

## **In A Flash 41**

### Chapter 41

“Don’t move.” Leslie hesitated for a moment, then he continued, “You’re quite busy, aren’t you? Meeting someone and then returning to make ravioli.”

“Someone?” After a moment of contemplation, Aurelia questioned, “Did you see me with Seth?”

“Are you worried that I saw you? Aurelia, have you forgotten? It’s written in our cohabitation agreement that neither of us should stray away during our marriage.”

“I didn’t stray! It was him...”

“If you remember our agreement, there’s no need for an explanation. Let me make it clear. I’m not accustomed to being cheated on,” Leslie coldly stated. He then released her wrist and walked out of the kitchen.

After feeling that her hand was in less pain, Aurelia turned off the tap and followed.

Leslie was eating ravioli with a cold demeanor that made him seem unapproachable. Aurelia hesitated, then sat across from him, contemplating how she should explain it.

“Mr. Synder, I...”

“I’m done eating, thank you,” Leslie politely interrupted and kept Aurelia at a loss for words. It was clear that he didn’t want to continue the previous conversation.

She could only ask, “Does it taste okay?”

“It’s a bit salty,” replied Leslie truthfully.

Glancing at the bowl, Aurelia had her doubts. "Salty? You've even finished the broth."

"I don't like wasting food," he countered.

"A compliment won't hurt even if it's good," Aurelia muttered.

Leslie squinted his eyes and asked, "What did you say?"

"Nothing."

He did not probe further and pointed at the bowl. "Leave it. I'll wash it myself."

"Good. At least, he's willing to do the dishes himself," pondered Aurelia.

Aurelia was about to nod when something came to mind. "Hold on, Mr. Synder. Could you help me fix the guest bathroom's shower? I've been cleaning myself using a basin lately. If it's not repaired soon, I might start smelling musty."

Leslie frowned upon hearing it. He had completely forgotten about this issue. Household chores and repairs were usually handled solely by Daniel.

Aurelia approached him and said, "When I was cleaning earlier, I found a toolbox in the cabinet along with a new shower head. You just need to replace it. You... Can do that, can't you?"

Although Aurelia was an adopted child, her father, William, had always doted on her and Ava. They would share the household chores. Whenever something broke, William would take care

of it. Hence, she instinctively believed that all men could handle such tasks.

Noticing the doubt on Aurelia's face, Leslie asserted, "I can."

“Great! I’ll get the items. You can start dismantling it in the bathroom.” Leaving those words, she turned to retrieve the toolbox and the new shower head from the cabinet before heading to the bathroom.

Meanwhile, inside the bathroom, Leslie stared at the showerhead with his brows furrowed. He tried to tug it following his instinct, but it did not work.

“Should we twist it?” Aurelia reminded softly.

“I know,” Leslie replied.

In embarrassment, he twisted the connection of the water pipe and removed the shower head. Aurelia promptly handed over the new shower head and pipe to Leslie.

While taking the items, Leslie noticed Aurelia observing him intently. For an inexplicable reason, he didn’t want to let her down. Thus, he carefully compared and studied them before installing each part.

After finishing everything, he breathed out a sigh of relief. Thankfully, it was not too hard.

“Give it a try,” he instructed casually.

“Okay,” Aurelia replied. She could not help but marvel at how intelligent people seemed to know everything.

## Chapter 42

The moment Aurelia turned on the tap, water gushed out from the seam of the shower head like a fountain.

She was caught off guard and could not react in time. Leslie instinctively raised his hand to shield her, but it was too late. In just a few seconds, they were both thoroughly drenched. Aurelia squinted her eyes and struggled to turn off the tap. She then turned to see water droplets on Leslie's hair.

They meandered across his handsome face. Tracing down his alluring collarbone, the water droplets then disappeared into his shirt. The damp clothes clung tightly to his body. It revealed his contour, even in that area... Everything was laid bare.

Flustered, Aurelia's face flushed red, and she immediately averted her gaze. When she looked back, she found Leslie glaring at the malfunctioning shower head. His expression resembled one where he was observing an adversary. Despite the seriousness on his face, Aurelia found it strangely amusing.

A chuckle escaped her lips, and eventually, she couldn't hold back her laughter.

"What's so funny?"

"Mr. Synder, it seems that you can't fix it. My mistake, I took it for granted," Aurelia said, trying to stifle her amusement.

Leslie's expression grew grimmer. Yet, his gaze couldn't seem to shift away from Aurelia's face.

Her damp, disheveled brown hair framed her fair face and her rosy lips parted slightly. Such a disarrayed look inadvertently evoked a sense of vulnerability. As the water trailed down, it soaked through her white shirt. The outline of her contour and her undergarments presented beneath the loose clothing.

Leslie restrained himself and looked away. He grumbled, "Stop laughing."

