

TMBA 1401

CHAPTER 1401 LOVE LAID BARE

When Erica found out Matthew's secret, he flipped out on her. He was so desperate to keep it a secret that he lost all sense of reason.

To Erica's intense surprise, the woman in the photo was none other than herself.

She didn't know what Matthew was angry about. She approached him and asked defiantly, "And what if I don't give it to you?"

His hand tightened around her wrist. The pain made her grit her teeth, but she refused to budge. Fortunately, it was not that painful, and she could ignore the pain.

The man acted like a three-year-old child and answered willfully, "Give it here! Now!"

He was like a broken record, repeating that phrase over and over again. He wouldn't say anything else.

Erica reached out her other hand to touch his cheek, and talked to him in a quiet voice. "Matthew, Phoebe was never the goddess in your heart. You never liked her. She's just your best friend's wife. I'm the woman you loved from the start. There's nothing between you and Phoebe, and I can prove it. You don't know how long you've been in love with me or when you started to fall for me, do you?"

After she came back from the Panda House that day, she remembered what he said, what his feelings were. He revealed all that in the car.

When he heard what she said, Matthew's jaw tightened. What she said was the truth.

"But I had another man's child. When your dad asked you to marry me, you turned him down. I can think of two reasons for that. One is that you don't like others getting involved in your business, and the other is that you didn't want to marry a woman with someone else's kid. In the end, you said yes because you like me. That love won out over a kid out of wedlock..."

"Erica!" His sharp cry stopped her from saying anything more.

Matthew's face was pale, but there was no anger in his eyes, but shyness instead.

"Matthew." Erica hugged him and said, "I know you don't like to talk about your feelings, so let me do it. It would be great if I could marry you now. After all, I'm a few years older now, than when we were married. I'd have a different view of things from that time. Maybe I would know you liked me earlier. But on second thought, I'm glad that we got married years ago. I don't regret getting married to you, or giving myself to you.

To tell you the truth, maybe I fell in love with you earlier than I thought. At that time, I knew there was a

goddess in your heart who shone like the new moon in the night sky, and I deliberately ignored how good you were to me. I was afraid I'd fall for you, and that you'd choose her. You'd chase the moonlight, always overlooking the red rose. I was afraid you'd always want her instead of me. What I didn't know was the moonlight and the red rose were the same person, and that's me."

She was the goddess in Matthew's heart, both the moonlight and the red rose.

Erica also found something terrible. Since she came back from Tow Village, every day she was with him, she would find more and more clues he had loved her from the beginning.

And she kept finding more. It was almost like he was leaving a trail of lovecrumbs for her to find. It was getting obvious how much he liked her even before they met.

"You will never know how grateful I am you waited for me all these years. I'd been away for more than three years, and you waited for me, patiently, for all that time. I don't know what I'd do with myself if you found someone else. I might kill myself because I can't live without you."

The bedroom was very quiet. Instead of holding her wrist tightly, Matthew embraced her tightly.

"Lili, Riri, Kaka, they sound similar to Rika Leonard. Matthew, why not just tell me about it? Why wait so long?" No wonder Matthew didn't take their four children to the Panda House, because it wasn't the pandas that were the point. It was his love for her.

At this moment, Matthew's feelings for her were laid bare.

'Sometimes I wonder if she can tie her own shoes, but other times her IQ is at least 200,' he thought to himself.

He still didn't say "I love you," but he didn't need to. She knew how he felt, how much he loved her. He loved her more than she loved him.

The bedroom got very quiet, and the man still didn't say a word.

Then she continued, "I don't want to lose you or miss you for the rest of my life. I want to love you for the rest of my life. You know, I'm a stupid woman. So, Matthew, please give me a map of the road of love and tell me where I should go. Or, I can love you in my own way. Anyway, I only love you, Matthew. You are my God, my destiny... Oh, and our sons. I love them deeply too. After all, they are what came from our love."

Tears welled in Matthew's eyes, but the woman couldn't see them. His love finally was paid back.

He also wanted to tell her that he loved her from the beginning to the end, but she already finished what he wanted to say, leaving him speechless for more than a moment.

He never dated anyone, and he was a newbie when it came to love, so he still didn't know what to say, how to respond to her confession. All he could do was hold her.

She looked at him at last, eyes full of expectation. He said, "I want to... make love to you." He wanted to express his love for her in another way, and he hoped she could understand. Erica was on the verge of breaking down. Alas, she was so tired, mentally and physically.

She knew he was strong and she had to give in. "Hold me!" she demanded.

The man lifted her up and walked towards the bathroom. "Rika," he called out.

"Hmm?" The expectation in her heart was ignited again, and she was desperately hoping he would say, "I love you."

But the reply she received was "This time, guide me in bed. Let's do what you want." She wanted to scold him.

'Wow, what a jerk! He won't say he loves me, and now he wants me to be the dominant one in bed.

Forget it. I know he loves me lots! He just can't find the words sometimes.

And, as the saying goes, the winner will be the one who laughs last, ' Erica thought to herself with a wicked grin. He didn't even notice.

Because of the sudden arrival of Erica's aunt Flo, Matthew not only had to give up on the idea of bathing together, but also had to handle her carefully.

The next day, because of the cramping Erica stayed at home all day to beautify Dylan's photos. She never left the house.

In the evening, Matthew picked up the four kids from the manor. Seeing that Erica was still in bed, Damian immediately knew what was wrong with her. "Mom, is it time for you to drink brown sugar water this month?"

But they only knew their mom needed to drink brown sugar water for a few days every month and couldn't take care of herself. They knew nothing else.

"Yes." Erica nodded listlessly. Her lower abdomen always hurt on the first day of her period.

Without saying a word, Damian and Adkins turned around and walked out of the bedroom. Colman kicked off his shoes and climbed onto the bed. Lying next to her, he patted her on the shoulder and comforted her gently, "Mom, it shouldn't hurt. Let me keep your belly warm."

Then he blew on her belly.

Erica was amused by his sweet behavior. She gently pinched the tip of his nose.

Boswell told the man who came in later, "Dad, you can sleep in my room tonight."

'Huh!' With a faint smile on his face, Matthew thought to himself, 'He allows me to sleep in a room I own. Like he has any say! What a little brat!'

CHAPTER 1402 SPOILED BY US

When his dad didn't say anything, Boswell continued, "I think you should experience the happiness of sleeping in your kid's room. Alright! I'll let you sleep in my room for tonight! You sleep there, and we will sleep with Mommy!"

Raising his eyebrows, Matthew asked, "And why would I want to do that?"

Boswell looked back at his mother, who was half lying on the bed, listening to their conversation. He replied, "Mom needs to be taken care of during this time of the month, and we do that all the time."

Matthew hung his coat on the hanger, walked up to the kid and patted his head. "You only need to take good care of yourselves from now on. Your mother has me to take care of her. Go back to your room and sleep." He grinned at his sons. These fellows wanted his wife all to themselves and were trying to drive him out.

Boswell was still unconvinced. He tried everything to fight for the opportunity to take care of his mother. He argued, "Mom is completely spoiled by us! She will be super irritable for the next few days and she will need brown sugar water. Dad, you have a bad temper! So, you can't take care of Mom. Let us do it instead!"

Erica almost burst out laughing. She was spoiled by them? She finally spoke. "Boswell, don't make Dad sleep alone. We can all sleep here."

However, to her surprise, Boswell refused decisively. Pouting his lips, he protested, "Dad will cheat! Last time, he secretly slept next to you after moving us to the other side while we were asleep. He held you all night and slept nicely. It's not fair!"

His father was always good to them, except when it came to his wife. He acted like a kid himself and often competed with them for her attention. 'Dad has his own mom! Why won't he go and sleep with her?' the boy thought to himself.

Taking a reproachful glance at his second son, Matthew walked over to him and picked him up. He threatened in a serious tone, "Do you have any evidence to prove that? If you don't, then I will sue you for slander. After that, you will be taken away by the police and will be forced to pay compensation."

Boswell was not frightened. "You know we were all asleep and don't have any evidence! That's why you

are so arrogant," he pouted angrily.

'Aren't you a smart one?' Matthew was amused. 'He is my son, after all.' Still, he pretended to be serious and said, "Remember to collect evidence before you question me next time. Without evidence, it's just slandering. 'Slan-der-ing.' Do you understand what that means? Let me tell you how serious an offense that is. Depending on the case, you could be sentenced to less than three years in prison or detention, and could be placed under public surveillance, while being deprived of political rights. Do you understand now? So, think twice before you speak next time. If you end up spouting something at the wrong place and at the wrong time, what kind of consequences will you bring upon yourself?"

