

TMBA 1281

CHAPTER 1281 DIDN'T CARE ABOUT CHANTEL

"Okay. Take care, and don't tire yourself." The doctor spoke with Chantel at length about all the things that she needed to pay attention to, and she listened attentively and tried to remember them all.

He had even suggested that she be put on record in their hospital so that prenatal checkups would be convenient for her. However, she was nervous, and so, she refused.

After leaving the hospital, Chantel wrapped her scarf tightly around her neck and took out her phone to message Erica. "Rika, the doctor said I'm five weeks pregnant."

Chantel nervously checked her phone several times, but she received no reply from Erica. She guessed that she hadn't seen the message. So, she placed her phone back into her pocket and took a bus to school.

As soon as she found a seat on the bus and sat down, her cell phone rang. She took it out and glanced at the caller ID. She was so scared that she almost dropped the phone.

It was Gifford!

Wide-eyed Chantel glanced around as though expecting him to be nearby. When she didn't see him, she closed her eyes, breathed a sigh of relief, and answered the call. "Hello, Gifford. What's up?"

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Um...I'm at school." Since she ought to be at school at this hour, that was the first answer that slipped out of Chantel's mouth.

"Why didn't I find you?"

"What? Where are you?" 'Crap! Did he come to school to look for me? But why?' she wondered.

Gifford leaned against the car as he answered, "I just stepped out of the school building. Now I'm at the school gate. I've searched everywhere for you. You aren't at school. So tell me, where are you?"

Guilt surged through Chantel as she tried to think of an excuse. Finally, with a tremor in her voice, she answered, "Well, I came out to buy something. Now, I'm on the bus back to school. Gifford, do you have something urgent to say?"

Her voice was trembling, and she was stuttering. He knew that she was lying, but he didn't know what she was hiding from him. He didn't even question her. Flatly, he replied, "Mom asked me to bring you some food."

He hadn't wanted to come, but Blair had scolded him. She had even gone so far as to imply that he didn't care about Chantel. Finally, he had given up arguing and made the trip to her school.

"Well, can't you leave it at the guard room? It may take me more than ten minutes to return to school." Since he was always very busy, she was sure that he didn't have time to wait for her. This way, she could avoid seeing him altogether.

"I see." Gifford abruptly ended the call.

There was a traffic jam on the route the bus took. Half an hour later, she arrived at the bus stop near the school. Erica had replied to her while she was on the bus. After stepping off the bus, Chantel texted back. "I don't think you need to tell Matthew. I'll tell Uncle Wesley and Aunt Blair when I can't hide it from them."

Erica had wanted her to tell Wesley and Blair, but Chantel was not mentally ready yet. She wanted to wait for a while before sharing the news.

She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she didn't notice that a car had parked in front of her. She pocketed her phone and continued to walk with her head down.

"Is there money on the ground?"

Chantel's head snapped up when she heard the familiar voice. Wasn't the man standing next to the military green car Gifford? 'Didn't I ask him to leave the food and go? Why didn't he listen?

What if he sees the test result? Oh, wait! I dumped it in the trash can as soon as I walked out of the hospital. Thank God!' The anxiety coursing through Chantel settled when she remembered what she had done with the test report. She tried to smile as she greeted him respectfully. "Hi, Gifford."

Gifford leaned against the car and crossed his arms. "Why are you so late?"

"Well, the bus took longer than expected as there was a traffic jam."

Chantel's gaze shifted from Gifford as she spoke. She was fidgety and appeared anxious. It was evident that she was hiding something. Gifford warned her, "Don't learn from Erica. She's a bad example."

"No! Rika is a good girl. She is not as bad as you think."

'Humph! How could I not know my sister?

Isn't it bad that she used an aphrodisiac to trick me into sleeping with Chantel?'

Gifford shook his head and ignored Chantel's objections. He pushed himself off the car, opened the trunk, took out the food prepared by Blair, and some snacks he had bought at the supermarket. As he

handed everything to her, he said, "If you don't have anything else to say, just go to class."

Chantel believed that Blair had prepared everything. So, she didn't ask any questions. She took the bags from Gifford and thanked him before turning toward the school.

Gifford sat in the car and watched as she made her way through the gate, past the lawn, and into the school building. It was only after her figure disappeared that he started the car and left.

When Erica heard the news about Chantel's pregnancy, she was both happy and wistful.

She was thrilled because she was going to have a niece or nephew. However, she was sorrowful as she wasn't pregnant yet.

Every morning, as soon as she woke, Erica would touch her belly first and then look down. How she wished her belly would swell!

One day, she even went to a pharmacy and bought a few pregnancy test sticks and took them back to the villa. The next morning, she went to the bathroom with a stick and followed the instructions. However, she was disappointed and walked out with a sullen expression.

She had looked like that for several days.

On New Year's Eve, Matthew and Erica had to attend a family reunion dinner at the Hilton family's manor. But this time, only Carlos, Debbie, Matthew, and Erica were there. Sheffield had taken his wife and kids to the Thompson family. And Joshua accompanied his wife and son to the Martin family.

On the first day of the New Year, Erica spent the day chatting with Carlos and Debbie in the living room on the manor's first floor, while Matthew worked on the second floor. In the evening, the young couple returned to their villa and prepared for the second day that they would spend at her parents' house.

Matthew and Erica flew to Askor on the second day of the New Year, as planned.

At the Leonard family's house in Askor

Wesley had just returned from the airport with the young couple. The moment Erica saw Chantel, she took her upstairs.

Wesley, Blair, Matthew, and Gifford were stumped by this sudden disappearance of the two women. They glanced at each other in confusion.

Yvette had chosen to celebrate the New Year with her fiancé's family.

Matthew's and Gifford's astonishment settled a few short moments after Erica and Chantel left. They didn't find it strange that the girls got along so well.

But Blair was curious, and asked, "Since when did Rika and Chantel become such good friends?" As far as she knew, they had only met once.

Gifford glanced at Matthew and said, "Birds of a feather flock together." His message was clear to Matthew.

But Blair, who didn't know what Gifford was hinting, was rendered speechless. She believed that Chantel was more obedient than Erica.

However, a smile tugged at the corners of Matthew's mouth as he turned to Gifford and said, "You're going to join them soon." After all, he had to be responsible for Chantel sooner or later.

Blair was even more confused now. Wesley, who stood beside them, fixed his pensive gaze on the two men. Even though they were speaking vaguely, he had a feeling something big was going to happen.

As soon as the door to Chantel's room closed, Erica grabbed the hem of Chantel's shirt. "Hurry up. Let me see my nephew."

Chantel blushed and shyly pressed down on her shirt. "You can't see it now..."

'Yeah. The baby is like bean-size...'

Erica gingerly placed her palm on Chantel's belly. Her voice was full of awe as she said, "Wow. To think that my nephew is inside. Aren't we awesome?" She and Chantel had made this pregnancy happen many years before it would have.

Erica felt proud, as though she and Chantel had made this child.

Chantel smiled. She whispered as she asked, "Erica, do you think I should tell your parents?"

She had struggled with this question for as long as she had known about her pregnancy.

She was sure, however, that she would not tell Gifford as she feared that he would ask her to abort the baby.

Erica held her hand and sat on the edge of the bed. After some contemplation, she said, "I believe you can tell my parents as I know how happy the news will make them. No matter what my brother wants to do with the baby, he wouldn't dare to go against my parents."

She was confident of the advice she was giving Chantel, as when in Alorith, it was only because of Carlos' and Debbie's support that she could challenge Matthew! So she knew how submissive men could be in front of their parents.

CHAPTER 1282 THE REAL MASTERMIND

Chantel knew that Erica was being completely reasonable, but she was still worried. "Do you think that your parents will hate me when they find out that I'm carrying Gifford's child?" she asked.

This was not the first time she had thought about this. If Wesley and Blair thought that she was a gold digger who was using Gifford's child to marry into the Leonard family, she would be heartbroken and embarrassed to face them again.

"Of course not!" Erica exclaimed incredulously. "You know how much my parents still love and care for Ethan, even though he is not my child. How could they hate the woman who is carrying their grandchild? And you know about my mother. Gifford is almost thirty-three. Right now, she would accept anyone as his wife, as long as it's a woman!"

Blair was very worried about Gifford's marriage. If Chantel told her that she was carrying his child, Blair would be thrilled to death.

That was how much she wanted to be a grandmother.

Every time she called Gifford, she would add, "If you are planning to come back alone next time, don't even bother coming. I won't let you into the house! Just find a woman, will you? I don't care if she's old or young, or if she's from a poor family. And it would be wonderful if you got her pregnant too! I just don't care as long as you bring someone!"