"Fine." Aurelia coughed lightly. She sensed that she might have gone a little overboard.

It was obvious that Linda pampered Leslie, so it wasn't unusual for him not to know how to change the shower head. At least he did not refuse and tried his best to install it.

It was a stark contrast to Seth, who was also raised lovingly by his mother, Rosa.

Aurelia remembered seeing Seth help Rosa change a light bulb once. Back then, she had thought that he was a filial and decent man. However, when she asked for help with a similar task, Seth claimed that he was unable to do it. He even mocked modern women for their incompetence in such basic tasks.

It was trivial and Aurelia had not paid much attention to it. However, with the comparison now, she realized that her emotions had shaded her view of Seth all along. With the filter removed now, Aurelia saw herself as naive and Seth as self-centered.

A towel suddenly landed on her head and interrupted her thoughts.

Leslie, drying his hair, nonchalantly suggested, "It's too late. We'll handle it tomorrow. You can use my bathroom. I'll be in the study."

"Okay," she responded while she clutched onto the towel.

She could tell that Leslie didn't have any work to do in the study. He simply didn't want her to feel awkward. She walked towards the door. Seemingly a little too absorbed in her thoughts, she accidentally stepped into a puddle.

"Ahh!"

Aurelia slid and bumped into Leslie, and both of them fell to the ground. Her lips hit the button on Leslie's chest, causing her to cry out in pain.

Instinctively, Leslie wrapped his arms around her as they fell. The soft collision between them disrupted his breath and stirred an unexplained restlessness in his otherwise composed body.

Aurelia, too, sensed Leslie's unusual reaction. Her face instantly turned red, and she quickly got up while covering her throbbing lips.

“I’ll go and take a shower. Goodbye, no... I mean, good night. Umm, that’s it.”

Her words were disjointed, as if she was trying to emphasize that she had realized something. Aurelia then made her escape into the master bedroom with a blushing face.

Leslie lied on the floor with his hands clenched into fists. He took a moment to regain composure and sat up calmly. However, the warmth in his palms lingered and refused to dissipate.

Had Aurelia felt shy earlier?

Didn’t she have an ex-boyfriend?

“Why did she appear so clueless?” Leslie questioned inwardly.

Thinking about her ex-boyfriend led Leslie to involuntarily consider their past intimacy. They might have performed even more excessive actions.

Displeased by his thoughts, he clenched his fists again. His expression displayed obvious signs of discontent as he entered the study.

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Chapter 43

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As soon as Leslie entered the study, he took off his damp shirt and wrapped a towel around waist. His well-toned, slender silhouette cast a reflection on the glass window.

He leaned casually against the desk and lit a cigarette. The wisps of smoke curling around him highlighted a hint of danger and nonchalance in his demeanor.

After a while, he seemed to recall something. Leslie settled at the computer and launched a Google search. Daniel's call came in coincidentally.

"Mr. Synder, the headquarters had compiled Synder Corporation's recent financial situation. As expected, it's not looking good this year."

"The new product's launch has been delayed due to chip issues. If we can't find a replacement chip soon, the new product might end up as a failure," reported Daniel with concern.

"No rush. We'll talk about it tomorrow," Leslie replied, seemingly unfazed.

"Huh? Mr. Synder, are you occupied right now?" Daniel was puzzled. He wondered if there could be anything more pressing than work for Leslie.

"Yeah. I'm on Google," replied Leslie, as he typed a query in the search bar while holding his cigarette.

"Google? What are you searching for? Do you need my help?"

"How to install a shower head."

Daniel was at a loss for words. It was first about washing dishes, and now installing a shower head. He wondered if his boss, Leslie, was planning to switch his career and become a homely, good man.

Aurelia finished her shower and walked to the study.

With a gentle knock on the door, she said, "Mr. Synder, I've finished showering. I'll head to bed now. Good night."

Leslie hummed in response—his voice devoid of emotion.

After the previous incident, Aurelia refrained from asking further questions. She returned to her room to sleep.

It was soon the next morning.

Aurelia sluggishly stretched as the alarm chimed, urging her to wake up.

As she freshened up in the bathroom, she noticed that the shower head, which had been on the floor yesterday, was now neatly installed on the wall. It was obviously fixed.

She curiously turned on the tap and found the shower head functioning perfectly.

Even though it was late last night, Leslie had managed to fix it on his own.

It seemed that Linda was right. Leslie might have a cold demeanor with little words to say, and his words might even cut you like ice. But, he was undoubtedly efficient.

Aurelia continued to brush her teeth after placing the shower head back. Suddenly, a pain

stung her lips and made her grimace. She looked in the mirror and noticed that her lip was chapped.

Staring at the bright red injury, she remembered the scene where she fell down with Leslie last night. Her face flushed red instantly.