Stunned, Erica scolded, "Matthew! You can't be serious! The child is only three years old. What does he know about all these?" 'Is this man really his father? Why is he frightening his own kid?' she pondered.

Matthew thought otherwise. "Do you really think that our kids are as innocent as other three-year-old kids?"

"Well, that..." Erica stammered. As their mother, she knew better than anyone else that her sons were much smarter than peers of their age.

Sometimes, she felt like they were smarter than her.

"We have to teach them all this while they are still young. Habits—good or bad—are developed from childhood," said Matthew.

Leaning his head against his mother's belly, Colman looked at his father excitedly. "Dad, you're so cool!"

Matthew arched his brow in surprise. 'What's so cool about this?' "Don't try to flatter me," he said to his little boy.

Sitting up straight, Colman retorted seriously, "I'm not flattering you; I'm serious! Do you think we'll be as cool and handsome as you when we grow up?"

This time, Matthew couldn't keep his calm. He was thrilled deep inside. After all, he just received a sincere praise from his son. He smiled and sat on the edge of the bed with Boswell in his arms.

Instantly, Boswell slipped out and climbed into Erica's arms. Matthew didn't mind and continued to chat with Colman. "Tell me, why do you want to be like me?"

Unexpectedly, the little guy became shy. He lowered his head and whispered, "Hmm...I can only marry once in my life, and I want a beautiful wife. If I don't look handsome, I won't get the most beautiful girl in the world!"

Matthew was dumbfounded and Erica laughed out loud.

She patted Colman's little butt and said, "You are only three! Why do you want a wife already? You are nothing like your father! I wonder whom you take after!"

His butt didn't hurt at all. After thinking, Colman answered, "Probably Uncle Sheffield!" After all, it was his uncle who had told him this.

Erica rolled her eyes.

"I don't think you take after your uncle Sheffield; you are just influenced by his stupidity," Matthew commented. He was going to have a word with Sheffield when he was free. He couldn't let his idiot brother-in-law instill such thoughts in his son's mind.

Just then, Damian pushed the door open and walked in, followed by Adkins, who had a tray in his hands. Behind him were two anxious maids.

Under Damian's intense gaze, Adkins came to the bedside with the tray. With a gentle smile on his face, he said, "Mom, I brought you the brown sugar water."

Matthew picked up the glass from the tray and looked at the two maids reproachfully.

He didn't say anything, but one of the maids was frightened and immediately explained, "Matthew, we wanted to help Adkins, but he—"

Adkins looked at Matthew and explained unhurriedly, "Dad, don't scold them! I insisted on bringing the water for Mom."

Matthew checked the temperature of the water. It was still a little hot, so he placed it on the bedside table. Then he told Adkins, "You are still young, Adkins. What if you trip and fall? Next time, don't do such dangerous things."

Damian interrupted, "Dad, don't worry! We always make the brown sugar water for Mom. We can do it."

Matthew was slightly stunned upon hearing that. He touched Damian's head and said, "If you burn your little hands, my wife will be very upset." And in turn, he would be sad too— for his wife and his child.

The kids blinked. Normally, Matthew should have answered, "If you burn your little hands, I will be very upset." But instead, he had said, "If you burn your little hands, my wife will be very upset."

Erica was amused by the five of them and laughed. "Well, well, my dear babies. I was okay with you making this brown sugar water for me because my room was close to the kitchen in Tow Village. But it's different now. You need to climb the stairs to the third floor. It's too dangerous. Dad and Mom are worried about you. So, let the maids do it next time, okay?"

The four boys nodded at the same time and answered in one voice, "Okay, Mom!"

Matthew sighed. When he said something, the children would argue with him. However, no one refuted Erica's words. They were so obedient. Was that the difference between being a father and a mother?

That night, since the children insisted, the family of six slept together in the same bed.

CHAPTER 1403 EVIDENCE OF CRIME

What Matthew wasn't aware of was that after he headed to the shower, the four kids sneaked out and orchestrated a grand plan behind his back.

Later that night, Adkins and Boswell went to sleep with Matthew on one end of the bed, while Colman and Damian slept with Erica on the other end.

Obediently, the kids closed their eyes as soon as they lay down.

Since two of his sons weren't letting him work anymore, Matthew gave up on the idea and went to sleep with them.

After a long time, the bedroom was quiet again. Matthew then sat up and got out of bed in silence.

He first picked up Damian on the other end of the bed where he was sleeping, and then Colman...

"Ah! Dad! I caught you!" Colman, who was supposed to be asleep in Matthew's arms, screamed all of a sudden. The other three children all sat up immediately.

Getting up from the bed, they rushed to Matthew and laughed at him. "Dad, you said that we needed evidence before accusing you of anything. We've got it now!" Boswell stated.

Colman put his arms around his father's neck and said, "Dad, we weren't asleep yet. We only pretended to be so we could deceive you."

Damian laughed out loud this time.

Adkins held Matthew's leg and accused him, "So it was true. It turns out that you really took us away from Mom while we were asleep!"

During this whole time, Erica had been half asleep until the voice of her children fully woke her up. Sitting up, she asked in a daze, "What's going on?"

Damian ran to turn on the lights, exposing Matthew's livid face to everyone else in the room.

The children only laughed louder and louder when they saw their father's expression. They wanted their mother to know they had now the evidence of Matthew's "crime."

Matthew wanted to put Colman on the bed first, but the boy didn't let go of him. Instead, he took the chance to complain to Erica, "Mom, Dad took us away from you while we were sleeping. Look! He hasn't even put me down yet!"

After hearing her son's words, Erica burst into laughter.

Despite being caught red-handed by his children, Matthew managed to turn his face blank but only on the surface. Deep down, he wanted to grab the kids and slap each one on their buttocks. Casting a cold glance at the four boys, he pretended to be angry. "How dare you set me up!"

If the news that Matthew himself was framed by his own sons spread, people would laugh their heads off. And Matthew wasn't very fond of this idea.

Yet Colman wasn't afraid of him at all. Standing on the bed, he wrapped his arms around Matthew's neck and started to jump up and down. "Father and son hierarchy doesn't matter in this case. In war, those who win become rulers, and those who lose are reduced to bandits. You taught us this yourself. So, tonight, you're the bandit."

Adkins stated, "The bandit should sleep on his own for a night as punishment."

"Dad, I don't mind your stinky smell, so you can have my room," Boswell suggested.

"Dad, if you're afraid of sleeping on your own, I'll keep you company," Damian offered gently.

Matthew was speechless for a moment. Once he recovered from his momentary shock, he pulled Damian into his arms and glanced at his other three sons and the woman snickering at him. "This won't happen again!"

Then he left the room, closing the door behind him. As soon as he got out, though, he heard the three children's cheers coming from inside the room.

Matthew looked down at his youngest son, who he was carrying under his armpit before straightening him up in his arms. Helplessly, he sighed and said, "I'm counting on you to support me in the future!"

Damian held his father's neck and answered, "Dad, don't worry. I'll make a lot of money to support you and Mom when I grow up."

"Good boy."

Early on the next morning, the other three children didn't seem as brave as they were on the night before. Carefully, they went downstairs to have breakfast, pushing each other forward as they slowly walked towards the dining room.

Eventually, as the eldest child, Adkins, stepped into the dining room. He politely greeted the man with the iPad and his brother, "Dad, Damian, good morning!"

Putting away the iPad, Matthew nodded at the boys and ordered the maids to serve the dishes as usual.

The three kids exchanged looks before Colman found the courage to ask, "Dad, aren't you angry with us?"

Matthew, who was wiping his hands with a wet tissue, paused and glanced at the three kids on the other end of the room. "Why should I be angry with you?" "Are you scared now? What about last night when you pretended to be asleep and set me up? Weren't you thinking about the morning after?" he wondered.

Matthew's words caused the three children to breathe a sigh of relief. Boswell seldom complimented his father, but at that moment, he took the opportunity to do so. "Dad, you're so kind!" Before heading downstairs, the kids were sure that Matthew would be angry for being kicked out of the master bedroom with their brother last night.

Adkins had even decided he was going to sleep with his father the following night in order to comfort the man.

Damian looked at his brothers and took a sip of milk. Then he said, "Don't worry. Dad said that we are his and Mom's children. He can't really get angry with us." Last night, while he had a heart-to-heart conversation with Matthew, the latter revealed this piece of information to him in person.

Matthew's magnanimity brought a mix of guilt, excitement, and happiness to the three children.