Chuckling at the thought, Chantel finally made a decision. "Okay, I'll tell them once I'm unable to hide the baby bump!"

"Did Gifford say anything after you both had sex?" Erica asked her again.

"What do you mean?"

"Did he say that he would marry you or something like that?" After all, they had sex. Gifford wasn't the type of person who would take it lightly.

Chantel shook her head in disappointment, but then comforted Erica, "It doesn't matter. My goal was to get pregnant with his child, and I've achieved it. If he doesn't want to marry me, I won't force him."

She didn't want Gifford to hate her.

At that moment, there was a sharp knock on the door to Chantel's room. The two girls looked at each other vigilantly. Finally, Erica asked, "Who is it?"

"It's me. I'm coming in." It was Gifford. As soon as he finished speaking, the door opened.

He saw the girls sitting on the edge of the bed, hand in hand. The moment they looked at him, the two

of them were struck by a guilty conscience. "What are you doing?" he asked, frowning.

Something was off about them. He couldn't help but wonder if they were planning to set him up again.

They stood up from the bed at the same time and replied in unison, "Nothing!"

Gifford was even more convinced now. 'These two are up to no good again!'

With his hands behind his back, he walked towards them and stood in front of the two girls. He suddenly yelled, "Erica!"

"Yes, sir!" she answered quickly, without thinking.

"What were you doing with Chantel?" he demanded, quickly and loudly.

Erica answered reflexively, "We were talking about the—" "Rika."

Matthew's voice came from outside the room, interrupting her, before she could utter the word "baby."

Erica came back to her senses in an instant. She loosened her grip on Chantel's hand and punched Gifford on the shoulder. "Gifford, you did it again! You are such a jerk!" Erica was sometimes slow to react and Gifford always used this trick to deal with her.

Lucky for her, Matthew appeared right on time. Otherwise, Gifford would have found out about the baby.

Gifford didn't even flinch as Erica punched him twice. He turned around and glared at the man at the door. There was no doubt in his mind that Matthew was part of this whole plot, whatever it was, and this man was the real mastermind.

Without his assistance, there was no way that Erica and Chantel could deceive him, let alone make him sleep with Chantel!

He decided to use the same trick on Chantel. "Chantel!" he shouted.

Chantel wasn't buying it. She looked at him in a daze and asked, "Gifford, why are you being so loud?"

He gawked at her.

Erica held Matthew's arm and snickered. "Did you really think that you could intimidate everyone with that cheap trick?"

"Hey! You know what? Chantel is actually more obedient than you!" Gifford provoked her on purpose.

Erica nodded and said with a smile, "I think so too. You like obedient girls, don't you? Why don't you marry her?"

Gifford was dumbstruck. 'Why did she have to say that now?' he cursed inwardly, wanting to beat his sister to death!

Afraid that he might say something hurtful, Chantel quickly waved her hand and said, "Rika, it doesn't matter. I'm still a student, and I should focus on studying now." An awkward smile appeared on her face.

Erica felt bad for her, seeing the bitter smile on the girl's face. 'No way in hell! He slept with her. How could he not take responsibility for it? I must talk some sense into him!' she thought to herself.

"Let's go downstairs! Otherwise, Dad and Mom will come up here," Gifford said and started to walk towards the stairs.

Erica let go of Matthew's arm and walked with Chantel instead. She comforted her in a low voice, "Don't worry, Chantel. He is not an irresponsible man. Give him some time to think about it."

"Hmm, I know." Everyone in the Leonard family was kind to her.

"Erica! What are you still talking about?" Gifford demanded, looking at the pair. If it hadn't been for Matthew, he would've gotten the truth out of Erica!

Since Erica was being yelled at by Gifford again, Matthew eagerly jumped in to protect his wife. "Stop being so curious about girls' secrets."

"Yes, Matthew's right. Gifford, why don't you admit that you are a sissy? You even want to know our girls' secrets," Erica said with a smug smile. With Matthew backing her up, she had nothing to be afraid of.

When Gifford raised his hand to slap her, Erica rushed to Matthew's side. "Honey, help! This man is bullying me again!"

Matthew stood in front of her. His eyes were stern and he said to Gifford in a low voice, "Your father is here."

"Gifford, what are you doing?" Wesley asked, furrowing his brows.

Gifford put down his hand and glared at the complacent girl. "Nothing, Dad. My hand was just a little itchy."

'Rika has become more arrogant than before since she was married. Matthew is obviously spoiling her so much!' he thought.

Wesley was no fool. He knew that Gifford was going to slap Erica. He said coldly, "How about five hundred push-ups? That should get rid of your itch."

Gifford rolled his eyes. 'This man is so cruel to me. I'm the victim here.'

But he chose to keep his mouth shut.

When they went downstairs, Yvette walked in. Erica beamed and rushed towards her sister for a hug. They hadn't seen each other in a long time. "Yvette, I've missed you so much!" Erica said.

Stroking her head, Yvette said in a gentle voice, "Why didn't you come back to see me if you missed me so much? When you came back last time, you ran away from home! You're still naughty, Rika."

Knowing that she was referring to when it was Matthew's birthday, Erica giggled and held her arm tightly. "I'm back now, aren't I?"

"All right, all right. I really can't be mad at you!" In Yvette's eyes, Erica was the cutest little girl in the world.

The Leonard family was very lively that day. Before dinner, Yvette even called her fiance, Remus, over. The women sat and chatted, and the men drank together. It was a fun night, and the atmosphere was filled with happiness and warmth.

CHAPTER 1283 THE BEST HUSBAND IN THE WORLD

Since everyone was on leave for the New Year, Matthew and Erica decided to stay at the Leonard family residence for a few more days. Over the next few days, the Leonard residence was filled with laughter.

One day, Erica seized an opportunity and snuck into her brother's room.

Gifford was working out with two dumbbells. When he saw her enter, he resisted the urge to kick her out. "Oh, it's you, Miss Troublemaker. What do you want from me?" he asked. His instincts led him to believe that she must be plotting something against him. However, fearful of how Wesley would react should he misbehave, Gifford curbed the urge to throw her out.

Erica ignored his sarcasm, closed the door, and jumped onto his bed. Oblivious to his growing annoyance, she lay down and crossed her legs. "Gifford, can we talk?"

He cast a sidelong glance at his sister, who seemed to behave as though this was her room. The more comfortable and carefree she appeared, the angrier he became. He firmly refused, "No!"

Only Erica dared to be so presumptuous in his room. Perhaps her confidence came from her knowing that he would not beat her.

"Don't be so heartless, Gifford. I did what's best for you. Think about it. You can't possibly continue to be

a jerk now, can you?" Erica shifted her body, placed one arm under her head, and looked sideways at the man who was still immersed in his exercise.

Gifford stiffened when he realized what she was going to say. He put down the dumbbells and sneered, "If you hadn't tricked me, I wouldn't need to be a jerk. Since you dared to scheme against me, I will behave however I please!"

What gnawed at him was that he had returned three days ago, but he still hadn't decided how he would deal with the matter between him and Chantel.

He knew that there were only two options. The first was to be cruel and send her away as if nothing had happened between them.

The other was to marry her and take responsibility.

However, there was a considerable age gap between them. He was twelve years older than Chantel! The age difference, among other things, led him to believe they were unsuitable for each other.

"Well, does it matter that we tricked you? Think about it. I'm your sister. I always have your best interest in mind. What we did isn't as awful as you believe. And Chantel is so young. How could she scheme against you? Wouldn't you agree?"

Gifford mulled over Erica's argument for a while. But all he could focus on was Chantel's age. "She is so young," he whispered. Finally, he glared at his sister and reproached, "How dare you do something so stupid? What if I decide not to marry her? Did you consider that possibility? How could you take such a risk knowing that her life might be destroyed?"

Erica sat up on the bed and said, "Exactly! Now, you have no choice but to do the right thing. You don't have a girlfriend, do you? Why are you hesitating? Let me tell you; age is not a factor in love. I know a couple. The woman is thirty years older than her husband. Despite that, they are happy together. What's more, you are only twelve years older than Chantel. It's not such a big deal. Besides, you don't look thirty-two years old. At first glance, you could pass for a twenty-two-year-old! You can think that you are twenty-two years old. That would make you only two years older than Chantel. Doesn't that make it easier to accept?"

Gifford knew that Erica had always been a glib talker. After she married Matthew, she must have bickered with him a lot, which was why she was more eloquent now.

