

## Chapter 142

### Are You Forcing My Hand?

Stella endured her pain and stood up, thinking that she would need to increase her dose of medicine to treat her condition. As soon as she rose to her feet, she collapsed into Matthew's arms and burst into tears. In response to her reaction, Matthew gently patted her and said, "It's okay! It's okay! Everything is going to be fine eventually!" At that moment, Stella briefly contemplated before agreeing to the man's words. He is right. Time can heal everything, and I won't feel the pain anymore sooner or later.

In the meantime, Stella was thinking of expanding her business lately but was held back due to a shortage of manpower. Besides, outsourcing the production to a third party didn't seem feasible to her since it was hard to find labor with reliable technical skills. Furthermore, she had recently just received an order from Murdough with a given deadline, which was why she was in such a desperate need of recruiting more manpower. Thus, she could only borrow some extra hands from some other companies in the same industry. It was then that she immediately thought of the man whom she was living with. Wait a second! Matthew's company also runs a fashion and clothing business. Perhaps I could borrow some of his employees to rush my production.

Coincidentally, Matthew had just recruited over 200 people before the new year. He had just finished training them, and they were not urgently needed to meet any tight deadlines, so he directly agreed to spare Stella fifty workers without hesitation. Needless to say, Stella happily thanked Matthew for his kindness when both of them sat on the couch and discussed the matter.

"Don't worry about it. We're a family anyway!" Matthew casually said.

"That's right," Stella bashfully replied.

Meanwhile, Zachariah, who was doing his homework, was happy at the sight of the lovely interaction between Matthew and Stella. However, as a child, he didn't know how to describe what was lacking, even though he somehow had a feeling that something was missing between the two adults. He would surely be able to tell that both of them were being too polite and reserved to each other if he were a decade older, as he would be mature enough to understand what was missing—love.

When Stella's mind was put to ease, she finally decided to head upstairs and rest. Nonetheless, she couldn't help but feel confused when she realized she had several orders with special requests for her own personal design. These custom designs were not cheap, and the clients would usually place orders for several clothings for her to design in one go. This was precisely what baffled her because she had received quite a few such orders lately. Nonetheless, she was forced to put her curiosity behind her, as her professionalism forbade her to pry into her clients' privacy.

As Stella continued to receive more and more similar orders, she noticed that those customers shared the same few things in common—they were young, rich, and arrogant. Thus, they didn't treat Stella kindly upon seeing her as they sized her up in a mean and harsh manner. Unwilling to lose her customers, Stella put up with their snobbish attitude while going about her job. When she had to take their body measurements, she crouched on the floor like a professional tailor, yet her dedication unknowingly became a submissive gesture that fed her customers' ego.

On one occasion, Stella bent over to jot down the measurements she had taken when serving a customer. At that moment, her hair that was hanging on her flank made her look especially gorgeous. "You look pretty, Miss Johansson!" Although the customer looked like she was raised in a wealthy family, she treated Stella with humility and courtesy, unlike the other customers. In fact, the compliment just naturally came out of her mouth when she noticed Stella's charming reticence at the time she was writing.

In response, Stella only smiled in silence, not knowing why her customer would praise her. People hardly approach designers in the factory themselves. I wonder how it even occurred to them to do that.

Occupied by one order after another, Stella was so busy that she didn't even have time to go back to Matthew's mansion. Thus, she has been staying in the factory after work. One day, when she passed by the sewing department, she overheard one of her workers talking on the phone. "Are you going back there? Because I don't feel like going back anymore. Tailoring may require longer working hours, but it's still less demanding than working in the construction site. Furthermore, President Johansson treats us pretty well." Having heard that conversation, Stella didn't read too much into it before she quickly moved on.

The reason behind her piling custom design orders by rich young ladies was revealed not long later, when one of her customers came to collect her dress. After she put it on, she stood in front of the mirror, all the while peeking at Stella in the reflection with a provoking gaze. Nevertheless, Stella ignored her provocation and reacted with a gentle compliment. "You look gorgeous!"

"Which of us do you think is prettier, Miss Johansson?" the customer asked.

Stella looked down with a faint smile. "Well, all of my customers are beautiful ladies."

"Do you think I could win over President Grant's heart, then?" she asked again.

Upon hearing the name, Stella's heart raised like a jackhammer, her mind wondering why the lady would mention Miles.

"President Grant is looking for a wife, and I heard many have failed to catch his eye. Since everyone in the Hollowcrest City is saying that you dumped President Grant, I've come to study your dressing style myself. I heard you design all your clothes and dresses by yourself in this factory, so I've specially come to have you design a dress for me. Do you think President Grant will fall for me, Miss Johansson?" The lady laughed haughtily, feeling jealous of Stella's past relationship with Miles. After all, she didn't understand why Stella would leave Miles and marry Matthew later on. Deep down, she reckoned that Stella couldn't bring herself to tie the knot with Miles since their marriage would not be her first one. Thus, she deemed that Stella had chosen Matthew, who had also divorced before, as a result. Well, she is indeed a perfect match with Matthew Xenon in every way.

