. Did she really see him like that?