He walked over, grabbed Erica's wrist, and pulled her off his bed. "Go back to your husband. A kid must not interfere in adults' business!"

He was grateful that she and Matthew had a peaceful life, which meant he had nothing to worry about. But he couldn't stand the fact that she had dared to meddle in his affairs. How could she be so presumptuous?

"A kid? Gifford, don't forget that I am married. I'm not a child anymore. What I said makes sense. You must listen to me! Hey, stop dragging me and talk to me! Hey, hey, don't drag me by the collar. I'm suffocating!" But Gifford didn't listen to his sister's pleas. He'd had enough. He dragged her by her collar to the door, flung it open, and threw her out of his room. Then, he slammed the door shut.

Relief coursed through Erica when Gifford released her collar. It didn't matter that she had been so rudely handled.

After she caught her breath, she made a face at the door.

'You are such a jerk, Gifford. Well, my husband is a better man than you. When I told him that I was afraid of having sex, he was sensitive enough to put my needs before his. And you can't even think beyond yourself!

Well, I'd better return and find Matthew.'

Erica opened the door to her bedroom and found that Matthew was inside, working on his computer. She closed the door, and like a dainty butterfly, rushed to him and wrapped her arms around his neck. She cooed, "Honey, you are the best husband in the world!"

"Ahem!" Suddenly, she heard someone coughing, and it wasn't her husband!

Erica raised her head and glanced at the screen. Matthew had been video-chatting with his father. What a surprise!

Her cheeks flushed crimson. She released Matthew and explained to Carlos, "Dad, you misheard me. I didn't say anything. Please go ahead with your work."

Carlos chuckled. "It's getting late. You two should go to bed early. Matthew and I will finish our talk tomorrow."

Matthew remained calm as he ended the video call.

When Erica was sure that the call had ended, she hugged Matthew again. "Hey, why didn't you tell me that you were going to video-chat with Dad? That was so embarrassing!"

Matthew didn't think it was a big deal. He turned off the computer and pulled her on to his lap. "Why would you feel embarrassed? At least this way, he knows that our relationship is a happy one. Now, he won't do anything against me because of you!"

It would infuriate Carlos if he learned that his son had mistreated Erica.

Erica placed her head on his shoulder and reassured him, "You are his son. He just said that he disliked

you. But in fact, he loves you very much. You should know this!"

Matthew sneered, "If that's what you believe, then you don't know him." Ever since he was a child, he felt as though his father only cared about the women in their family. If Debbie hadn't treated him well, he would have thought that he was not Carlos' biological son.

Erica wrapped her dainty arms around his head and patted him as if she were comforting a child. "Honey, don't cry. I'll be good to you in the future. As long as you are obedient, I'll buy you whatever you want."

Matthew, who buried his face in her arms, was rendered speechless. "What? Does she think I'm a three-year-old child? It doesn't matter. Her affection is a welcome change!"

On the afternoon of the second day, Matthew was engaged in his work in the study. As Gifford was not at home, Yvette took the opportunity to accompany Erica and Chantel on their shopping trip.

Before they returned home, the three headed to the supermarket.

In the supermarket

The three women separated to buy what they wanted. While Chantel and Yvette went to pick up drinks, Erica made her way toward the snack aisle.

As she pushed the shopping cart around a corner, Erica's curiosity was piqued by a man and a woman who stood before a shelf, whispering about something.

"Honey, we don't need them, okay?" the man said.

"We must use them. I'll get pregnant without them," the woman protested anxiously.

"No, you won't. I won't ejaculate inside you. Besides, it doesn't feel good to use them," the man rationalized.

"Then, we'll buy thin ones."

The man sighed helplessly. "Okay."

After grabbing a box of condoms from the shelf, the man began walking toward the payment counter. He turned and saw a girl standing in front of the aisle. She seemed to be lost in her thoughts.

The couple didn't dwell on what the girl was doing. They shot her a curious look and left.

Erica studied the condoms in front of her. They were full of different scents and sizes.

CHAPTER 1284 MATTHEW BULLIED ME

"I'll get pregnant without them!" What the woman said echoed in Erica's mind.

She'd never given condoms a second thought. But this woman's words shocked her into reality. She stood there, thinking of all the times she and Matthew were intimate together.

He would drive her wild with his flirting, and then wait a few seconds before actually entering her.

Even if they started on the balcony or in the living room, they would end up in the bedroom eventually.

And all this made her think about things differently. Then, suddenly, she had an idea. She quickly found Yvette and Chantel, who were going through their shopping list. "Hey, are you done? Let's head back home."

"We just got here. What's the rush?" Yvette asked. She noticed something seemed to be bugging her sister.

"Well, I remembered something I need to do. I have to get home now. Why don't you finish shopping and I'll grab a cab?" She was going to have an answer to the question that burned in her mind.

"Nah, we're good. I have everything on my list. How about you, Chantel?" Yvette asked.

Chantel shook her head. "I think I'm done."

"Then let's pay for our stuff and get out of here." Yvette pushed the shopping cart up to the counter to pay the bill.

At the Leonard family house

When the three girls got home, the sun was lower in the sky and the streetlights were on. Blair was in the kitchen preparing dinner. A maid was in there helping her. Neither Wesley nor Gifford were there. Matthew was hard at work in the study.

As soon as Erica got home, she immediately rushed upstairs. She had to check something out. If she remembered correctly, Matthew had opened the drawer in the nightstand last night.

Confused, Blair went to the stairs and looked up, as if she'd get the answer to her question that way. "What's going on?" Blair asked Yvette and Chantel, who just entered the house. "Why did Rika run upstairs like that?"

Yvette spread out her hands and said, "Beats me. She was acting strange at the supermarket too. It's okay. I'll ask her later. I've got groceries to put away!"

"Okay!" Blair didn't devote too much attention to it, and went back to finishing up the meal.

Chantel went to the bathroom to wash her hands and walked back into the kitchen. "Hey, let me help with that."

Blair pushed her out of the kitchen. "No way. Three's a crowd. We're doing fine in here. Why don't you and Yvette run off and find something else to do?" Cooking was her only hobby, and she wouldn't do anything else.

She wouldn't even let the maid help her if it weren't for the fact that it would take forever for her to prep and cook. So she accepted that she needed someone else.

"It's okay. I'm not busy now." Since Chantel was pregnant, she didn't want to do anything too strenuous. Like practicing dance, for example. She was afraid it would hurt the baby.

When Chantel was about to cut the vegetables, Blair grabbed her hand and said, "I mean it. Out! Out!"

Finally, Blair drove her out of the kitchen. Having been shoed out, Yvette was sorting the things they bought at the supermarket. Seeing Chantel, she smiled and said, "You should know the drill by now. Mom doesn't want help in the kitchen."

Chantel nodded helplessly and had to help Yvette with groceries.

The first thing Erica did after reaching her room was to tear open the drawer in the nightstand.

She took a look inside and her suspicions were immediately confirmed.

There was a box of condoms laying quietly in the corner of the drawer.

How did that get there? It must be Matthew's doing, but when? She didn't know.

She never used them before she got married. She knew nothing about them. Her friends around her were the same as her, knowing little about sex and unwilling to discuss what they did know. No one described how a girl might feel when her partner used a condom.

So if Matthew used them secretly, she'd probably never know.

Erica wanted to cry. Resisting the urge to go straight to Matthew and confront him, she closed the drawer.

Matthew was nobody's fool. He knew something was bugging his wife, but he couldn't say precisely what. They were at dinner when he asked her, but she just said she was fine.

Matthew asked her a few more times, but all that did was annoy her. So he had to give up. He decided to leave it alone till everyone had retired for the night.

It was already eleven o'clock by the time Matthew strolled in to their bedroom.

Erica was playing with her phone on the bed. She'd turned up the thermostat, and only wore a black slip. It showed off her arms, legs, and curves quite nicely.

Seeing Matthew come in, she put down her phone and stretched out her arms to him. "Hi honey, give me a hug."

She was pretty sure she knew, but she had to be sure. She had to seduce Matthew, and then she'd have her answer as to whether he used condoms with her.

Matthew, confident, horny, and none-the-wiser, rose to the bait. He took her in his arms, and kissed her red lips.

That was exactly what Erica wanted. He was playing right into her hands. She kissed him back passionately.

He had planned on showering first but she seemed hot to trot. With it being offered to him, of course he took advantage of it. He folded his fingers in hers as he lay on top, pressing her into the bed.

Scarcely ten minutes passed. Erica suddenly held Matthew's hand, quickly turned over and turned on the bedside lamp.