“Stop thinking about that. Stop thinking about that,” she thought.

Aurelia spat out the toothpaste and splashed her face with cold water until she finally calmed down. Taking a deep breath, she smiled at herself in the mirror and went to the kitchen.



While putting on her apron, Aurelia noticed that Leslie had washed and tidied all the dishes in the sink. Even though they were living together, Leslie didn't just go through the motions.

His consistency in action made him much better than many other men. It made Aurelia believe that living like this wasn't so bad after all.

Aurelia happily opened the refrigerator to prepare breakfast—pan-fried ravioli. It was Ava's favorite breakfast to make for Aurelia. Along with a specially made dipping sauce, it would set Aurelia up for a joyful day ahead.

After setting the breakfast, she started preparing lunch for the day.

Aurelia had always been in the habit of preparing packed meals. However, her current stay at Leslie's place wasn't the most convenient. Having already surpassed her monthly living expenses, she needed to cut it back a little bit.

She sautéed an excess of broccoli, which was bought on sale at the supermarket yesterday. It had to be used and eaten by dinner. Aurelia also made an ample portion of beef stew. She accidentally thawed more beef than necessary and rendered it unsuitable for refreezing.

Finally, she tossed up a large bowl of cucumber salad.

It had been over a month since she last cooked.

Staring at the pink lunch box on the table, Aurelia realized it wouldn't accommodate so much food. But, she was hesitant to let the surplus go to waste.

Her gaze

fell on the blue lunch box beside it. It was an accidental purchase since it came as part of the supermarket deal discount for buying two lunch boxes.

“Why not pack the extra food for him? After all, he wouldn’t know it was leftovers,” she pondered.

## Chapter 44

Leslie’s company was located in the heart of the city. A casual meal there would easily cost around 30 to 40 dollars. Dining out regularly would cost a significant amount of money in a month. To avoid wastage, Aurelia transferred the remaining dishes into the blue lunch box.

She evenly distributed the food between the two lunch boxes. Even taking into consideration that Leslie was a man and might need a little bit more to eat.

Since he didn’t seem to favor oily dishes, Aurelia opted to keep a larger portion of the beef stew for herself—given her fondness for it. The distribution was more on accommodating his food preferences than her being stingy.

“Why does he have to be so picky about food?” she mused.

As Aurelia was arranging the beef slices, she suddenly heard footsteps behind her. She swiftly covered the lunch box and placed it in the bag.

After preparing everything, she walked out of the kitchen with two bowls of corn soup.

“Good morning, Mr. Synder.”

“Morning,” Leslie replied as he took his seat.

Though his expression remained composed, his face was undeniably pleasant to behold. Aurelia couldn’t resist stealing a glance at him. Yet, fearing a repeat of last night’s scalding situation, she promptly averted her gaze and offered a bowl of corn soup to Leslie.

“Let’s eat. The pan–fried ravioli isn’t too heavy, it’s not very oily.”

“Okay, thanks.”

Leaving aside everything else, Leslie’s politeness made Aurelia feel at ease. It felt her efforts were acknowledged.

Leslie leisurely tasted a spoonful of the corn soup. It was rich in flavor and thick in consistency, which was soothing to his stomach.

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He then tried a piece of fried ravioli. The outer layer was crispy, and the meat filling inside was juicy. They were notably superior to the crumbly ravioli Linda used to prepare.

Despite being a simple breakfast, especially for someone accustomed to coffee and bread, Leslie had to concede that Aurelia’s culinary skills were beyond reproach.

He couldn’t help but look at Aurelia. She maintained her old–fashioned attire, and her face naturally flushed without any makeup. The freckles on her nose added a playful charm to her

appearance.

“Are you feeling hot?”

“Huh?” Aurelia felt a twinge of guilt and quickly clarified, “The heat is from cooking in the kitchen.”

“Umm.” Leslie glanced toward the kitchen. Since he never used the stove, he had no idea how hot it could get while cooking.

Under his watchful gaze, Aurelia put down her spoon and declared, “I’m done eating. I’m off

to work.”

Leslie nodded faintly. “Okay, just leave it. I’ll wash it later.”

“Alright.”

Aurelia rose and headed into the kitchen, carrying two packed lunch boxes along with her.

“Meals around your workplace must be pretty expensive, right? I’ve made lunch for you. If

you... Don’t like them, you can just get something else to eat.” With that, she left the blue bag

and turned to leave.

Before slipping on her high heels, Aurelia meticulously wiped the shoe surface with a cloth. She seemed to cherish the pair of heels very much.

Leslie was about to thank her when he observed her intense care for those old heels. He then abruptly recalled what her colleague had said. These heels were a gift from her ex-boyfriend, and she had been wearing them for three years.