"Dad, can I sleep with you tonight?" Adkins finally exposed what he had in mind.

Matthew raised his eyebrows at him and questioned, "You want to drive me out of my room again? Don't even think about it. I want to sleep with my wife!"

Adkins waved his hands at him immediately. "No, no, no. We just felt sorry for you because of what happened last night and reached an agreement that I will sleep with you first, then Boswell and Colman."

'They feel sorry for me?' Matthew put down his unfinished sandwich and said, "If you feel sorry for me, you can sleep on your own from this day forward and just leave your mom to me."

After a moment of hesitation, Boswell asked, "But what about us? We're only three years old. Dad, do you really have the heart to do that to us?"

"Of course I do. As men, shouldn't you be sleeping on your own already?" Matthew's voice remained unaffected. He had spent over three years away from his wife. Now that she was finally back, he still

couldn't have her in his arms to sleep every night. How pathetic!

The four kids looked at each other before Adkins declared, "Dad, let's eat first." 'Since we can't reach an agreement now, we better talk about it later!' he thought.

"Okay," Matthew agreed.

Later that night, Alorith was bustling. Even though it was cold outside, by eight or nine o'clock, the town was still crowded.

As Matthew got caught up in a trip abroad for two days, the four kids were temporarily at Sheffield's house in the care of Evelyn and a group of servants while Erica was out in the city.

The woman wrapped herself up tightly to remain protected from the cold. She had a hat, a mask, a sweatshirt, and trousers on. She was careful to specifically wear only black clothes as she walked in a high-end bar through a side door, not wanting to draw any undesired attention to herself.

As soon as she stepped into the bar, someone spotted her.

A seemingly ordinary man in jeans walked towards her. When he was about to pass by, he whispered, "Erma, they are on the second floor!"

"How many people are there?"

"Six."

"How many of our people have come?"

The man in denim looked around the first floor and answered, "About a hundred or more. Six of them are in Room 205 upstairs."

"Okay, you guys stay here. I'll go upstairs and walk around. I'll be right back."

"Yes, ma'am!"

Erica walked towards the stairs at the end of the bar and went up.

When she reached the second floor, she noticed that it lacked all the noise she was met with on the first floor. She found many waiters on standby in the corridor, and next to them, there were a few bodyguards in black in front of one of the private rooms.

CHAPTER 1404 END UP AS MATTHEW'S WIFE

As soon as Erica opened the fire door, several pairs of eyes looked in her direction.

She closed the door behind her as if nothing happened. A waiter came over immediately and asked politely, "Excuse me, can I help you?"

Erica was dumbfounded for a moment, then flashed him a charming smile. That was when she remembered she wore a mask and he couldn't see her face. "Room 205, please!"

The waiter led her to Room 205. When they passed by Room 206, three bodyguards in black snapped to attention and looked alert.

After entering Room 205 without incident, Erica was relieved by the voices of her henchmen greeting her one by one.

Taking off her hat and mask, Erica asked the people in the room to have a seat. Once everyone did as they were bidden, she asked softly, "Found anything yet?"

"Not yet. I heard them talking about a dock, but we don't know the location or what's going on there. Check out the photo, Erma." One of her minions handed his phone to Erica.

Erica enlarged the pic he took, the result of clandestine activity. She looked at it, but didn't recognize anyone. When she was about to give the phone back to the man, her gaze fell on a particular woman in that photo.

"Wait. Who's that?" She immediately enlarged the photo and re-centered it. Erica looked carefully at the woman holding a man's arm. The woman looked familiar, but she just couldn't figure out why.

She spent more time looking at it, and the longer she stared, the more the woman resembled Noreen.

She gave the phone back to the man, took out her own and called Chantel. "Hey, it's me. You busy now?" she asked.

"No, I just finished a shoot. I'm on my way back." Chantel leaned against the back of the seat wearily. She'd taken on too much work to handle. Fortunately, the day after tomorrow was her day off. She could visit her son.

"Any idea what Noreen is up to, by chance?"

Hearing her mention Noreen, Chantel shook her head and said, "When we humiliated her on the cruise ship, Noreen and I have become mortal enemies. I haven't even so much as bumped into her in forever."

She really hadn't given her a second thought. She had no clue what TV shows she was on or interviews she gave.

"Here's the thing—I ended up at that bar thanks to the intel my brother gave you. Our people snapped a pic of the group. One of them looked like Noreen, but I'm not sure. She wore shades, and it was dark

out. I figured you might have more contact with her than I do," Erica explained.

Gifford told Chantel where this group of thugs was, and she told Erica. It was a rather efficient information pipeline.

"I'll have someone look into it." With something to take her mind off show business, Chantel cheered up quickly.

Erica nodded, "Ask my brother. Your hubby is pretty good at sussing these things out!"

Chantel sighed and answered, "Let me have a crack at it first."

"Okay. I can't wait to find out what you turn up."

If her suspicions were confirmed that Noreen was one of those people in the photo, things would be much easier.

After the two ended their call, Chantel asked her agent first, "Do me a favor. There's an actress, Noreen, that I want to talk to. Can you find out what she's doing tonight? If she's taping, I can catch her afterwards."

"I'll try. But no guarantees." The agent made a few calls, but no one knew.

Chantel had no choice but to call Gifford.

The phone rang twice before someone picked up. "It's me. You home now?" the man asked.

"No," she answered. Chantel was a little nervous talking to him. "I wonder if you could do me another favor."

Instead of replying, Gifford took a deep breath. Finally, he asked, "You've been busy lately. When do you get some time off?"

"I already booked my flight. I'll be there the day after tomorrow," she answered.

"Awesome! Now what do you need?"

Taking a deep breath, Chantel pushed away the excitement and nervousness in the bottom of her heart and asked, "Do you know Noreen?"

Gifford thought for a while, but he didn't remember the name. "No. Should I?"

Amused, Chantel couldn't help but tease him, "She's the 'it girl' in the industry right now. You can't tell me you haven't heard of her."

"I don't really watch TV. Why should I know who she is? And why do you care?" Gifford asked in reply and thought she was just being funny. He didn't run in those circles. The only big star he knew was Chantel. And he liked it that way.

"No, it's not like that. Fine. I just want to know where she was this evening."

"Well, I need a little more info than that."

"Well, she's a big star right now, her full name is Noreen Ortiz, and she's 35. That's really about it, but IMDb is bound to have something on her."

Gifford sighed helplessly. "All right. I'll call if I find anything."

"Okay. Did I disturb you?" she asked.

Gifford smiled, "Little late for that, isn't it? I mean, we just had a conversation, right?"

Chantel blushed. "I was really nervous. After all, Rika's still waiting for the info."

Gifford knew it was his sister who made Chantel come to him for the goods. "Tell her to take care of herself. If anything happens to her, I end up as Matthew's wife!" He really didn't know if that was the case, but he also didn't want to find out, either! Anyway, he and Erica were all Leonard family members.

"You want to be Matthew's wife? I'm sure he'd spoil you," Chantel said, not knowing whether to cry or to laugh.

"You can't be serious. I think we've established which team I'm batting for,"

he said in a serious tone. She seemed to be quite clear about it. "You can prove it to me the day after tomorrow. Now let's focus on that info that your sister wants."

"Okay."

After the two ended the call, Gifford thought he should call Matthew and tell him about it. He was afraid Erica would go off and her husband wouldn't know.

After delegating the task to his men, he dialed Matthew's number.

It was not until the two of them talked on the phone that Gifford realized how bold his sister was. She really wasn't waiting for anyone this time! She not only did what she wanted, but also went there when Matthew was not in the city.

'Erica might not know what these thugs are capable of! She doesn't know how many people they've

killed, and now she goes into the proverbial lion's den to investigate!' he thought to himself.

Matthew was out of town on a business trip and wouldn't be back for a while. After receiving the news, he had to ask Sheffield to gather his bodyguards and head to the bar to protect Erica.

When Sheffield found Erica, Chantel had just hung up the phone. She confirmed to Erica that Noreen was in that establishment.

When Sheffield swaggered into Room 205, Erica looked at him in astonishment. "Sheffield, why are you here?" she asked.

He sat leisurely on the sofa and said, "Your husband called. From thousands of miles away, he gave me this bodyguard duty! I must have done something pretty bad to Carlos and Matthew in the previous life!"

Erica rushed over excitedly and asked in a quiet voice, "Does he know?"

Raising his eyebrows, Sheffield nodded, "Of course. And he was pretty pissed. Rika, do you know how dangerous those guys are? They kill with impunity."