It was too late for Matthew to stop her. He held something in his hand, the wrapper half-open.

Heedless of how she was completely naked, Erica carefully looked at the thing in the man's hand. It was a condom!

So Matthew had been using condoms every time they had sex!

Therefore, even if she gave it everything she had, she would never get pregnant.

A trace of embarrassment flashed across Matthew's face, which was pretty rare as he was usually calm and collected. He held the now-opened condom wrapper in his hand and hugged his wife, pulling her closer.

Tears welled in Erica's troubled eyes. Her words were choked by grief. "You...you...bastard!" How could he lie to her?

"Honey, don't cry!" Matthew kept kissing her forehead, trying to soothe her.

With glistening eyes, Erica pushed him away, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Matthew, how could you use condoms behind my back? You're a liar!"

"Rika, I can explain—"

"No! What is there to explain? My baby...and my twelve billion dollars..." Everything had been in vain.

Matthew didn't know whether to laugh or cry when he heard what she said. He pushed his lust down inside him and buried it. After he'd regained a modicum of control, he put the quilt over her and said, "Don't get cold."

However, Erica whipped the quilt away, put on her pajamas and sat on the edge of the bed, crying sadly. Despair writhed inside of her.

She was sad as her twelve billion and five sons were saying bye-bye to her.

Soon, the other members of the Leonard family had heard her sobs. Wesley knocked at the door first. "Matthew? Rika? You in there?"

Erica immediately ran to open the door in bare feet this time.

Wesley and Blair stood in the hallway outside the door. Erica hugged her father and complained, "Dad, this is hopeless. Why can't I just die now?"

"Why are you crying?" Confused, Wesley held his daughter in his arms and patted her back to comfort her.

After tidying his pajamas, Matthew followed her outside and stopped beside her.

Sobbing, Erica answered, "Dad, Matthew bullied me. It's true." She was afraid that Wesley wouldn't believe her, so she emphasized that Matthew really did it this time.

"What did he do?" At this moment, the Leonard family members left their bedrooms and surrounded the young couple. They looked at Erica with concern.

It was not until now that Erica realized that she couldn't tell them what was really going on, because then she'd have to reveal that Matthew used condoms when they had sex. This was too embarrassing! So she decided to beat around the bush. She could only say, "I've lost twelve billion! And it's all because of Matthew!"

The different members of the Leonard family were all dumbfounded.

CHAPTER 1285 LIKE A SPOILED BRA

Once he figured out Erica was crying over twelve billion dollars, Wesley thought that she was just making trouble out of nothing. Where would a girl like Erica get twelve billion?

Wesley opened his mouth to sort her out, but Matthew hurried to interrupt him. "Dad, Mom, it's really

my fault this time."

Blair felt sorry for Erica. After all, the girl was beside herself with grief, but she also felt sorry for Matthew. The man was always taking the blame for things. "Don't blame yourself, Matthew. I think she's blowing things out of proportion."

Matthew nodded but proceeded to apologize gracefully and sincerely. "Rika, I'm sorry. It's all my fault," he said.

Wesley patted Erica's back and tried to calm her down. "There, there. Matthew's apologized to you. You don't need to cry anymore! If you keep crying, that's on you!"

Erica anxiously explained, "Dad, no. It's really on him..."

"Yeah, Rika's right. It's all my bad." Matthew came over and pulled her into his arms. He apologized again, "I'm sorry. Please don't cry."

Yvette already had a hunch something was wrong. Erica was acting weird in the supermarket earlier, and it got worse when they came back home. She asked in confusion, "What happened? You've been all weirded out since we got back from the supermarket. So, Rika—what's going on?"

Matthew answered for her, "Don't blame Rika, Yvette. And it's kind of awkward. Just know that I'm the one to pin it on."

Seeing him defending his wife all this time, Yvette nodded and just decided to drop it.

Gifford picked his ear casually and told Erica, "Look at Matthew. He's completely cool with this. Stop crying. It's the middle of the night, for Chrissake? You're crying like a pig in the slaughterhouse! I'm pretty sure our neighbors know by now."

When she heard this, Erica glared at her brother, eyes red from crying. She wanted to skin him alive. "Who are you calling a pig? Dad, look, even my brother is mean to me." And the waterworks started once more.

They had almost snapped her out of it. Now, thanks to Gifford, Erica was crying all over again. Wesley was so angry he kicked his son's leg and asked sternly, "A pig? Seriously? She's your sister!"

Gifford wanted to avoid the kick, but he knew that would just cause more trouble. He stood there and took it like a man.

He felt so frustrated. He was a colonel, and a 33-year-old man. Yet, somehow, he was still like a little kid being disciplined by his father. "I was comparing shit. I wasn't calling her a pig!" He just felt that Erica's crying fit was just her being a drama queen.

However, he didn't know that he'd pissed anyone off. But it was more than that, he angered everyone. Even Matthew cast a cold glance at Gifford and said, "Rika has good reason to cry. Let her." 'Comparing my wife to a pig! What in the world were you thinking? If anyone needs a lesson, it's you, ' Matthew thought.

The young colonel was speechless. 'Well, forget it.'

Fighting the urge to slap Erica to end her hysteria, Blair tried persuading again, "Alright, simmer down! How old are you? You're still acting like a child. Work it out with Matthew. He's been apologizing to you." The aging mother felt Erica was becoming more and more childish, acting like a spoiled brat.

"Mom, you don't know what you're talking about! I can't forgive him." Erica stopped crying and answered decisively, her eyes as red as a rabbit's.

'Can't forgive Matthew? So she's going to keep causing problems?' Wesley thought, then glanced at his daughter expressionlessly. "Rika, your mother is right. Start giving a little!"

"That's right. Matthew, take Rika back to the bedroom and have a good talk. I think she'll understand." As she said this, Yvette pushed her sister towards Matthew.

Yvette's push brought them almost nose to nose. Erica lost her balance and fell into Matthew's waiting arms.

"Okay, thank you, Yvette. We'll have a good talk."

Since Matthew had been apologizing the whole time and his attitude was very sincere, Erica was the one they started harping on by the time everything was said and done.

Blair sighed heavily. "Damn it! Matthew's a great guy. Stop making a scene. Go to bed!" After saying that, she not only pushed them inside the bedroom, but also closed the door behind them.

Erica felt so helpless. She was so down in the dumps. Why didn't anyone nag Matthew?

In a fit of anger, she broke free of his grip and sat back on the bed with a burp.

Rubbing his eyebrows, Matthew wondered how Erica figured out what he was doing. He had been very careful every time he used the condoms, so where did she even get the idea?

In fact, he didn't mean to hide it from her. He didn't tell her because he was afraid she wouldn't agree. Why shouldn't he get to enjoy himself without worrying about whether a kid might come along?

He didn't know whether she would believe him or not, but he also didn't like using condoms. But if he didn't use them, she'd get pregnant, and he wouldn't be able to make love to her for almost a year.

He had waited so long to get to the point where she felt comfortable sharing a bed with him. They were practically newlyweds; who would satisfy his needs if his wife got pregnant so soon? He didn't want to be horny for so many months...

Anyway, it was his fault.

He pulled her into his arms and whispered in her ear, "Honey, my money, my houses and my cars are all yours, and me too. I'll give everything to you, but can you forgive me?"

Erica stopped sobbing. After a while, she said, "I only want the first three things." She was still angry with him and didn't want him at all. At least, not right now.

She wouldn't be cooling off that easily. Even if she had his money, houses and cars, she would still be angry.

Matthew had never felt so distressed before. He knew she still didn't love him. "No way!" If she didn't want him, what was he going to do? "Um, my money and stuff is kind of a package deal. You don't get any of it without me."

Erica pulled a long face again, but she didn't want to say that she didn't want the twelve billion. Forget that!

She knew she needed to get some sleep. Erica knew she'd probably feel better in the morning.

So, she lay silently in bed. Matthew lay down beside her, hugged her and continued to cajole her, "I swear I'll never use condoms again, okay?"

She didn't say anything.

She was trying to have a kid with him because she promised him one, but now it looked like she was just desperate. How was she going to get herself out of this?

Matthew kissed her earlobe, and the woman in his arms shivered, which made the man laugh quietly.

Hearing his laughter, Erica felt both ashamed and angry. She buried her face in the pillow, hammered the pillow and shouted, "Matthew!"

Settling his weight on her, he whispered, "I can show you I'm trying. How about that black card when I get back? And the credit card with the unlimited balance? How does that sound?"