Among the ladies Leslie knew, none had worn a pair of shoes for that long. Especially shoes that were showing signs of wear and tear. It spoke volumes about Aurelia’s love for Seth. Leslie wondered, “If she loved him so much, why marry me? Was it for money?”

After changing her heels, Aurelia politely said, “Goodbye, Mr. Synder.

Leslie’s expression darkened. He nodded but said nothing.

This abrupt change left Aurelia in puzzlement. “Weren’t things fine earlier? Well, perhaps it’s his personality—cold, distant, and odd.”

She didn’t inquire further and hurried out for fear that she might have missed the subway.

Leslie heard the door close and lost his appetite with his thoughts earlier. He then rolled his sleeves up and carried the dishes into the kitchen.

The moment he stepped inside, he was engulfed in intense heat. Despite the opened window, the stifling atmosphere lingered.

With his brow furrowed, he put the dishes into the sink and started washing them. As he prepared to wipe the counter, he noticed that Aurelia had already tidied up. She only left the dishes for him to wash.

Listening to the running water, he found himself unable to fathom Aurelia’s thoughts.

## Chapter 45

At that moment, Daniel’s call came in.

“Mr. Synder, the morning meeting is about to start. You might be late.” Daniel heard the sound of water and hesitated. “You’re not washing dishes again, are you?”

“Yeah,” came Leslie’s casual response. “Daniel, go get a fan for me.

“What do you need it for?” Daniel inquired curiously.

“It’s so hot doing the dishes,” replied Leslie.

Daniel was speechless. He wondered why Leslie

I gave off the vibes of a family man.

Leslie soon finished cleaning up. After drying his hands and straightening his clothes, he noticed the packed lunch boxes on the table. Without much hesitation, he grabbed them and headed downstairs.

As he got into the car, Daniel noticed the blue bag in Leslie's hand.

"Mr. Synder, you're too kind. You even brought me breakfast," Daniel remarked. He then reached out to take the bag, but Leslie stopped him with a tap on the hand.

"Buy your own if you want to eat. Give me the morning meeting files," Leslie instructed.

"Okay." Daniel refrained from any further jokes and promptly handed over the files.

Flipping through the documents, Leslie's expression turned serious and composed. He resembled a cold yet mesmerizing statue—one that invited attention but discouraged proximity.

Meanwhile, at Young Advertising, Aurelia reached the company just right on time.

After clocking in, she breathed out a sigh of relief. Aurelia settled into her seat and wiped away her sweat. It was then that Millie approached her with a mischievous grin on her face.

Aurelia felt uncomfortable with Millie's intense gaze. "What's up? Is there something on my face?"

"It's not about your face, but your lips," Millie replied with a teasing grin, followed by an air

kiss.

Aurelia hastily covered her mouth. Her face, which had just calmed down, flushed red again.

Millie teased, "Aurelia, are things that intense for newlyweds?"

"No, it was just a bump," she tried to explain.

Pointing to her lips, Millie joked, "Ah, I get it. You 'bumped' into your husband's lips."

Aurelia pushed Millie's chair lightly and focused on her work. She said, "I'm not in the mood for chitchat right now."

'Seriously, Aurelia, I feel a bit sorry for you. You're quite attractive and capable. Even if don't choose Seth, you could find someone better. Maybe someone more, well, appealing?"

Millie avoided the term "ugly" and used "appealing" instead.

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Aurelia didn't quite understand Millie's point and responded, "He's actually a good person."

Millie sighed and relented. "Alright, alright, as long as you're happy."

At that precise moment, the clear clacks of high heels echoed from the door. Everyone instantly recognized the arrival without having to look it was Kimberly.

The colleagues glanced up as Kimberly entered with new branded attire. It was as if Florence's derision didn't concern her at all.

"Good morning, guys!" she greeted cheerfully, and waved her hand with an incredibly radiant

smile.

“Kimberly, you look stunning today! Are these clothes and this bag brand new? They must be pricey, right?” someone commented.

“They’re gifts and didn’t cost me a penny. I initially declined, but he insisted. He’d be upset if I refused. For the sake of our company collaboration, I had to accept it,” Kimberly boasted.

“Company’s collaboration? We prioritize our partnership with One Technology the most. Could it be their boss? He’s truly nouveau riche to splurge so lavishly,” a colleague admired.

“No, stop spreading rumors. I’ve never admitted anything. Otherwise, people might accuse me of enticing clients.”

As Kimberly stated, she cast a meaningful glance toward Aurelia. She was obviously implying that Aurelia accused her of such actions.

Aurelia stayed silent. She didn’t want to become a part of Kimberly’s flaunting wealth.

Despite Kimberly’s verbal denial, her tone suggested that they had guessed correctly. Her attire was indeed a gift from One Technology’s boss.

A colleague chimed in, “Who dares to say that? She’s clearly jealous of you.”