Those people ran in the shadows, while Erica and Chantel were the army of light. And no one knew who was running the show as far as the thugs were concerned.

But Erica wasn't dumb. She explained to Sheffield, "I haven't done anything yet, have I? I just want to make sure it's them. If it's true, I'll call the police or Matthew as backup."

She knew what she was doing, and what kind of danger she was in. That was why she had people in place downstairs, to help her beat a hasty retreat if necessary.

Sheffield looked at Erica up and down and said, "You look like a killer. I thought you came here alone." He made a gesture of rubbing his neck.

Erica was amused. "Have you ever seen a killer in sportswear?"

"No, I have never seen him before." Sheffield's phone rang. It was Matthew.

He answered the phone and called out in an exaggerated effeminate voice, "It's dear Matthew."

CHAPTER 1405 DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER

Matthew rolled his eyes, holding his phone to his ear. "Where's my wife?" he asked on the other end of the line.

"Don't worry. She is right here next to me. Safe and sound. You shouldn't worry about her. She just came here to check something out," Sheffield answered.

"Well, take her back and put a bodyguard on her. We'll talk about it when I get home," Matthew said.

"You got it!" Sheffield didn't hang up the phone. He told Erica, "Let's go, Rika. Your husband asked me to take you home and keep an eye on you!"

Erica reached out her hand and said, "Let me talk to him."

She took his phone from his hand. Before she could say anything, Matthew quickly said, "Don't try to explain anything to me."

The only thing you need to do now is to wait for me at home." Erica let out a sigh of frustration. "All right!" But she still tried to defend herself by saying, "I have my people upstairs and downstairs. They have my back. I'll be fine."

Matthew's voice became colder and colder as he spoke. "Those gangsters have weapons. Are your men armed?"

"Fine! I'll go home, I guess," she said dejectedly. How could her people get weapons? Most of them, especially guns, were illegal! About the only thing they were allowed to carry was pepper spray, and even that was iffy.

"Good girl."

After they both hung up, Erica returned the phone to Sheffield and sighed helplessly. "You ready to go, then?"

Sheffield stood up from the sofa with a smile, and the two walked out of the private room one after the other.

Coincidentally, as soon as they came out, someone opened the door to Room 206. Some people shuffled out.

Sheffield met with the head of the group, a mysterious expression on his face. Before the head of the group saw it, it had all but vanished. With his usual smile, he greeted him gregariously, "Wow, what a coincidence, Michel!"

Michel was a little surprised to see him, and to see Erica behind him. But he smiled and responded in kind, "Oh, Sheffield! Erica! What are you doing here?"

The two men shook hands. Noreen looked at Erica in confusion, and Erica pretended not to notice.

Michel's greeting pulled Erica's thoughts back to reality. "Erica! Doing well, I take it? You haven't aged a day! Uh, where is Matthew?" He also looked behind them to see if Matthew was there.

Erica smiled at him and was about to say something, but Sheffield cut her off. "My brother-in-law is out of the country on a business trip. Erica and he had a little tiff and she went out for a drink. Matthew asked me to make sure she got home okay. Fortunately, I got here quickly. I arrived before she could order any wine!"

It was pretty convincing, if only partially true. Michel was taken in by and seemed satisfied. He nodded and struck a conciliatory tone. "Fights are common among couples. The nice thing is, they don't last long. You should probably go back home and get some sleep. Everything will be fine tomorrow."

Sheffield did his part, and Erica picked up the conversation and ran with it. In cooperation with him, she acted annoyed. "Matthew went too far. He can stay out all night drinking with you, Michel. But he doesn't allow me to drink. Next time you see him, tell him that's messed up."

Michel laughed. "You must be kidding, Erica. I think you give me too much credit."

"I see. Thank you, Michel!" she answered with a smile.

Sheffield shifted position, pretending he had just seen Noreen. Feigning surprise, he asked Michel, "Michel, isn't this the famous star, Noreen?"

There was a flash of emotion in Michel's eyes, but the smile on his face remained the same. "Yes, she's my goddaughter. I have a good relationship with her mother, so I made her goddaughter. Noreen, come and say hello to Sheffield and Erica!"

Noreen walked over. She did as she was bidden. Walking up to Sheffield, she said, "Good evening, Sheffield!" Her smile was more a grimace, showing lots of teeth. A smile that said her toothpaste tasted bad. But when she was face to face with Erica, she looked like she was struggling with that smile. The actress looked angrier than anything. She said reluctantly, "Erica, what a surprise."

Erica did her best to ignore her. Sheffield knew there was bad blood between them, so he tried to smooth things over. "Noreen, I've heard a lot about you. And they're right. The number one actress is beautiful and captivating. Now I have something to tell my grandkids!"

No matter how unhappy she was, Noreen couldn't help smiling at Sheffield. He was handsome, rich and powerful. Not only that, he was exceedingly charming. "Why Sheffield, I'm flattered!"

After some more small talk, they all went downstairs.

They climbed into their cars and went their separate ways. After everyone had driven off, Noreen asked Michel worriedly, "Why was Erica there?"

The polite smile was gone from Michel's face. He didn't have to act the gentleman anymore. With a gleam in his eyes, he ordered his assistant in the front passenger seat, "Is Matthew really gone? Look

into it."

Two minutes later, the assistant answered honestly, "Michel, it looks as if Matthew is really out of town, at least."

Michel nodded, "I hope we're just being paranoid." The last family he wanted to mess with in Alorith was the Hilton family.

He had dealings with them, true. He'd go out for drinks, or attend their dinner parties. But they kept it surface level—work-related topics only.

Holding the man's arm, Noreen said in a spoiled tone, "I'm not happy. Erica humiliated me on that cruise ship. You should help me teach her not to mess with me!"

Michel didn't say anything. He just patted her hand to comfort her. He wasn't about to offend the Hilton family over a woman.

Since he said nothing, Noreen didn't dare to press the issue. Michel was responsible for a lot of her fame. He made videos of her and they went viral. He got her in front of the cameras whenever he could. Even if she wasn't doing anything, she was still famous.

After hanging up the phone with Sheffield, Matthew ordered Owen, "Trace my wife's journey from the slum to Kuflya. I have a sneaking suspicion..." It was obvious that there must be something important and dangerous that Erica hadn't told him.

"Yes, Matthew."

Erica drove here by herself. Sheffield threw his car keys to his bodyguard and got in Erica's car, trying to find out what she was going to do.

Sitting in the passenger seat, Sheffield fastened his seat belt, leaned back, and asked her, deadpan, "Rika, why did you look for those people?"

Erica tightened her grip on the steering wheel, but she didn't say anything in the end. Instead, she asked, "Hey, do you think Michel's involved? I mean, he comes off like a refined scholar, but I think that's just an act."

"Well, I don't know. Anyway, don't judge a book by its cover." Michel's company moved their headquarters to Alorith two years ago. The Wilkinson Group was doing well there, and now had thousands of branches all over the world.

"You talk to him much?" she asked.

Sheffield replied, "Yes, but not as much as Matthew does. I think you should ask your hubby about

Michel."

"Okay."

"Well, if there's really something fishy about Michel, you better stay away from him. I'll ask someone in the gang to dig into his background if you want."

"Thank you, Sheffield!"

Resting his hands behind his head, Sheffield decided to tease her and said, "Rika, why don't you give Colman to me as a gift in return? That's the best way to thank me!"

Playing along, Erica nodded, "Okay. Thanks to you, he's talking about finding a wife every day. Maybe I should just let him stay with you and Evelyn!"

CHAPTER 1406 MIDDLE STAGE OF GASTRIC CANCER

"Hey, Rika, don't try to stir things up here. Let me correct you. I don't need to look for a wife every day because I already have the best wife in the world. Got it? Evelyn would make me kneel on a keyboard again if she heard that!" Sheffield made sure to explain himself clearly, even though he knew it was just a joke.

Erica laughed out loud and said, "Perhaps, I should learn from Evelyn and make Matthew kneel on some durian shells in the future. That man needs to know just how powerful I am!"

"That sounds like a great idea, Rika. You have my full support! If you need any help, just let me know!" Sheffield was amused at the idea of Matthew's misery.

In fact, he was dying to see Matthew crying in pain on a pile of durian shells.

When they arrived at the Pearl Villa District, Erica went straight to Sheffield's villa to see her sons, but they were already in bed with Godwin, ready for sleep.

However, the moment they saw Erica, they jumped out of bed in a split second, yelling her name with excitement. "Mommy!"