She feigned nonchalance and said, "Don't try to bribe me with money! I'm not that kind of girl!" But in fact, that was what she wanted...

"Then what can I bribe you with? Yes, I know. My wife is not that kind of girl. It's just that I have too

much money and no place to keep it. So why don't I give it to you?"

Unable to resist the temptation of money, Erica tilted her head and said, "That's what you said. This isn't some kind of trick?"

"No trick. This is just me being a loving husband!" Matthew propped himself up with his right elbow, put his hand on her waist and started to caress her.

"Okay! It's a deal!"

"It's a deal!" He lowered his head and kissed her hair. "Since you can't wait to have a baby with me, I guess I need to work harder at it."

His words made Erica tremble with fear. "Come to think of it, having a child is not real high on my list. I don't want it anymore..."

CHAPTER 1286 WE ARE NOT DESTINED TO BE TOGETHER

Erica felt angry and betrayed when she learned that Matthew had been hiding the fact that he had been using condoms. Obviously, he had taken advantage of her because she was ignorant about condoms.

She decided to watch some adult movies to advance her knowledge after she returned to Alorith. That way, she wouldn't be deceived by the cunning Matthew again!

"It's late!" Matthew whispered as he turned her over and kissed her without hesitation.

The next morning

When Matthew went downstairs, Erica and Wesley were having a heated discussion.

There was a trace of anger in her tone as she said, "We are not destined to be together. Don't force us." She rubbed her aching waist secretly. If she hadn't been at home today, she would have missed her lunch because of the previous passionate night.

Wesley was baffled by his daughter's stance. He just couldn't understand why she would behave this way. What was the girl thinking? From what he had seen, Matthew was an ideal son-in-law, and he wouldn't be able to find a better one even if he searched the world! However, when Erica persisted, he argued, "I have to tell you that an arranged marriage can sometimes work! You are so lucky to be with Matthew. Why do you always have to complain?"

"Dad! How can you know that this is right for me?"

"I'm your father. What I say is right! Well, since you insist, how about this? Don't return to Alorith. Instead, get a divorce. Then he can marry Tessie's sister. By the way, what's her name?" Wesley said as he crossed his arms across his chest.

Erica's expression soured at the reminder. Reluctantly, she replied, "Phoebe."

"Yes. If you're so unhappy, then divorce Matthew and let Phoebe be Mrs. Hilton. This way, I won't have to hear you whine about him anymore!"

Erica snorted, "I won't give him to her. She hasn't apologized for slandering me! She will never be Mrs. Hilton. Not in this life or the next!"

The more Erica thought about the scheming woman and how much she coveted the position of Mrs. Hilton, the more unappealing the idea of divorcing Matthew became. 'If I continue to be angry with him, Phoebe might get her chance!' she thought sullenly.

Blair, who had taken Chantel to the supermarket to buy some food, returned at this point. As soon as they entered the living room, she saw Matthew standing at the stairs. She immediately walked up to him and asked with concern, "Matthew, have you finished your work? Are you tired?"

"Thank you for asking, Mom. I'm not tired."

When she heard Blair call Matthew's name, Erica's eyes almost popped out of her head. She whipped around only to find that he was standing at the stairway. With a shrug, he pushed his hands deep in his pockets and stared at her intensely.

How long had he been standing there? How much had he heard? She had no idea that he'd been listening to her conversation with her father.

She immediately lay prone on the sofa and asked the man who was talking to Blair, "When did you come down? What did you hear?" 'What did I just say to Dad? Let me think. Did I say something bad about Matthew?' She racked her brain.

"He came downstairs when you were telling me not to force you and him. Rika, you broke Matthew's heart!" Wesley snorted. 'Perhaps she will feel bad if she understands that she broke his heart,' he thought.

And Wesley was right. Erica shifted her guilt-filled gaze to Matthew. Uneasily, she asked, "Did you hear everything?"

Matthew nodded as he approached her. Instead of being angry, his expression reflected the deep affection he felt for his wife. He looked at her gently and said, "Well, Rika, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry that being with me makes you unhappy."

'Wait a minute! What is he doing? Is he tricking me again?' Erica thought.

Blair glared at her daughter, who was half-kneeling on the sofa. She was so disappointed with her.

"Erica, see how he treats you! You should treat Matthew better from now on." 'Poor Matthew. Rika must have bullied him a lot.'

Erica's mouth fell open with disbelief. She couldn't believe her ears. 'I don't want to come back to this house anymore. I don't want to see my parents anymore. I miss Carlos and Debbie.'

Matthew has deceived Dad and Mom. They don't know how fierce and frightening Matthew can be when he is angry! He knows how to pretend in front of my dad and mom!' she argued in her mind. However, no matter how many objections she thought of, she couldn't find the words to express them.

Matthew rubbed her head when he saw her crestfallen expression. He said, "Mom, Rika is very kind to me. Don't worry!"

Blair glared suspiciously at her daughter, who was nodding vigorously. "Really?"

"Just like last night. I upset her at first, but then I made up for it. Now, she isn't angry with me, right, Rika?" Matthew said.

Erica was too quick to react. Before she could analyze what Matthew meant, she had nodded her head several times.

Part-way through her emphatic nodding, realization struck her like a bolt of lightning. Suddenly, she glared at the man, who was trying to hold back his laughter. "You manipulated me again!" She never said that she would forgive him! So then why was she so quick to agree with what he had said?

Matthew coughed and said, "No, I wouldn't dare!" 'My Rika is so silly. It is so easy to trick her!'

"Well, Erica, just get along well with Matthew, and don't be childish! Look at Chantel. She is gentle and obedient. You should learn from her," Blair announced with a sniff. If Erica were as obedient as Chantel, they would worry less, and Blair would have more reasons to smile.

"Why do I even bother? To you, everyone is better than me. I know. I'm a pair of old smelly socks that you want to throw away!" Erica pouted discontentedly.

She finally realized how Matthew felt when he was in his own home, as she was treated the same when she came to see the Leonard family.

Matthew ignored Wesley's presence and whispered in her ear, "It doesn't matter. I believe that you are the best!"

Joy coursed through Erica. However, a split second later, blood rushed to her cheeks. Wesley was still there, and he must have heard Matthew's declaration. What would her father think? She placed her hand over his mouth and protested softly, "What are you talking about?" Matthew thought her shyness was endearing.

He smiled at her but remained silent. Did she not know that he was truthful? She was the best girl in the world!

Wesley understood that perhaps he had heard something he shouldn't have. And so, he turned to Blair, raised his phone, and said, "Blair, Remus' family just called..." Then he stood and left the living room.

Still red-faced, Erica turned to Matthew and complained that he was too bold. She even fiercely warned him not to behave like this in front of the elders next time.

Matthew had no choice but to agree.

Blair happened to see how angry Erica was with Matthew and scolded her daughter.

Erica stopped defending herself. She knew that no matter what she did, everyone in this family believed that she was at fault.

On the sixth day of the New Year, Gifford returned to work. On the eighth day, Matthew and Erica left the Leonard family's house and headed for Alorith.

Yvette's wedding was set for the second day of the second Lunar month as, by then, everyone would visit Askor to attend the ceremony.

Erica ran to her bedroom the minute they stepped into their villa in Alorith. She found all the condoms that Matthew had bought and threw them in the trash can in front of him.

After that, she placed her hands on her hips and raised her chin proudly. "If you are not convinced, just hold it! Or I'll tell your parents that you're preventing them from having a grandchild."

Suppressing the smile in his eyes, Matthew took out two cards and waved them in front of her. He had promised her that he would give them to her in Askor.

The arrogance on the woman's face disappeared in an instant. She ran to him happily and said in a sweet voice, "Dear Matthew."

Matthew didn't mind that the money had changed her attitude toward him. He hooked her collar with his left index finger and placed the cards into her clothes with his right hand. "I'll keep my promise. I won't use condoms anymore from now on."

What was the worst that could happen? If she got pregnant, he would have to wait for about a year. Then, he would be able to have sex with her again.

Erica removed the two cards from her clothes and looked at them. One of them was the card he had showed her in the office the other day.

CHAPTER 1287 I FEEL LIKE AN EMPRESS

Erica's eyes lit up at once when she saw the card. She kissed the flat piece of plastic again and again, resisting the impulse to scream. "Now that's more like it. Thanks, Matthew," she said.

'Wow, I'm a rich woman now! I pretty much have 12 billion!' This was something she never dreamed of!

Matthew sat on the sofa, his slender legs elegantly overlapped, and continued to charm her, "And there's more where that came from. I have much more than 12 billion. If you behave, you'll have it too!"