## Chapter 46

Kimberly chuckled, “I doubt it. I mean, I haven’t exactly saved Mrs. Lynch’s life or her daughter’s. What’s there to envy?”



A colleague said, "Mrs. Lynch isn't even part of One Technology. Even if Mr. Lynch had a say, he's still just a manager. You know how the boss of One Technology is. Ultimately, it's his call for all the collaborations."

Kimberly smiled and stopped talking further, but everyone in the office had heard those words clearly.

Those who had previously mocked Kimberly for her adeptness at charming wealthy men suddenly changed their tune, eagerly seeking to gain favor with the prospective deputy

director.

Kimberly grinned at Aurelia. However, Aurelia remained focused on her work, refusing to even acknowledge Kimberly's presence.

Kimberly was clueless about Ian. It seemed improbable for him to have gifted her such expensive clothing-

Seeing that she had failed to impress Jason, Kimberly shifted her focus, fearing that her position in the office would be compromised.

However, Aurelia was unfazed by it all.

Noticing Aurelia's indifference, Kimberly felt a twinge of dissatisfaction. In her point of view, Aurelia should envy her, especially considering the outfit that she was currently dressed in. After all, with her monthly salary, Aurelia couldn't even afford the pair of shoes Kimberly was wearing.

At the thought of shoes, Kimberly's eyes honed in on Aurelia's weathered footwear. An arrogant smile spread across her face. She then elegantly took a seat, subtly showing off the expensive designer heels under her dress.

"Kimberly, are those Christian Louboutin heels?" someone asked.

“For us ladies, owning a pair of Louboutin heels is a necessity. These are only six thousand dollars. You should all get yourselves a pair too. Otherwise, you won’t be able to keep up with the trend,” she boasted.

Kimberly lifted her feet, showing off her expensive lambskin high-heeled shoes.

“Are you interested? I’m quite familiar with the store’s sales associate and can help reserve a pair for you. We can have afternoon tea and take photos together. It’ll look great,” Kimberly said enthusiastically.

“I’d like that!”

“Me too!”

A few colleagues expressed their interest as they stood up excitedly, and even Millie raised her hand to join them.

Aurelia was taken aback by the sight. Millie, who had previously disliked Kimberly’s showiness the most, was now actually planning to purchase a pair of heels that cost six thousand dollars.

It seemed like she would be stretching her budget thin this month.

Aurelia discreetly signaled to Millie, hoping to convey her concern. However, either Millie didn’t catch on to the signal, or she deliberately chose to ignore it.

Aurelia was perplexed. Suddenly, Kimberly appeared before her.

“Aurelia, would you also like a pair? Look at your heels. They’re quite worn out.”

“No, thank you. My shoes are just fine.”

Aurelia glanced at her own high heels. It was a classic pair of black heels. The pointed style accentuated her feet gracefully. However, the pointed tips were a little scuffed, making them appear a bit worn.

However, she didn't feel ashamed because they were a gift from her parents after she had completed her internship. It had cost them almost a thousand dollars for the shoes. Although it wasn't from a luxury brand like Kimberly's, it was still a pair of heels from a mid-luxury brand.

William and Ava had only ever worn unbranded shoes, which cost less than 100 dollars for a pair. Their decision to buy Aurelia an expensive pair of high heels was a clear display of their affection for her.

To Aurelia, it wasn't just a pair of shoes. They symbolized her parents' love for her. While the shoes would get old and worn, the love behind them remained timeless. Hence, Aurelia didn't see the need to purchase a new pair of exorbitantly priced shoes.

If they had the means, splurging on luxury items wouldn't be an issue. However, most of her colleagues came from average families. It seemed unreasonable to her for them to buy shoes or bags worth more than their monthly salary, solely for the sake of taking good photos.

Although Aurelia couldn't comprehend it, she refrained from meddling in other people's lives. She simply smiled in response to avoid dampening anyone's spirits.

However, Kimberly wasn't about to let Aurelia off so easily and seized the opportunity to make a pointed comment.

"Aurelia, you've been wearing those heels for three years. We get it," Kimberly stated. Her tone carried many implications, attracting the attention of their colleagues.

They recalled Aurelia's three-year relationship with Seth. Those high heels must have been a gift from Seth.

Despite being married, it seemed that she still couldn't bear to part with the items from her past relationship. After all, Aurelia wasn't an exception to sentimentality.

## Chapter 47

Aurelia sensed her colleagues' glances and explained, "These shoes were a gift from my mom...

Kimberly cut in, "Aurelia, I forgot that your mom is still in intensive care, and you also just got married. Your husband doesn't seem to have much money either, so it's no wonder that you can't afford a pair of new heels. It's fine to wear your old shoes. How about we e organize a donation for your mom? It could be our way of showing concern."

Aurelia frowned, surprised that Kimberly would bring up her mother.