Gwyneth, who was telling them bedtime stories, helplessly said, "Aunt Rika, they are so naughty when they are together. It's so hard to get them to lie down in bed!"

Erica turned her face towards the boys, glaring at them angrily, and asked, "Have you been naughty again?"

Adkins immediately apologized, "Mom, I'm sorry. I'm going to bed now!"

As soon as he crawled into the bed, the rest of them followed suit and closed their eyes at once, pretending to be asleep.

Gwyneth chuckled and shook her head with amusement. "Aunt Rika, you're the only one who can deal with them so easily. My voice is starting to become hoarse because I have to keep yelling at them."

Erica whispered in her ear, "These kids can be very considerate as well. They will listen to you if you pretend to be aggrieved."

"I see! I think I understand what you mean, Aunt Rika. I'll be sure to try that out next time."

When Erica returned home, she found an empty villa, full of nothing but loneliness. She took out her phone from her pocket and called Matthew. "Honey, are you asleep?"

"No. What's up?"

"Nothing, it just feels very lonely at home without you." All the maids had gone back to their own quarters for the rest of the day, while Erica was hanging from the railings of the staircase, lazily dragging herself up the stairs.

Matthew snorted in amusement and said, "Really? I thought you were having a good time. If I didn't ask Sheffield to go there, you would still be in the bar, wouldn't you?"

"Well, I had no intentions of hiding anything from you. When I got the news about them, you were on a business trip. What was I supposed to do? So, I took some people with me. Nothing happened! Don't worry about me," she said.

"What if something happened to you today? Who am I going to settle accounts with? Gifford? After all, he's the one who gave you the news in the first place," Matthew argued, furiously.

"Please don't blame Gifford. Otherwise, he won't help me anymore!" Erica stood up straight.

However, Matthew was too upset to care. "So what?" The only person he cared about was his wife.

"Matthew, please stop making such a big deal out of it. I promise I won't do anything before you come back, okay?"

Finally, he got what he wanted and he responded with a resounding sigh of relief. "Hmm."

The two had been talking on the phone for almost half an hour, but since Matthew had to deal with some problems at work, he had to hang up.

Erica decided to call it a night and hit the sack, but soon after, she felt a strong pang of pain in her stomach.

She tossed and turned in bed, and finally pressed the buzzer to ask the maid downstairs to bring her a glass of hot water.

After slowly drinking a glass of hot water, Erica realized that it was pointless, because apart from the momentary pain relief, it did nothing else.

She racked her brain, trying to trace back what she had eaten today to see what was causing her stomach to ache so badly.

The more she tried to think, the sleepier she felt. Eventually, Erica's sleepiness helped her to overcome the pain and she fell asleep.

The next morning, when she woke up and stretched her arms, there was no sign of the pain from the night before.

Erica assumed that the worst was over, until it was near noon, when the unwelcome stomachache returned. This time, the pain seemed to be more severe. In fact, not only was the pain excruciating, but she was also starting to feel nauseous. Soon after, she had no choice but to get herself checked up at the hospital.

Erica had to go through registration, inquiry, examination and other procedures.

The display screen of the hospital was broken. Moreover, Erica was busy playing with her mobile phone, so when she heard someone call her name, she grabbed her bag as quickly as she could and rushed to get the result. However, when she couldn't understand the test result, she passed it to the attending doctor and asked for an explanation.

The doctor looked at the examination result and then slowly shifted his eyes to her. Finally, he pressed her stomach a few times and suddenly asked, "Does it hurt here?"

"Ouch! Yes, it hurts a lot!" she cried.

"Are you 27 years old?"

"Yes, I am!"

The doctor drew back his hand and simply said, "Stomach cancer, stage III."

"Oh... What? What did you say?" Erica's mind went blank even though she was staring at the doctor. Did she hear it wrong?

After confirming her name, the doctor explained to her slowly, "You are going through the middle stages of gastric cancer."

The best treatment at present is to remove most of the stomach." Suddenly, Erica felt as though the sky was crashing down above her. She shivered, as streams of tears traced paths through her cheeks. The doctor continued, "Alas! Young lady, just go through the admission procedures. Don't worry, you are still young. But, even though your life is not in danger, there are still some risks..."

Erica had no idea how she came out of the outpatient room. The people waiting in the corridor stared at her in wonder while her eyes were lowered to the floor, focused on nothing in particular. She couldn't stop crying, as if completely oblivious to the confused gazes of those around her.

She was dying. Cancer...

'Matthew, my sons, my parents, my family... I will have to leave them and won't be able to see them again...'

After walking out of the hospital, Erica fell into deep contemplation and she wondered whether she should find another place to spend her remaining days in. After all, the thought of dealing with the pain of treatment seemed horrifying enough.

However, when she thought of her parents, husband and her children, Erica felt despondent and disheartened. How could she think of doing such a thing to them without even telling them?

Without paying much attention, she somehow managed to pull out her phone and call Matthew. Unfortunately, before she could even figure out what she was going to say to him, the call got connected.

Matthew always answered her calls on time. No matter how busy he was, he wouldn't miss any of her calls.

"Rika?" The man's gentle voice graced her ears from the other end of the line.

The moment she heard him, she burst into tears, failing to control her emotions any longer.

"Matthew..." Erica's voice trembled and her muffled sobs wracked against her chest.

Matthew, who was just now talking business with a client, frowned and walked to the side, while his client gazed at him in confusion. "Rika, what's wrong?" he asked in a worried voice.

However, the woman could barely utter a proper word without bawling or sniffing like a baby.

Matthew could tell that Erica wasn't joking and that something very bad must have happened for her to be in such a state. This time, when he spoke, he sounded quite anxious. "Rika, don't cry. Just tell me what happened."

"I... I...I might be dying... Well, I want to die alone..." In truth, she didn't want anyone to feel sorry for

her.

Her words caused Matthew's face to change dramatically. As he walked out of the room, he patiently tried to comfort her. "What are you talking about? What do you mean you're dying? Just tell me everything clearly."

Erica wiped her face with a tissue and took a few deep breaths to ease her mood. After a minute or so, she explained, "I just came from the hospital... The doctor said I... have...gastric cancer and it is at stage III. Matthew, I don't want to undergo a partial gastrectomy. It hurts so much. I'm afraid of pain..."

"Gastric cancer? Stage III? That can't be right!" Despite his efforts to remain calm while facing problems, Matthew's voice rose in shock.

"But it's true..."

CHAPTER 1407 SUCH A JERK

Furious, Matthew denied in a low voice, "No way! How could you have gastric cancer? What kind of quack did examine you? Go and tell him that his career is over because I'm going to sue him! He will never be a doctor again in his life!"

He had been away for only two days on a business trip, and all of a sudden, he got the news that his wife had middle stage cancer. Before he left, she was just fine. How could he believe such nonsense?

"It's true. I've had a stomachache since yesterday. I went for a check-up today. Let me take a photo of the results for you." Erica knew Matthew was having none of it, and to be honest, she was having a hard time believing the results herself! But what was the point of it? The fact that she had cancer wouldn't change just because they refused to believe it.

"Send it to me!" Matthew ordered and hung up the phone.

Next, Erica took a photo of the exam results and immediately sent it to Matthew.

The moment he got it, Matthew swiped his finger down the photo, ignoring the bunch of words on the top. Reaching the bottom row, he read the results, which confirmed that Erica had middle stage gastric mucus cancer.

The report was made at the Alorith First General Hospital. The names of the gastroscopy operator and the attending doctor were also on it.

Putting his phone away, Matthew took out a cigarette from his pocket and lit it.

As he stared at the view outside the window, he took a drag on the cigarette.

When Owen came over, he found his boss smoking. He then whispered to him, "Matthew, Dave is waiting for you."

Matthew didn't say anything. He simply took another drag on the cigarette.

Once it was about to burn out, he managed to suppress the panic he felt in his heart before he stubbed it out in the trash beside him. Finally, he said in a hoarse voice, "Put the contract with Dave aside and book the earliest flight to Alorith. We need to go back as soon as possible."

Caught off guard, Owen did not resist asking, "Matthew, has something happened in Alorith? The contract with Dave will be signed soon..."

Matthew nodded. "I'll tell Dave about it myself. You arrange a car for the airport right now. We can't wait any longer."

Noticing that something serious must have happened, Owen didn't dare to insist more. "Yes, Matthew."

The moment he had everything settled, Matthew left the company and dialed Erica's number. He wanted to calm her down before she did anything stupid.

Absent-mindedly, Erica drove straight to a river nearby. The phone kept ringing, but only after several rings did she come back to her senses.