"It better be all mine! I'm your wife." She ran over and sat on his lap, draping her arms around his shoulders. "From now on, your money and your house are mine. You can't spend money on any other woman! And no other woman gets to live here either!" she declared.

Simply put, she was jealous. She feared that the women who attached themselves to Matthew weren't just after his money, but Matthew himself.

Matthew smoothed her long hair and made an affectionate noise. "Mmm-hmm." He would agree to whatever she asked.

Erica kissed his thin lips happily, held his neck with her arms, and buried her face in his neck to savor this quiet moment. She was as happy as a clam.

Her heart was full to bursting, and she recited an enthusiastic prayer of praise and gratitude to herself. "Ah! The earth! Ah! The motherland! Ah! Mother! I, Erica, am rich now! I can spend money on many young, handsome guys. I feel like an empress! Even better, I'm an empress like the only female empress in China's history.

Matthew is my royal consort, emperor in name only. The four men from the FC group are my imperial noble courtiers. The male model is my noble courtier. All of them exist for my pleasure...'

The man whose neck she was nuzzling was considering having a baby with his wife. He had no idea what was running through Erica's mind at the moment. But he was indirectly responsible for her fantasies.

Erica now agreed with the saying—"A man is loyal to his wife because there are not enough temptations. If there are beautiful women around him, it will stir him from his resolve.

A woman is loyal to her husband because she is not rich enough. If she has enough money, she won't mind buying whatever she wants, including handsome men."

At the City Convention Center

Today, there was fair-sized art show. The exhibition was held by the City Art Gallery and the City Artists Association. The sponsor was the owner of a studio and a painter herself, Phoebe.

When Nathan was still alive, he and Matthew invested in the studio. Matthew owned forty percent shares, and Phoebe owned sixty percent.

Publicly, Phoebe was the owner. Matthew was the silent partner. Everyone just assumed it was her studio.

As the boss, Phoebe was busy today. She had to receive guests and do interviews at the same time. She also had to explain the meaning of each piece and what the inspiration was to the guests.

After a while, two people walked in—a man and a woman.

The woman wore a light yellow casual suit, a baseball cap of the same color, a valuable white backpack on her back, and a pair of white Vans—the latest style of skateboarding shoes from that well-known international brand.

Her fingernails were painted with brown nail polish with cartoon patterns, and an expensive white watch could be seen on her slender wrist every once in awhile. She held a cup of red bean milk tea. She looked every inch like someone from a rich family. She played the part well.

The man next to her only wore plain clothes, and people could tell at a glance that he was just an ordinary college student.

The security guard at the door stopped them and asked politely, "Hello, invitations please? You won't get in without them."

The woman took another sip of her milk tea, indicated the man next to her with her head. The man understood and took out two invitation letters from his backpack and handed them to the security guard. "Here you are."

When the security guard saw Matthew's name on the invitations, he immediately guessed who the woman was, so he let these two go in without much of a fuss.

As soon as they left, the security guard called Phoebe and informed her, "Phoebe, two people with Matthew's invitations are here."

Everything went smoothly after they entered the exhibition area. The woman carefully praised every piece of work under the gaze of the crowd.

She had to admit that Phoebe's skill with pen and brush was pretty outstanding.

She really captured the essence of a person. You knew who they were, right down to the eyes, even if you'd never seen them before. The landscapes were full of character and life.

Erica was thinking that she should double down on her studies and hold an art show as soon as possible.

She couldn't just rest on her laurels if she wanted to be an internationally famous photographer.

Leaving the journalists behind, Phoebe immediately gravitated to the two people who had just arrived—her first thought was Matthew, and her heart felt a tangible thrill, like a mini-lightning bolt had hit it. However, when she saw the two people standing in front of a portrait, all her excitement disappeared in an instant.

"Hey, Phoebe, long time no see!" The woman who was drinking milk tea spotted her first. She stood on tiptoe and waved at her, smiling.

She looked so happy to see Phoebe that people who didn't know them might think they were good friends.

Phoebe's heart was immediately lifted by her smile. Every work displayed here today was the result of her blood, sweat, and tears. She couldn't let Miss Troublemaker destroy any of them, let alone kill her mood.

She didn't respond to Erica. Instead, she summoned the security guard to her side.

The security guard trotted over and greeted her. "Phoebe!"

"Grab two more members of your unit. Watch those two, and don't let them make any trouble!" Phoebe didn't want to get into it with Erica, because she was afraid. Of course, she was not afraid of Erica, but afraid that Matthew would punish her if she tried anything. After all, he had warned her before.

"Yes, Phoebe!" The security guard radioed two of his colleagues, ordering them to tail Erica and Hyatt and watch their every move.

All Phoebe wanted was to be left alone. But the more she wished for it, the more Erica would show up and ruin her plans.

Erica came here today to find Phoebe to prove her innocence and get her to apologize. She wouldn't let Phoebe go until she got what she wanted.

Seeing Phoebe was about to leave, Erica ran over in a hurry. "Phoebe, don't go!" Erica ran over and stood in her way.

People were already looking at them. Phoebe tried her best to keep her poker face and warned Erica in a quiet voice, "I don't have time to deal with you today. Get out!"

"No way! I have a bone to pick with you. Call Matthew right now and tell him what kind of person you are. Tell him that you fell down on purpose to force yourself to miscarry and blame me for it. Tell him I had nothing to do with that. Then apologize to me. And I want a sincere one, not a begrudging one. Make it good. Then I'll leave!" Erica thought she was fairly laid back. Although Phoebe framed her like

that, she was willing to let her off the hook as long as she apologized to her and told Matthew what she had done.

Phoebe took a deep breath and said, "I'm really busy today. Can we do this another ti—"

"Shut up! That's the only reason I'm here." Erica had been hoping Phoebe would come to her after she had provoked her two times. But she never took the bait. Erica had to take the face-to-face route.

"Look! This is getting ridiculous!" The snicker on Erica's face made Phoebe feel very uneasy.

She knew clearly that she couldn't admit what kind of a woman she was in front of Matthew and apologize to Erica in public.

"Is that fear I see on your face?" Erica's bright eyes swept around the exhibition hall and finally fell on a sketch.

'Humph! That's my husband! She drew him and displays it in public! Who does that?'

Erica was instantly infuriated. She handed the milk tea to Hyatt and quickly took the sketch off the easel where it sat.

"Erica! What are you doing?" Phoebe was in panic mode.

She had sketched Matthew without his knowledge, and never filled it in completely. If anyone asked about it, she would explain that she and Matthew were friends and she subconsciously sketched him from memory.

CHAPTER 1288 HIS HANDSOME SOUL

"What am I doing?" Erica flashed a wicked grin. She was annoyed by Phoebe's sketch. 'Matthew wouldn't even let me take a picture of him. How could he let Phoebe sketch him? I'll take the sketch to him and settle accounts with him!'

As for how to do this, she had two options—she could buy it or snatch it. And which one she chose depended on Phoebe!

But there was a note next to the sketch—"Not for sale."

'Dammit! Looks like I only have one choice.

Phoebe is smart, using a sketch of my husband to attract people to her exhibition, ' she thought to herself.

Erica handed the sketch to Hyatt, took her milk tea back and sipped it as if nothing had happened. "Do

you know how much money my husband is worth? How dare you make a sketch of him! But now that we're here, maybe you can pay royalties for using his likeness. Five million should be enough!"

She couldn't just use her husband's money. She had to make some extra money for their family.

She extended her hand, palm up, waiting for Phoebe to write that check!

"Five million?" Phoebe's eyes went wide in surprise. She was upset now, and couldn't help but raise her voice. "Wow, you're a greedy bitch, aren't you?"

Her voice carried, and echoed through the exhibition hall. People were naturally curious to find out what happened, but the security guards blocked the way, and the onlookers could not get close to them.

"What's wrong? Think his likeness rights aren't worth five mil? Why don't you try to invite my husband over to attend your art show? He wouldn't do it even for a few billion." Normally, Erica would have asked for at most five hundred grand. But ever since she married Matthew, it had affected the way she thought about money. After all, he was so rich and always gave her as much as she wanted.

She already snapped a pic of Matthew, and she remembered his reaction. He asked for 100 million. So asking for five million was generous.

'What an entitled bitch! She's in the wrong, and she loses her temper? Humph! She should thank me. I gave her the rights for a good price, ' she thought.

Trying her best to quell her anger, Phoebe lowered her voice and said, "Matthew didn't say anything when I sketched him. So what right do you have to treat me like this? You're a Hilton by marriage only. You're just sponging off the guy, while you do nothing worthwhile. You're nothing to me. Get out of my face!"