If Kimberly thought that she could humiliate Aurelia with money, she was utterly mistaken.

Right now, what Aurelia needed the most was money. She pretended to be grateful and said, " Sure. Thank you, Kimberly."

Kimberly's smile froze. She didn't expect Aurelia to actually accept her offer.

Did Aurelia have no shame? Only a pauper would need a donation.

Who would want to be considered a poor wretch among urban office workers?

Millie caught on and offered, "I'll donate five hundred dollars. Kimberly, how much will you contribute? I'll note it down. A rich lady like you will surely contribute more than me. When Mrs. Simmons wakes up, I'm sure she'll b

grateful."

Kimberly raised her eyebrows and casually donated five thousand dollars. "Just a small gesture.

“Thank you.

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Aurelia accepted the money nonchalantly, but the others were displeased with Kimberly’s ostentation.

Why did Kimberly have to also involve them when she had just wanted to flaunt her wealth? Now they couldn’t even afford the basic necessities for the month.

Aurelia happily accepted the money, but she was fully aware that she couldn’t actually take it.

She didn’t want to risk everyone hating her for taking their money. She just wanted to embarrass Kimberly.

In a few days, she planned to tell the others that she had received financial aid and return their money to them.

After all, colleagues should keep their relationships professional and not burdened with personal favors.

After receiving the money, Aurelia deliberately took out two adhesive bandages and handed them to Kimberly.

“Kimberly, the back of your heels are swollen. Don’t let them get too inflamed.”

Didn’t Kimberly like to show off? Let’s see how she’d show off now!

“No, it’s just a little red. It doesn’t hurt at all. How could such high–end shoes hurt my feet?” Kimberly laughed awkwardly.

She casually took a few steps and then glanced at her colleagues.

“Which of you wanted to buy the heels earlier? I’ll help you place an order.”

“Forget it. Your feet are almost bleeding. I have to be on-site often, so I don’t dare to wear them.”

“Yeah, I just donated money, so I can’t afford it now.”

“Kimberly, take care of your wounds soon. Don’t let them get infected.”

Kimberly was infuriated. She sneered at her colleagues. They really didn’t know how to appreciate her.

At that moment, a colleague noticed Aurelia’s high heels.

“Aurelia, have you really been wearing those high heels for three years? Are they really that comfortable?”

“They aren’t bad. Sometimes, even after a whole day, my feet don’t feel too tired,” Aurelia replied casually.

“Where did you buy them?”

“It’s from a small brand and can be found in any mall.”

“Then, I’ll go shopping after work today. Last week, I wore flats to meet a client, and Zachary scolded me for not paying attention to my image.”

“You’re going shopping? Count me in. My son went to his grandma’s house, so I’m finally free.

“Take me with you. I want to buy some summer clothes. It’s getting hotter lately.”

With that, the conversation shifted, and Kimberly was completely ignored.

Kimberly enjoyed only ten minutes of attention with her designer outfit. Her colleagues even complained about her for causing them to have to donate money.

Fuming, she forced a smile and returned to her seat.

Glancing up, Aurelia saw Kimberly forcefully kicking off her high heels under the table, nearly knocking down her computer monitor in the process.

Aurelia couldn't be bothered to pay any more attention to Kimberly, so she averted her eyes and continued with her work.

A familiar client arrived in the morning, and after a brief chat, they signed a contract. The performance bonus for that month was now guaranteed.

## Chapter 48

By the time Aurelia was done with her work, it was lunchtime. Millie slid over to where she was sitting. She felt apologetic and said embarrassedly, "Aurelia, I wasn't ignoring you this morning. I just..."

Aurelia shook her head. She had no intention of interfering with Millie's thoughts. "It's okay."

"Aurelia, I just can't stand Kimberly showing off. I'm no worse than her, and I bet I'll look better than her in those heels," Millie said as she stretched out her legs.

Aurelia had a good relationship with Millie, so she couldn't help but offer a word of caution. Millie, Kimberly comes from a wealthy family, and you're from an ordinary one. There's really no need for you to compare yourself to her. It's better to save your money and do what you like instead of imitating her."

“Imitating her? So, she can buy it, but I can’t?” Millie sneered.

“No, I just...”

“Okay, okay, I get it. It’s just a pair of shoes anyway. Anyone can afford them. What should we eat today?”

Millie clearly didn’t want to discuss this topic further.

Aurelia sighed and took out her lunchbox.

“I brought my own lunch. You should go ahead and order something for yourself.”

“How frugal.

Knowing that Aurelia was now paying for her mother’s medical expenses, Millie didn’t press further and said, “Then, I’ll order takeout and eat with you.”

“Okay. It just so happens that I brought more food today.”

“That’s great. I’ve been craving your cooking for a while now.”

Millie took out her phone to order some takeouts for herself.