Pulling over, she got out of the car and answered the phone without giving Matthew a chance to say anything first. "Matthew, I've calmed down already. In fact, I'm grateful for the opportunity I got to be Wesley and Blair's daughter, your wife, and the mother of my four sons. I'll come into terms with my dying. Well, I guess there is a next life, right?"

Matthew was short of breath, so he tried to calm himself down before comforting her. "Rika, you don't know that because you don't often go to the hospital, but medicine is quite advanced nowadays. It's just middle stage cancer. I'm sure that if you get proper treatment, you'll get better. I've just checked. There are many patients at the advanced stage of gastric cancer who stabilized their condition after regular treatments. The first thing you need to worry about is your state of mind. Don't give yourself up..."

"My state of mind..." With her eyes fixed at the river in front of her, Erica sat on the lawn. She had been in a bad mood since she left the hospital. "Matthew, I think... I think I've lived my whole life in vain. Even though I'm dying, I still don't know whether you love me or not..." She was about to die and never even heard Matthew say that he loved her.

"Why did you say that? Rika, can't you feel my love for you?" Matthew asked. He thought he had already proved his love for her over and over.

"Yes, I can feel it. But you never said it, so how can I be sure if you really love me or not?" Erica couldn't hide the disappointment in her voice.

Sensing her frustration, Matthew got a little flustered. "Do I have to tell you out loud? Well, Rika, listen to me carefully!"

Regardless of how shocked Owen was from the driver's seat, Matthew swore firmly, "I, Matthew Hilton, will only love one person from beginning to end, and this person is none other than you. I love you, for this life, for the next, and forever..." With a roar, he stated at last, "I only love you, Erica!"

Tears streamed down Erica's face. He finally told her that he loved her.

"Don't cry. I love you so much, even more than you love me. I've been feeling this way for a long time already. I can't tell when exactly I fell in love with you. Maybe you were thirteen or fourteen..." At that time, he was only eighteen or nineteen years old, but she was still too young for him. Even if he had all of these feelings for her, he had to suppress them.

Owen was astonished when he heard Matthew's love declaration to his wife. 'Oh my God! Matthew is such a jerk. How could he have fallen in love with Erica when she was only thirteen or fourteen years old?' Owen thought to himself.

"Matthew, I love you too," Erica confessed. Despite the strange looks she kept getting from the passersby, she burst into tears.

She was overwhelmed with joy!

"So from now on, don't cry anymore. I'll take you to the hospital for the most precise examination. If the diagnosis confirms you have middle stage gastric cancer, I'll take you to the best hospital, and you'll receive the best treatment there is. No matter how difficult it is, I'll be with you every step of the way. I won't let you face anything on your own, and in return, you mustn't leave me alone in this world, understood?" Matthew pleaded.

"Understood..." Erica nodded obediently.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Matthew closed his eyes and leaned back in his seat. "Honey, I'm on my way back. Wait for me at home, okay?"

"Did I keep you from your work?" Erica asked, feeling a bit guilty.

"No." In fact, it was his work that kept him from being with his wife when she had to face that terrible news alone.

After a moment of silence, Erica suddenly remembered something she had been wanting to ask him. "Matthew."

"Hmm?"

"Why did you marry me in the first place?" she asked.

Prior to their engagement, Erica asked Matthew why he wanted to marry her. And he said it was to fulfill a request from his father.

Unconvinced, she asked him again after they got married, to which he answered, "I wanted to do everyone else a favor and prevent you from causing trouble to another person."

Now, five years later, she was asking him the same question once more.

This time, he replied, "Because I love you."

With her arms around her legs, Erica buried her head into her knees as she cried and laughed like a fool.

After that, the two kept on the line until Matthew got on the plane and was forced to say goodbye.

"Rika, wait for me."

However, before turning off his phone for the trip, he made one last call to Paige. "Find my wife. You'll keep track of her from now on." Even though Erica promised him she would wait for him, he still feared that the silly girl would suddenly take off to a remote place to die on her own.

"Yes, Matthew," said Paige.

As the hours passed, Erica was still sitting by the river in a daze. Her phone rang several times, but she didn't seem to hear it.

She also didn't drink or eat anything from afternoon to dusk, and then from dusk to night...

"Rika!" a familiar male voice called from behind her.

At his call, Erica woke from her daze as she turned around.

Not so far away, stood a man in a dark suit and a long black overcoat. That man was none other than Matthew.

CHAPTER 1408 I LIKE TO EA

Erica dissolved into tears. The pent up emotions in her heart seemed to find an outlet. Erica threw herself into her husband's arms and cried bitterly.

Matthew took off his overcoat and wrapped it around her. He inhaled her scent and kissed her long hair gently. "Honey, don't cry," he said, trying to comfort her.

'You won't die without my permission!

If the King of Hell wants you, he'll have to defeat me first!' Matthew thought to himself.

Erica didn't say anything and kept crying.

They just stood by the river, holding each other tightly. The woman choked with sobs, while the man reassuring her.

Occasionally, when someone came near, they couldn't help but take a look at them. The sadness of the two people was replaced by warmth and happiness.

Ten minutes later, Matthew suddenly said, "You still have your test results with you? Let me see them again."

With swollen red eyes, Erica took out the crumpled piece of paper from her pocket and handed it to him.

Matthew straightened the paper out so he could read it. On top it said that it was the electronic endoscopy examination report of Alorith First General Hospital. He was not in a hurry to read it. Instead, he asked her a question first, "Did they give you anesthetic before the exam?"

"Anesthetic?" The woman was confused.

"Yes!"

Erica thought for a while and answered, "No." They never gave her anything for the pain, nor did they sedate her. Nothing.

Matthew held her in his arms and asked in a trembling voice, "Silly girl, why didn't you opt for the anesthetic?" Usually, these kinds of procedures involve knocking the patient out using some sort of anesthetic. A tube with a camera is inserted in the throat so the doctors can look around the stomach. It's generally painful even when sedated.

Erica didn't know what was going on. They never offered her anything. She hugged him and said sadly, "It doesn't matter. They'll have to use it when I go under the knife!"

Sighing silently, Matthew continued to read the results.

There was a long paragraph in the middle consisting professional medical instructions. He could understand most of them. "Did the doctor say how you might have developed cancer?"

The woman in his arms shook her head. "I was too sad to ask."

"Why not?" Never mind. He would take her to do the examination again. Do it right this time, ask

questions. No matter what the result was, they would face it together.

Erica was still drowning in sorrow, and couldn't find a lifeline. Matthew suddenly raised his voice and said, "Erica!"

The atmosphere changed abruptly. Things felt different somehow.

"What?" She raised her head and looked at him, her eyes red and swollen from crying.

Matthew stood there, staring at her, a weird expression on his face. Erica couldn't describe it to save her life.

Anyway, he glanced down at the examination results in his hand, and then shifted his gaze to her again. Finally, he asked, "So your name's Erika now?"

Confused, Erica asked, "Are you out of your mind?" Who was she if she weren't Erica?

Matthew clenched his fists and closed his eyes in despair. When he opened his eyes again, he gritted his teeth and asked, "I'm out of my mind? I think that describes you better than me. How carefully did you check that report? Think hard before you answer."

The woman nodded like a chicken pecking rice. "I looked at every line. Why?" She kept reading the line "stage III cancer" over and over. It seemed like she'd read it thousands of times.

"Then why did you cry after you'd checked it so carefully?" He really wanted to strangle the woman in front of him right now.

"I have cancer! Why can't I cry? Want me to laugh instead?" She suddenly let go of the man, feeling that he was insane.

"So your name is Erika? When did that happen?" Since when did she change her name? Did she get Wesley's permission before doing that?

Erica was a little angry and she spat, "Are you insane?" How could he still tease her like that now she was deathly ill?

"You're not sick!"

She thought what Matthew said was a rhetorical remark, so she retorted angrily, "Maybe not! But you are! Stop it!"

Matthew was gobsmacked. He lifted the test results to eye level, pulled out his phone, and turned on the LED light. The exam report was all lit up. "Open your eyes wide and look carefully! You're not sick!"

"Are you crazy? Stop it Matthew, please. I'm not in the mood." Hands on her hips, Erica was now arguing with her husband.

Matthew was tired of going round and round. He felt she was deliberately being obtuse. He put the report in front of her eyes, pointed at the name printed on the paper and gritted his teeth. "Check it out!"

"Erika? So the doctor typed my name wrong. It's not my fault... Wait a minute!" Erica's eyes widened.