Erica nodded without hesitation. "Yes, I'm sure my pet snake was nothing too, right?" If she was right, the place where Phoebe had gotten stitches must have healed recently.

With her back to the crowd, Phoebe took a deep breath and held back her impulse to slap the woman across her face. "Erica, I can't apologize to you. Just go away, sooner rather than later. Don't make trouble here, or you'll be removed from the premises."

When she heard that, Erica sneered, "Seriously? You won't admit you're wrong, and you threaten me? Ha-ha! Phoebe, to tell you the truth, I wanted to gather all your paintings and burn them in public!"

However, she knew that many people believed Phoebe's innocent act, and had no idea who she really was. Everyone thought Erica was a troublemaker, but had nothing but good things to say about Phoebe. She didn't want to drag the Hilton family name through the mud, much less dishonor the Leonard family, so she gave up that idea. So a public humiliation like that for Phoebe was not in the cards.

"Well, well. Since you won't apologize to me and won't pay the money for my husband's likeness rights, I'll sue you for violating my husband's rights. That plus legal fees should cost a hefty sum!"

After saying that, Erica took out her phone and sent a WeChat message. "Hey, are you there?" She didn't have a lawyer, and had to ask someone to help her find one. Since Matthew liked Phoebe, she didn't know if he would be willing to help. So she had to ask someone else.

"What's wrong, Erica?" came the reply.

"Can you do me a favor? Help me find a lawyer," she texted back. If she didn't teach Phoebe a real lesson, Phoebe would continue to plague Erica.

Phoebe thought Erica was just trying to intimidate her and didn't believe she was really going to sue her. Everyone knew lawsuits were long, drawn out, and troublesome. "Sue me if you like," she said.

"Huh! You think I'm bluffing? Just wait and see. Frankly, I was going easy on you. I only asked for five million. When I sue you, it will be ten!" She would then have ten million and Matthew's sketch. That would be awesome! She really didn't understand why Phoebe would rather be the target of a lawsuit. She could just pay her and she'd stop.

'Did I ask for too much?' she wondered.

'Ten million? She must be crazy. Where the hell would I get ten million? Well, my family has ten million, but Mom would never give me that kind of cash. I'm not exactly well-loved, '

Phoebe thought to herself. With a mean look on her face, she trash-talked Erica. "I've never seen a bigger assclown. I feel sorry for Matthew, married to someone like you."

Erica was really irritated now. "Well, even if you apologized now, I wouldn't forgive you! I'm definitely suing you. Might as well set aside ten million dollars, because it's going right in my pocket." She swore she would sue Phoebe and force her to give her ten million even though Matthew really liked her.

Then she found a number from the last WeChat message she was sent and dialed the number. "Hello, is this Kelvin Adams?"

"Speaking. Erica Leonard, right? I got your friend's message. I was about to call you."

"Well, Kelvin, here's the thing. Someone violated my husband's likeness rights. I'm going to sue her..."

While Phoebe was gritting her teeth, Erica left the exhibition hall with Hyatt. He held the sketch in his hands.

The security guards wanted to stop them, but they didn't dare to do anything since their boss, Phoebe,

hadn't given them orders.

At the Pearl Villa District

The moment Matthew stepped into the bedroom, he heard his wife mumbling something. She was holding a piece of paper in her hand. "I think my husband's hotter than that. I don't think she really did him justice. She just couldn't capture his handsome soul."

"What are you doing?" Matthew asked casually, hanging his coat on the hanger.

Erica sat at the mirror, and looked back at the man without saying anything.

His curiosity aroused, he loosened his tie and strode around behind his wife. That was when he saw what was on the piece of paper she held. It was a sketch, and it was a sketch of him, no less.

"Where did you get that?" he asked. He didn't remember anyone sketching him.

"Oh, I snatched it!"

she answered. Matthew was an observant man. He immediately knew that his wife was angry, so he continued to ask calmly, "Where did you snatch it from?"

"Phoebe's art exhibition," Erica answered bluntly.

At the same time, she complained in her mind, 'Don't pretend you don't know. Is there someone else who has sketched you before?'

After thinking a while, Matthew asked attentively, "Did you and Phoebe get in a fight?"

'She dared to sketch me without my permission. She must be tired of living.'

"What? Why would you think that?" Erica suddenly smiled brightly. "I'm an adorable girl that everyone likes. Why would I ever get in a fight?"

The man raised his eyebrows. 'Well, she's right. She is adorable. So did she push Phoebe around? Probably. After all, she took the sketch. I don't think Phoebe can do anything to intimidate her.'

CHAPTER 1289 LETTER OF COMMITMEN

When Matthew was about to change his clothes in the walk-in closet, he could hear his wife muttering, "Why the hell would I even bring this sketch back?"

He didn't know what to say. 'Is she irritated because the sketch was from Phoebe or is it because of the person she had sketched?'

However, there was absolutely no difference as to whether it was about the sketcher or the sketch itself. Either way, she was disgusted and annoyed by the picture.

Thinking of this, he turned around and held Erica in his arms. Judging from her furrowed eyebrows and pursed lips, she seemed to be thinking deeply about something. "How annoyed are you?" he whispered.

"Very annoyed," she snapped.

Caressing her face, Matthew warned, "Watch your words."

'Watch my words?' Erica shook off his hold, and her face turned bright red from the warning. She had been holding back her anger this entire time, and her husband had the audacity to tell her off. "Watch my words? Back then, you wouldn't even allow me to take a picture of you! And yet Phoebe made a sketch of you! You're being unfair!" she yelled.

"I didn't allow her to sketch me," he tried to explain, but it seemed that the misunderstanding created a wider gap between them.

"Don't you lie to me! Who would dare sketch you without your permission?" Hell, she didn't dare take a photo of him without his permission.

The more she thought about it, the more irritated she felt. 'I know that I probably couldn't measure up to Phoebe, but this is just too much!'

Matthew stretched out his arms to wrap around her waist. He pulled her into his arms. "Don't move. If you do, you'll face the consequences."

'Damn him! He even dared to threaten me? What an ass!'

"I really didn't know when she sketched me," he protested. Debbie was right. Erica was like a can of coke. If shaken, she would explode in whirling rage.

The sincerity in his eyes made her pause. She stopped struggling under his hold. "Really?" she asked doubtfully.

"Really!" He nodded.

'That's more like it!' she thought triumphantly. Erica didn't bother to tell him her plans to sue the other woman. She was afraid that it would only belt him back to Phoebe's side, so she decided to probe, "If one day I hurt Phoebe and make her lose everything she could ever dream of, would you feel sorry for her?"

He shook his head. "Of course not!"

'He probably doesn't like her anymore, ' she thought. A smile slipped onto her face as she played with the buttons on his shirt. "How about me? Do you like me?"

Without even waiting for his answer, she immediately raised her head and added, "If you do, then I'll protect you from now on. I'll even defend you against the Hilton family. In fact, I'll forget the fact that you've hurt me before."

'Hurt her? When did I hurt her?' Since she looked pretty convinced of his sins, he nodded. "I'll like you from now on." Matthew didn't bother to tell her that he had actually already fallen in love with her a long time ago. He had no interest in liking any other woman.

"That's good." Her eyes glinted. "Then I'll like you too."

Matthew tightened his grip around her waist and pressed his forehead against hers. His breath fanned against her nose. "Have you already made up your mind?"

"I would, if you pinky swear to it." She pulled out her pinky finger and wiggled it in front of him.

Staring at the way her eyes flashed so innocently, he found himself stunned by the declaration. A part of him even wondered if he would partake in such a childish thing.

Afraid that he might go back on his word, she raised an eyebrow. "Do you plan on going back on your word so soon?"

Reluctantly, Matthew hooked his pinky to hers.

He honestly didn't want to partake in such a childish thing, but he had to. Or else, Erica might think he was reluctant to commit to such a promise.

As soon as their fingers were hooked on each other, she said, "From now on, Matthew will only like Erica for the next hundred years." 'Wait! What if he lives for more than that?' She immediately corrected herself and added, "I mean, for one thousand years! If you change your mind, then you're a jerk!"

'A jerk?' Resisting the urge to snort, he rolled his eyes. "Now that I promised you this, shouldn't you also promise me something?"

"Fine! What do you want me to promise?" she asked.

"From now on, you will only like me. If you change your mind, then you'll be prisoned by me all your life. If I change my mind, all my properties will belong to you, and I'll be at your disposal. All in all, no matter what happens, we will be together all our lives."