Aurelia smiled and took out her lunchbox. The next second, her smile froze.

Was this what they meant when they said that extreme joy would always be followed by sorrow?

Where was her beef stew?!



At One Technology, with the opening approaching, no one in the office dared to waste time. All of them chose to get takeouts for lunch.

During the meal, their usually serious boss, Leslie, took out a pink lunchbox.

A male colleague commented, "Manly pink? I want it."

The new female receptionist muttered, "Damn, no wonder they didn't hire female employees here before. It seems that they prefer to hire people they already know. I finally see a handsome programmer here, but it turns out that he likes such girly things."

Leslie stared at the pink lunchbox in front of him and frowned.

Did Aurelia do this on purpose?

Daniel whispered, "Mr. Synder, why didn't I notice this side of yours before?"

Leslie glanced at him and slowly opened the lid, revealing a generous portion of beef stew. The fragrance wafted out as soon as the lid was opened.

Daniel exclaimed, "Isn't this portion a bit too much? Where did you buy it?"

Leslie felt inexplicably relieved and said casually, "Someone made it for me."

Daniel was stunned.

A clattering sound was heard as the others put their cutlery down in envy.

"Comparing oneself to others will only make one angry."

Leslie found that phrase unexpectedly pleasing to his ears.

He lowered his head to eat. Aurelia's culinary skills were excellent as always. However, he didn't understand why she had packed so much meat for him.

After finishing the meal, Leslie couldn't hold back his curiosity any longer and sent Aurelia a message. Out of politeness, he also expressed his thanks for the meal.

"Thank you."

Aurelia's phone vibrated. As she picked it up to look at the messages and photos from Leslie, she couldn't help but bite hard on the fork between her lips.

"I thought you didn't like greasy food, but you ate it all," she texted back. That was her beef stew!

"I didn't want it to go to waste," Leslie replied.

He could have said anything else! "Oh, as long as you liked it," Aurelia responded.

"But I didn't like the pink lunchbox," Leslie returned.

Aurelia was at a loss for what to say, but she was unable to admit her mistake.

Revealing that the lunchbox full of meat was actually meant for her would be quite awkward.

"I'll change it next time," she typed.

"Then, I'll be looking forward to it tomorrow," Leslie replied.

Wait a minute. Something seemed off about his response.

Chapter 49

Tomorrow?

The day wasn't even over yet, but he was already talking about the next day's lunch.

Well, it was just a lunchbox. She needed to make one for herself anyway. She could just increase the portion.

"Alright."

The conversation ended there.

Millie frowned and looked at Aurelia. "Aurelia, you've been biting on that fork this whole time. Who is it that's making you so annoyed?"

Aurelia sighed, "Beef stew."

Millie swallowed her mouthful of food before saying, "Is it your husband? You're actually likening him to beef stew? That's very..."

That was very unbecoming, wasn't it?

But Millie didn't dare to say it out loud. She pursed her lips and continued to eat her food. Then, she unintentionally saw Aurelia's lunchbox.

"Aurelia, didn't his family give you any meat? Your meal is just full of greens. Eating all that might even make you turn green!"

Aurelia remained silent.

At that moment, Aurelia was thankful.

Fortunately, she had picked up the wrong lunchbox. Otherwise, if Leslie saw the lunchbox full of greens, his face would have turned green too.

Seeing Aurelia's silence, Millie thought that she had tacitly agreed and couldn't help but sympathize with her.

She quickly gave Aurelia a couple of beef slices.

"Aurelia, have some meat."

"Thanks." Aurelia smiled.

Their conversation happened to be overheard by Kimberly, who was making coffee in the pantry.

Kimberly raised her coffee cup, and her lips curved up into a sly smile.

So, that was the case.

Aurelia always embarrassed her. She wanted to make Aurelia experience that embarrassment too!

After Aurelia finished eating, she checked up on her mother via video call with Karen. Then, she laid her head down on the table and took a nap.

Hearing her phone vibrate, she stretched lazily before heading to the restroom.

While seated on the toilet, her mind was still addled with sleep, and she continued to daydream with her eyes half closed.

At that moment, the door to the restroom opened, and two voices engaged in conversation reached her ears.

‘Really? Isn’t that too pitiful? Good thing I’ve decided not to get married in this life.’

“I really don’t understand what she’s thinking. She left her good-looking ex-boyfriend and married an ugly guy, only to be mistreated by her in-laws.”

“I heard that she married the ugly guy but still misses her ex-boyfriend. She couldn’t bear to throw away the high heels that he had given her and even wore them for three years!”

“No way! She’s usually dressed so conservatively, so I thought that she was an honest and responsible person. Who would’ve thought that she’d be such a complicated person?”

“Haha, okay, let’s stop talking about it.”

The voices of the two individuals gradually became more distant.