She grabbed the exam results and thought she finally got what he was trying to tell her. She was too excited to say much.

"I...I'm not...Erika. My name is Erica. These are not my test results!" She started laughing hysterically. She was so excited that she was about to cry.

Suppressing the complex emotions in his heart, Matthew asked her again calmly, "Look at the procedure. Did they jam a camera down your throat?"

"A camera...down my throat?" Erica silently lowered her head and took out her cell phone. She looked up what it was, checking Google to make sure Matthew's description was accurate.

She wiped her tears and screamed excitedly, holding Matthew in her arms. "They didn't do anything like that to me. These results aren't mine at all. I don't have cancer. Hahaha!"

Matthew rolled his eyes. After a long while, he gritted his teeth and squeezed out, "Know what I think? I think you lied to me so I'd confess to you."

He wondered how she got hold of such a thing.

"No, I didn't. I really had a stomachache when I went to the hospital. Look at you! You didn't care about me at all. And now you start flinging crazy accusations at me..." Erica's voice faded away in the man's disgusted eyes.

At last, she pulled a long face and said, "So you aren't happy that I don't have cancer?"

Seeing her like this, Matthew felt a dull pain in his temples. He picked her up and left the river bank.

In the following days, Matthew forced Erica to go to another private hospital, one owned by Hilton Group. After a short exam, the doctor consulted with Matthew. "I think it was just a garden-variety stomachache. She ate a star fruit, and those things are high in acid. So it gave her a sour stomach for a few days.

She should be alright now."

In the ward

With a cold face, Matthew asked the woman in the bed who was having an infusion, "Where did you get the star fruit anyway?"

Realizing that she was in the wrong, the woman tried to make herself as small as possible. "I went to a farmer's market and bought it from an old woman..." She ate it all. It was the size of a baby's fist and tasted sweet and sour.

But it was not her fault. The old lady said the fruit was fresh.

When he heard that, Matthew was really pissed off. His tone became colder and colder. "Don't we have enough fruit at home?"

The walk-in fridge at home was always full since Erica and their four sons were living in the villa together. They had no end of food, including twenty or thirty kinds of fruits.

"All right, all right. It's all my fault. I like to eat. Don't get mad at me!" Fortunately, she got what she wanted. She was trying hard to control her emotions and stop herself from laughing out loud.

The man's sleeves were half rolled up, and he stood by the bed with his hands on his waist. It was obvious that he wanted to settle accounts with her to the end. "Seriously? You're laughing now!" he snapped.

"Can't help it. Sorry?" she said in a weak voice.

Matthew didn't know how to respond. 'What do I do? I can't stay mad at her forever. She's my wife, and I love her more than life itself!' he told himself.

"I need you to write a list of your faults. No less than a thousand words. Don't go to bed until you finish it!" he ordered.

'What?' She hadn't written something like that in more than ten years. Pitifully, she raised her left hand, which an IV needle was taped to, and said, "How about not?"

CHAPTER 1409 I CAN CHANGE MY MIND

When Paige came in holding a pair of lunch boxes, she happened to see all this. Trying not to laugh, she told Matthew, "Matthew, Erica, I've got your midnight snacks."

Erica's eyes lit up. She immediately sat up straight and said with a smile, "Paige, you wouldn't happen to have bought me seafood porridge?"

Paige glanced at the man next to her, who still had a long face, and shook her head at Erica. "Matthew

said you had a belly ache. I got millet porridge with yam. I hope that's okay, because Matthew asked me to get something light and digestible for you." 'But I got seafood porridge for him, ' she thought.

With a grim face, Matthew snorted, "If you've got gastritis, seafood porridge should be the last thing you eat. Did you think I'd let your hurt yourself?"

"No, no. You don't get it. I wanted to make sure she got some for you." Erica didn't dare admit what she really thought.

To her surprise, the man said indifferently, "Well, she did get me some. And it's yummy, thank you very much."

Erica lapsed into stupefied silence.

A few minutes later, she looked at the man eating seafood porridge next to her and sighed in her heart. He made her watch him eat that on purpose. She couldn't eat so much as a single mouthful of his savory porridge, but she could only eat the bland and tasteless millet porridge.

The man seemed to know what she was thinking. He deliberately picked up a piece of sirloin, taking his time looking at it before finally popping it into his mouth. After chewing it at a leisurely pace, he said slowly, "Yes, I did it on purpose. I let you watch me eat, knowing you can't take a single bite." He figured this would teach her a lesson. See if she tried to eat anything without thinking about it next time. She was even more careless than her four three-year-old sons.

Erica was upset, but she held it in. She had to say, "No matter. It's good. Porridge and vegetables! I can lose some weight too!" What else could she say? Matthew was convinced he was right, and there was no use fighting over it.

"Well, then eat some more."

She pouted seeing his smug look. 'What a jerk! When I get better, I'll show him. I'll grab steaming bowls of hot and sour rice noodles, spicy hot pot, boiled fish with golden pepper... I'll eat them in front of him, too.'

That night, Matthew wore a long face the whole time, both when around her, and off to the side working on his laptop.

The ward was so quiet that Erica felt uneasy. After tolerating the dead silence for two hours, she finally couldn't stand it anymore. "Matthew."

The man looked up at her and remained silent.

"You just don't want to confess to me, do you? Otherwise, why are you mad at me all the time? So go ahead. Get pissed off. Can you take back what you said to me?" Before he could explain, she continued,

"You can't go back in time. It's too late. I waited so long to hear your confession of love, so I recorded it and saved it to the cloud. I'll listen to it on my phone whenever I want!"

Matthew was confounded. He put down the documents in his hands and came to her. Hands in his pockets, he stood by the bed and looked at her indifferently. "Who told you I was angry because of that?"

'So that's not why?' Erica was confused. "Is it because I ate a bad piece of fruit?"

The man didn't say anything, which meant yes.

She was suddenly enlightened. "I told you that I won't eat it again. It's not worth staying mad over, right? My battery's dead, and you won't charge my phone for me. I'm so bored."

Matthew remained unmoved.

Erica became listless in an instant and muttered in a quiet voice, "I missed you day and night when I was in Tow Village. Now I finally can see you every day, but you're just being impossible. Ugh! I can hardly stand to be around you." Under the man's cold eyes, she boldly snorted, "Humph! You are always so cold. I'm your wife, not your enemy! It almost makes me want to run away again!"

"Didn't you say you would be a fool to run away again?" Matthew said flatly.

'Oh, did I say that? It doesn't matter. I'm a girl. I can change my mind whenever I want!' So, she nodded and said, "So, yeah, I guess I am a fool!"

'Now I can run away!'

The man was first stunned by her words, and then chuckled. He had never been angry, and now he couldn't pretend to be cold to her, either.

He really couldn't do anything about her behavior. He placed her hand gently under the quilt and said in a soft and loving tone, "It's late. Get some rest. I'll take you home later."

Seeing the smile on his face, Erica nodded proudly. "Okay, then you're not mad anymore?" She would have gone to bed if she hadn't considered his feelings.

He bent over and kissed her forehead. "No. Now go to sleep."

Hearing his promise, she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

Erica asked Matthew not to tell anyone she'd been in the hospital. Especially her family, including her four kids. She was okay now, and she didn't want to worry anyone. She cared about them too much to do that.

Late at night, Matthew cautiously carried the sleeping woman to their bed. He laid her down gently, but she woke up. She opened one of her eyes and looked at the man in a daze. "We're home?"

"Yes. Go to sleep. I need a shower."

"Okay!"

When he came out of the bathroom after the shower, Erica was sleeping soundly. He tucked her in and then went to the study.

In the study

Matthew phoned Owen, and his assistant reported everything he'd learned to his boss. "Orange, a member of the FC group, suffered from heart disease. He died three years ago. His PR guy announced that he died of a heart attack at home, but in fact, he died in jail. Before this, he was a good friend of Erica. He and his associates took good care of your wife in Kuflya when she was pregnant. Orange was closer to her than any of the others. To protect her, he let himself be framed and arrested. He never lived to serve his full sentence."

It began to drizzle outside. Matthew stood in front of the window listening to both the raindrops and the report. "The person who framed Erica and Orange was Kirk. You defeated him in Tow Village. His gang is quite powerful, and have a bad reputation. After that group of people were put behind bars, Erica also sent someone to secretly investigate who Kirk's boss might be. He's a mysterious man, and even Kirk doesn't know who he is."

Owen paused, and then continued, "Oh, one more thing. In the past few years, Chantel, Erica and Tessie have been creating their own power base."