Hearing him state that "all of my properties will belong to you," she was more than ecstatic to agree to his request. She nodded vigorously. "Deal!"

'Now that we have a deal, he'd finally like me!'

Matthew, who had always been a cautious man, thought that a pinky swear wasn't enough to bind the both of them. This was why he took Erica to his desk and handed her a pen. "Write a letter of commitment," he ordered.

'A letter of commitment?' She furrowed her eyebrows. "Stating what?"

Of course, it was a contract regarding their relationship! "Write what I say!" he stated.

"Don't you believe that I could keep my promise?"

'Of course not!' he thought, but he didn't say that aloud. Instead, he leaned back against his seat. "Since you can do it, why don't you just write it down?"

"Whatever." She rolled her eyes. "Just tell me already."

His eyes glinted. "I, Erica Leonard, will only love Matthew Hilton all my life. If I betray him, whether physically or mentally, I'll be imprisoned by him for a lifetime. From now on, this promise holds legal effect. Signed by Erica Leonard."

Erica wrote it down just as he had said and read it carefully to see if she had spelled anything wrong.

Seeing as there wasn't any, she pushed the piece of paper towards him. "It's your turn."

He took the paper from her hands and shrugged. "I always keep my words," he stated. "Since I've already said it, I'll do it." Unlike her, he wasn't going back on his word anytime soon.

"Isn't that unfair?" she demanded. Erica held his hand and forced him to write his own letter of commitment.

'If he does something wrong one day, at least he'll know the consequences.'

Seeing that he was being held against his will, Matthew had no other choice but to write down the promises that he had just told her.

At last, the two of them signed their names in both letters. Feeling that something was missing, she grabbed her lipstick from her bag and rubbed it all over his thumb. Raising her chin, she said, "Press your fingerprint."

He was rendered speechless. This was the first time he had ever seen such a thing happening! In fact, he had never met anyone who had doubted his words.

Erica handed her signed letter of commitment to him. "Let's exchange. You'll keep mine, and I'll keep yours." It was an awesome feeling. Matthew, one of the richest men in the world, was already wrapped around her fingertips.

CHAPTER 1290 A GRANDCHILD

Matthew's grin deepened upon seeing the triumphant smile on his wife's face. He would do everything just to make her stay by his side forever, even giving her all his properties.

After putting the letter of commitment and cards given by Matthew in the drawer, Erica locked it and kept the key.

'As long as this letter is with me, I will always be Mrs. Hilton. Ha-ha! From now on, I can start dealing with Phoebe more unscrupulously,' she thought inwardly.

Matthew also locked his copy of the letter in a safe.

He thought that when they got old in the future, they would read it again together.

Blair had believed that Yvette's marriage was the most significant thing in the Leonard family. But she was wrong. She would be surprised that she was going to have a grandchild in a few months.

That day, she was in a shopping mall to buy a new razor for Wesley. She was on her way to the cashier when she received a call from Chantel. "Hi, Chantel. What's up?"

"Auntie Blair..." A woman's weak voice was heard from the other end of the line.

"Chantel? What's wrong?" She could sense from Chantel's trembling voice that something was wrong. It was as if she was scared of something.

In the hospital, Chantel was grasping the bed sheet helplessly. She knew that sooner or later, she wouldn't be able to hide her pregnancy from Blair and Wesley anymore, so she needed to tell them now. "Auntie, I'm in the hospital."

"What? Why are you there? What happened to you? Which hospital?" Blair was so worried that she bombarded Chantel with a series of questions. The new semester had just started two days ago. Why was she in the hospital?

She and Wesley immediately went to the hospital that Chantel told her.

They went straight to the obstetrics and gynecology department and entered one of the wards there.

In one of the three beds at the corner of the room, a thin figure curled up.

Blair's heart ached upon recognizing that it was Chantel. 'We have been taking care of her at home for

quite a while now. Why does she still look so thin?' she thought. "Chantel?" she called.

Upon hearing her voice, Chantel turned to face the door. As soon as she saw them, she immediately sat up and greeted them in a low voice, "Uncle Wesley. Auntie Blair."

Staring at her anxiously, Blair couldn't help asking, "What happened? Why do you look so pale?"

Chantel bit her lower lip nervously as she lost the courage to tell them the truth. If it weren't for the fact that her baby was in danger, she wouldn't have bothered Wesley and Blair to come over.

The couple waited for a long time, but Chantel remained silent, which made Blair feel more anxious.

Wesley held and squeezed her hand lightly, hinting her to calm down. Then he turned to Chantel, who had been looking at the floor all the while. "Chantel, just rest for now. Your aunt and I will be back later."

This time, Chantel looked up. With guilt written all over her face, she just nodded.

Instead of leaving the hospital, Wesley took Blair to the doctor's office. At the door, he said casually, "Excuse me. We are looking for Dr. Ximena."

While in the ward just now, he noticed Chantel's medical chart on the bedside table and saw the name of her attending physician on it. So, instead of forcing her to talk, he just urged Blair to leave so they could look for the doctor.

A female doctor, who was busy writing on her desk, raised her head. With her eyeglasses on, it looked like she was in her forties. She heard someone mentioning her name, so she answered, "I am Ximena Ford."

The couple immediately came in, and Wesley introduced themselves. "Hello, Dr. Ximena. We are Chantel's family. She's the patient in bed number 1 of Ward 3. We're here to check on her condition."

"Are you her parents?" Ximena took off her eyeglasses and continued before any of them could answer, "Actually, she and her baby are not in good condition right now. Because of her dancing, the baby in her belly became unstable. If she wasn't sent here on time, she might have lost it. She needs to be hospitalized for a few days to avoid miscarriage. You should go through the admission procedures for her as soon as possible."

"What did you say, doctor? She needs to stay in the hospital to avoid miscarriage? Are you serious?" Blair's voice rose a little because of disbelief, so everyone's eyes in the office fell on her.

Realizing her gaffe, she looked around and apologized immediately, "I'm so sorry. Please go on with your work."

She then turned back to the doctor and asked in a low voice, "Dr. Ximena, you might have mistaken. Chantel is only 20 years old, and she doesn't even have a boyfriend. How can she get pregnant?"

Wesley was also shocked by what he heard. But since he was more experienced in handling things, he was able to keep calm and just listened to Blair and the doctor's conversation.

Thinking that they were really Chantel's parents, Ximena smiled and said, "I understand how you feel. But I can't be wrong. Chantel is twelve weeks pregnant now. Maybe you need to talk to her. I don't have any idea why she didn't tell you that she has a boyfriend. She came to our hospital because the baby in her belly is in danger. I am sure about that." The doctor's statement was very affirmative, and Blair was utterly dumbfounded.

After talking with the doctor, the couple stood at the corridor outside the ward. They silently looked at each other, didn't know what to say or do.

Since Chantel came to their family, she had always been pleasing and docile. She had never done things recklessly. Most of the time, she came back to the Leonard family house at night to rest. She only stayed in the dorm overnight if her classes finished late or if she needed time to study her lessons alone.

So, Blair's first question to Wesley was, "Do you think Chantel was abused by a bad guy and just didn't tell us?"

Wesley thought that it was possible, but he didn't conclude yet. Instead, he said, "I'll go through the admission procedures, so we can transfer her to a private room. Go and talk to her first. Maybe this time, she will speak up. If someone really abused her, assure her that we will let that man pay." Although Chantel wasn't their biological daughter, they treated her as a legitimate member of the Leonard family. There was no way that they would take her for granted.

"That's right. Go ahead and finish the admission procedures, so we can move her to a better ward. I don't like the strong smell in her current ward. She won't be comfortable there." "Alright.

I'll go ahead." The couple parted ways to do what they needed to do.

Inside the ward, Chantel held Blair's hand and said apologetically, "Auntie, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to lie to you. I'm ready to tell you everything now." Earlier, she was too nervous to say anything. But after having some time alone, she was able to calm down and prepare herself.

Blair nodded and stroked her messy hair. "Don't worry about it yet. Your uncle is currently processing your admission. Have a rest for now."

The gentleness in her voice made Chantel's eyes red and misty. She held her hand tighter and confessed, "Auntie, I'm pregnant." After saying it, she felt like a burden was finally removed from her heart.

"We already know. We went to your doctor just now, and she told us. Chantel, what really happened?"

Chantel took a deep breath first before she said, "Auntie, if I tell you everything, I hope that you and Uncle Wesley won't get mad at me now. After my baby is born, I will accept it even if you beat and curse as much as you want."