Aurelia breathed a sigh of relief. She made sure that the restroom was completely empty before she dared to get up and flush.

The women’s restroom was like the intelligence bureau of the entire building. Although no names would be mentioned, everyone would know who was being talked about.

But, who were they talking about this time? Who was so unlucky to be abused by her in-laws? Someone who wore the same pair of heels for three years? That seemed inexplicably familiar.

Aurelia didn’t dwell on it too much. She washed her hands, neatly redid her hair, and then straightened her slightly wrinkled dress.

## Chapter 50

After making sure that she looked presentable, Aurelia walked out of the restroom, only to find that everyone who walked by her would give her an extra glance.

She wondered if she had missed something that needed tidying up.

“Aurelia!” Millic rushed over, panting.

“What’s wrong?” Aurelia reached out to support the breathless Millic.

“Look at this! I saw it in the community chat.”

The community chat was a group chat created by acquaintances in the building. There were employees from various companies in it. In short, it was just a gossip group.

Aurelia used to be in that group chat, but there were too many internal conflicts.

The late-night discussions about trivial matters and the group members’ tendency to always tag everyone annoyed her.

Eventually, she grew tired of it and left the group.

She never thought that she’d become the subject of discussion in that group one day.

“Who’s the one from Young Advertising that’s being mistreated after getting married?” the accountant from the foreign trade company upstairs inquired.

“No, I heard that it’s her in-laws who treat her horribly. Not only does she have to take care of her seriously ill mother, but she also has to bear the actions of her nasty mother-in-law. The worst part is that her husband looks like a bull, ugly but strong, so she doesn’t dare to resist. “Today, she only ate vegetables for lunch, with a few pieces of shredded meat. After eating, she was so tired that she fell asleep. Poor thing,” The receptionist from the consulting company downstairs sent, adding a sad emoji after the text.

money,

“What’s so pitiful about it? I heard that she broke up with her boyfriend because of and then she married someone else in a fit of anger. Isn’t she just reaping what she sowed?” the designer from the adjacent renovation company criticized.

“Now she’s stuck with a man who’s worse than her ex-boyfriend for the rest of her life.”

The discussion about how her husband wasn’t as good as the ex-boyfriend continued for more than 99 messages.

Although Aurelia’s name was never mentioned from the beginning to the end, who else in Young Advertising had recently gotten married and had a mother who was seriously ill?

Aurelia held the phone and looked at Millie hesitantly.

“How did they find out?”

Millie was visibly startled, and she shook her head vigorously,

“Aurelia, it’s not me! It’s really not me! At first, it was just a few people in the company upstairs discussing the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. I didn’t

pay attention, but after a few minutes, it turned into everyone secretly talking about you. I really don't know how it turned out like this!"

"Don't worry, I believe you. Can you find the first person who mentioned me in the group chat?" Aurelia comforted Millie.

Millie was two years younger than Aurelia. They've known each other for over a year now, since her internship.

Aurelia knew very well what kind of person Millie was. She was sure that Millie wasn't someone who would stab her in the back.

Millie scrolled through the group's messages anxiously.

However, with 476 members in the group chat, the messages were overwhelming.

It took her five minutes to find the source of the message.

It was someone with an avatar of a white rose. The profile of that account was obviously fake.

Millie said helplessly, "This should be someone's side account. It's impossible to trace who's behind this since anyone can join this group. Except for a few familiar names from here, the rest of them are strangers."

Aurelia stared at the profile picture and sighed lightly. It was obvious that the person had deliberately hidden their identity.

Everyone in t

the group was a veteran at gossiping. They never mentioned any names in the discussions. Even if she were to question them one by one, they would just deny that they had been talking about her.



In the workplace, private discussions like these were common. The best way to approach it was to feign ignorance. After all, everyone had their own rumors.

“Forget it. I can’t control what other people say. A few comments won’t affect my salary anyway.” Aurelia said, waving her hand.

“Aurelia, tly, you shouldn’t have married someone else out of spite,” Millie said empathetically.

“I didn’t

“Is that “im out of spite. I’m genuinely dong rai ve

now.”

you call doing well? Alright, I’ve said my piece. You won’t listen anyway. It’s fine. as long as you’re happy,” Millie sighed.

“Let’s go. The lunch break is over. Let’s get back to work.” Aurelia immediately changed the subject.

She really didn’t want to be the subject of someone else’s gossip.

Some people in the group spoke as if they were life mentors, but in reality, their own lives

were a mess.

Rather than feeling sorry for her, they seemed to take pleasure in her misfortune. The more they argued with others, the more energetic they became.

Millie pursed her lips and followed Aurelia to the office.

Before she reached the door, she pointed at her phone with wide eyes.

“Aurelia, Seth just spoke.”

“Seth? Why is he in our community chat?” Aurelia exclaimed.