Matthew was stunned for a second and asked in a quiet voice, "Are you kidding me?"

"Never, sir. Their gang is called the Violet Eagles. At first, it was a small group led by a man named Latham Ballard. Later, Chantel took over, and the three women began to increase the size and scope of the group. According to reports, the group is several thousand strong. Half of them came to Alorith with Erica, and the remaining half are spread out in Kuflya and Askor."

Owen's report on the Violet Eagles was quite detailed.

From the investigation, Matthew could see that Erica rooted out Kirk's group and continued to figure out the mastermind behind him in order to avenge Orange.

He remembered she went to the bar last night. After getting off the phone with Owen, he called Sheffield immediately afterwards.

Fortunately, Sheffield was quite busy with work of his own, so he hadn't gone to bed yet. It was already three in the morning. When he saw the caller ID, he answered it and said in a playful voice, "Hey, Matthew. It's pretty late. You miss me?"

Without further ado, Matthew go straight to the point. "Who did you see in the bar?"

After thinking for a bit, Sheffield got serious and answered truthfully, "Michel, Noreen, and three others I didn't know. What happened to Rika?"

"After doing some digging, I figured out the one she's looking for is probably Michel..." Matthew didn't think Noreen had anything to do with it. She would never hang around with gangsters.

CHAPTER 1410 I WILL TEACH HER A LESSON

If it turned out that Michel was indeed the mastermind behind Kirk and his gangsters, then there was more to him than everyone had anticipated. Even before Hilton Group started to cooperate with Wilkinson Group, Matthew had asked someone to make a thorough investigation on Michel's background, but they couldn't find anything suspicious about him.

"You mean Michel is manipulating the contraband trade in secret?" Sheffield asked. Matthew had told Sheffield about what Erica had been doing in Tow Village to some extent, and as such, he had a rough idea about who she was looking for.

"If I'm not mistaken, that's it," Matthew replied with some certainty. The information from Gifford was flawless and accurate. Moreover, Sheffield and Erica did bump into Michel when they were coming out of the bar.

"I also sent people from the gangland to investigate Michel, but they couldn't find anything on that man," said Sheffield. As he clutched his chin in a pensive manner, the more Sheffield thought about this mysterious man, the more curious he was.

He decided to have his people keep a close eye on Michel, just to ensure the safety of his sister-in-law, Erica.

"I'll call Gifford and touch base with him. Good night."

"Okay."

By the time Matthew finally found Gifford on the phone, the latter had already returned to the Leonard family's house and walked up to the second floor. There was no one else there with Gifford as his wife was supposed to be back the next day.

Gifford answered the phone and whispered, "Why are you calling me in the middle of the night? Why aren't you asleep in the arms of your loving wife?"

"The information you gave Rika—where did you get it?"

"Oh, two days ago, I took a group of people to destroy the den of a notorious gang. After being tortured, the group of gangsters told me that they were going to make a deal in a bar in Alorith in two days. I put two and two together and realized that I had found the clues Rika was looking for." Gifford stopped at the door of his son's room and quietly leaned against it instead of going inside.

"Have your men pay more attention to Michel, the CEO of Wilkinson Group in Alorith. I'm sure you'll find something fishy if you look hard enough."

"All right! Got it! Sounds like you're onto something. Just leave it to me and I'll look into it." There was a sense of urgency in Matthew's tone which led Gifford to strongly believe that Michel was not an ordinary person. Fortunately, Gifford was eager and ready to take up the challenge.

Just like that, Matthew, Sheffield and Gifford joined hands to fight for Erica.

But before Gifford could hang up the phone, Wesley pushed the door of his bedroom open and walked out in his pajamas.

As he looked at his son standing in the hallway, he frowned and said, "I had a feeling it was you."

"Old man, how are you still so vigilant? Isn't it supposed to fade at least a little with your age?" Every time Gifford thought he was being stealthy, his father would still find him out no matter what.

Could it be because of Gifford's lack of skills or was it Wesley's high vigilance?

Squinting his eyes towards his son's hand, Wesley noticed that Gifford was talking to someone on the phone. "Who are you talking to in the middle of the night?"

"Your son."

After a short pause, Wesley understood that he was referring to Matthew. "What happened?"

"No, actually your precious daughter ended up offending a big shot. Matthew was just worried about her!" Indeed, Erica's reputation of being a troublemaker was undisputed. The moment she was seen in public after a few years, she ended up getting in the bad books of a dangerous person.

'A big shot?' Wesley's facial expression had a slight change. He quickly walked over, grabbed Gifford's phone and put it to his ear. "Matthew, how is Rika now?"

"Dad, don't worry. She has gone to bed. She is fine now. I will keep an eye on her."

Wesley breathed a sigh of relief after learning that the girl was safe and sound. At the same time, he

suggested, "Make sure she doesn't go anywhere alone. She can be quite difficult, but if you think she's being too much, just send her back and I'll teach her a lesson!"

"Yes, I will keep an eye on her."

"This girl will never grow up! Don't hesitate to bring her to me when she's gone too far. I know what to do with her!"

Matthew couldn't help but chuckle at Wesley's words. His father-in-law and Carlos were more and more alike. They were just duplicitous! 'Bring Rika to him and let him teach her a lesson? Would Wesley have the heart to do so?' Matthew wondered in silence.

"Okay, Dad! You should get some rest. I'll handle it from here."

"Well, you've been working hard all day. Don't stay up late. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

"Yes. Good night, Dad."

Wesley returned the phone to Gifford.

Gifford eventually spoke out what Matthew was thinking in his heart. "You want him to bring Rika to you so you can teach her a lesson? Do you still have the stomach for that kind of stuff? Why don't you just ask Matthew to punish Rika instead?"

Wesley took off one of his slippers and waved it at Gifford angrily. "Why do you spew so much nonsense out of your mouth? You, young men are careless. What if Matthew hits Rika too hard and accidentally causes her internal injuries?"

Gifford dodged his father and said, "That's impossible! Matthew treats your naughty daughter better than you do. Erica left him and disappeared for more than three years without saying a word. I heard that when she went back to him, he didn't even raise his voice to her. He would never hurt Rika! I think you're wrong about him."

Wesley dropped his slipper on the floor and wiggled his foot inside. Needless to say, he knew just how much Matthew loved Erica. However, he was just afraid that one day Matthew would run out of patience with his naughty daughter. What if Matthew lost his temper one day?

Wesley, however, didn't continue on this topic any more. "Just kiss your son goodnight and go to bed!"

"Right, good night, old man!"

This time, Wesley didn't even look at him as he quietly went back to his room.

Gifford walked into his son's room with a cheeky smile. The little boy was sound asleep, clutching his

favorite quilt between his tiny fingers. Gifford sighed, looking at him with affection before he pulled out the quilt and tucked his boy inside safely.

He decided that he was going to sleep in his son's room tonight.

Much to his surprise, however, even after waiting for a whole day and a half, there was still no sign of Chantel.

Meanwhile, scandalous news of Chantel and Red, the leader of the FC group, entering the same building at midnight was released on the Internet.

It was nearly two days after the agreed time that the heroine in the news finally rushed back to the villa of the Leonard family.

Wesley and Blair had just gone out for a walk after dinner. The only people in the living room were Gifford and his son.

The moment Hugo saw his mother come in, he threw away the toys from his hands and ran to her. "Mommy!"

Chantel picked up her son with little difficulty and kissed him on the cheek. "Good boy." Then she looked at the expressionless man sitting with his lips sealed and awkwardly apologized, "I'm sorry. I was planning on coming back yesterday, but something important came up in Kuflya, so I..."

Gifford knew what she was going to say next, so he cut her short. "Something important? You mean when you went inside the same building with another man in the middle of the night?"

With her son still in her arms, Chantel froze for a moment. Due to her best efforts to suppress the news, Chantel didn't expect Gifford to find out so soon.

"No, I just saw the news too. I was just in the same building with Red, but he was staying a floor above me." The paparazzi that photographed her deliberately made it look like she and Red were engaged in a morally questionable activity.

Without a word, Gifford came over and took the boy from her arms. "So he's in a favored position to get close to you?" he said.

Chantel had nothing to say. Since she had to visit Kuflya quite often, Chantel decided to buy an apartment there. She had just stayed there a few times after she bought it. The idea of having to sell the new apartment just to avoid suspicion seemed a little absurd to her.

However, the man, who was climbing up the stairs with his son in his arms, suddenly stopped and turned around to look at the woman. "Don't people in the entertainment circles often play Weibo or something like that? You should probably come clean about everything on Weibo."