Stunned by her response, Stella said, "I'm not sure what kind of girl is up to President Grant's liking, but I suppose you'll win him over as long as you're consistent and dedicated."

The customer tilted her head and asked, "Really?" Her disbelief was obvious, and her sarcastic words were accompanied by a provocative tone.

Nonetheless, Stella still nodded in response. She sank into her chair as soon as the customer left. While everyone in Hollowcrest City knew about her story with Miles, they all reckoned that Stella, a divorcee, was undeserved for gaining the affection of an outstanding man like Miles. Because of that, gossip spread across the city with some ridiculing Miles for being blind, while others believed that Stella had given him a love potion.

Nothing lasts forever since all good things must come to an end. Anyway, I'm happy that he is at least doing something for his own love life, and I believe he'll meet the right person one day. The thought of that put a smile on Stella's face. It seems that all the ladies who came to me recently have the same purpose—to learn more about me and my dressing style, as well as to annoy me. Nevertheless, only Stella herself knew the actual reason behind her separation with Miles, as she wouldn't have walked away from him if the situation was permissible.

After completing all the orders, Stella decided to head back to the Xenon Residence, where she saw Matthew smoking upon arrival. Knowing that the man hardly smoked, she curiously asked, "Are you okay?"

"Do you know where those workers you got from me were from?" Matthew asked.

Stella shook her head in response, recalling the tele-conversation that she overheard earlier that day when she walked past the sewing department.

"Stella, I hail from a rural village, and I left home at a very young age. I may not have returned home for years, but I know how tough it is to make a living there. Thus, I can empathize with those people and understand their struggle to make ends meet," Matthew answered in a frustrated manner.

Although Stella was aware of Matthew's backstory, she cluelessly wondered why he would bring it up.

"Those 200 people were the ones who lost their jobs at Miles Conglomerate, so I took them in and trained them, yet Miles Conglomerate wants them back now!" Matthew could barely contain his temper. "I can't afford to lose them, not after I've spent so much time training and familiarizing them with the production. What're we going to do if they leave?"

Upon hearing the man's words, Stella frowned as she soon recalled the news that she saw earlier and remembered that their contracts were still valid, which would give Miles the right to summon those people back to his company. Soon, she deduced that the call her worker received earlier that day must have been from their previous supervisor who wanted them to return to Miles Conglomerate. At the same time, she was quickly dismayed by a thought. Oh, man! Why does it seem like I can't stay away from Miles? It's like he is everywhere no matter where I go. Is it because Hollowcrest City is too small for us to stay apart?

"What do you think about the matter, Stella?" Matthew wanted to hear Stella's opinion.

"I don't know. I just don't want to have anything to do with him!" As soon as she finished her sentence, Stella went upstairs to seek some solitude. Then, she found herself in a dilemma, in which she couldn't bring herself to pick a side between Miles and Matthew. If worse comes to worst, I'll just return all fifty workers back to Matthew. If it weren't for me, he wouldn't be shorthanded right now! I can't bring myself to cause such trouble to him.

Deep down, Stella planned to divorce Matthew right away as soon as Miles found a girlfriend. After all, she was guilty of using Matthew as a tool to keep Miles away from her. Meanwhile, Jane hadn't contacted Stella for a while, but the latter believed that Jane had already learned about her marriage with Matthew and was probably unhappy about it. Therefore, she didn't get in touch with Jane, thinking that she would nag at her.

In the meantime, Matthew was forced to meet Miles again since this was a matter between the two men. After all, his company's production could be paralyzed by the sudden shortage of manpower if those 200 workers just left their posts. Because of that, his company could be faced with a huge loss.

"Miles, can I borrow your 200 workers for one more month? You laid them off, but now you want them back. This shouldn't be the way things are done," Matthew helplessly said. Despite his reluctance to get in touch with Miles, he didn't seem to have any other choice.

Miles smiled indifferently and replied, "You took what's mine away, but I'll always find ways to get it back!"

Confused with the ambiguous meaning behind Miles' words, Matthew could only assume that he was referring to those 200 workers.

"Some of them are still working in Stella's factory, so I'll try my best to summon them for you."

By mentioning Stella's name, Matthew was hoping that it would soften Miles up and stall him since he reckoned Miles would never hurt Stella. Therefore, he decided to bet on it and push his luck.

As expected, Miles responded with silence before he coldly asked, "Are you trying to force my hand?"