

Wedded Bride 511

Chapter 511 Delicious

"Oh well, I'm fine," Sheryl answered as she came back to her senses. She grabbed and hugged her loving daughter tightly in her arms. With a worried look on her face, she stared at her and thought to herself, 'Should I take Shirley with me?

But I am unsure if I can spend some time taking care of her and keeping her company. What should I do?'

Defeated by hunger, Shirley finally opened her mouth, "Sher, do we have food? I'm starving."

Tony often dropped by to carry ingredients and cook dinner for her. Today, however, he didn't come. So she had to count on her mother.

The single mother, after hearing out her daughter, looked around and glanced at the wall clock. It was already about eleven o'clock. Realizing she didn't go to the market to grab some ingredients, she hurried to the living room in an attempt to check the refrigerator and see what she could use. The last time Anthony came, he filled the fridge with snacks and other food. But as she opened the fridge, apart from fruits and yogurt, there were only two tomatoes inside.

Surely, you can't make something out of nothing. Sheryl let out a deep sigh at the sight of the empty

fridge. She grabbed an apple, washed it and handed it to the little girl. "Have an apple first. I'll go to the market to grab some ingredients and make you something good," she said.

Upon seeing her mother so unprepared, Shirley shook her head in disappointment. She sighed and thought, 'I finally understood why Tony said mom couldn't even take care of her own life.'

She continued to whine, 'I wonder why Tony didn't come to visit me these days. It seems like he had a fight with Sher. Maybe I should do something to let them to make peace with each other. Just when will Sher stop causing trouble?'

Feeling her stomach grumbling, Shirley then took a huge bite at the apple her mother gave her.

Feeling sorry at the sight of her hungry daughter, Sheryl turned on the TV and let Shirley watch her favorite cartoon show. As she was getting ready to head out to the market, she heard the doorbell ringing. Excited at the thought that it could be Anthony, she strode to the door cheerfully. After opening the door, she found Sue standing instead. A look of disappointment was seen on her face. She then greeted Sue with less vigor, "Hey Sue! What brought you here?"

Seeing the disappointment all over Sheryl's face, Sue asked, "Were you expecting somebody else?"

Don't you want to see me?"

She further added, "Well, I just came to bring my sworn daughter some food to eat. I should better take my leave now that I've dropped it off. It seems like I'm not welcome here at all."

"No! You got me wrong!" Shirley exclaimed. "Come in please and make yourself at home," Shirley added while inviting Sue with glee and eyes beaming with delight. And just like seeing her life saver, she held on to the arms of her displeased visitor and hastily dragged her inside. "Come on! Why are you so serious? Who would dare marry you if you keep having that bad temper?" she jokingly said.

"You!" Sue faltered with her face turning red from anger. Sheryl playfully took the bag from Sue, opened it and saw some hot, good food.

After hearing loud voices at the doorstep, Shirley stood up to see what the commotion was about.

Shirley exclaimed at the sight of her sworn mother, "Aunt Sue!"

She sprinted towards her and threw herself into her arms. "I missed you!" she said lovingly.

The appearance of her sworn mother made the little girl forget how hungry she was. With a bright and enthusiastic smile, Sue bent down, stretched out her arms and hugged the adorable girl. "I missed you so much, my little sweetheart. You're such a good girl. Unlike your mother, she is not cute at all. Never

be like her, okay?" she murmured.

Sheryl left the two alone and prepared the table. "Shirley, you said you were hungry," Sheryl said to intentionally break the two off. She further added, "Come here now! The table's ready. Go ahead and have a taste of what Sue brought you!"

Sheryl gestured her daughter to have some lunch.

After hearing the word "food", the little girl excitedly slipped away from Sue's arms, ran towards the table and climbed on her high chair.

As Shirley left her arms and headed towards the table, Sue felt a little upset. She grumbled, "How could both of you treat me like this? I don't deserve this!"

"Oh, come on Sue! Will you stop whining?" Sheryl said jokingly as she took Sue's hand and invited her to have a meal with them. "You mustn't have eaten yet. Join us then," Sheryl said. "Come on now! It's been such a long time since you came and visited us. Eating a meal with us isn't too much, right?" she further added with a wide smile on her face.

She then thought to herself, 'I might have lost my memory, but I'm so lucky to have both Anthony and

Sue by my side. They made things a lot easier for me.

Without them, I would never have made it alone.'

At the sight of good food, Sheryl excitedly took a bite of the braised pork chop in front of her. To her surprise, the taste was really familiar. She thought, 'This tastes like what Anthony cooks. Could it be...'

She then turned her head and looked at Sue, her best friend, full of doubts.

Ignoring Sheryl's gaze, Sue lowered her head and ate anxiously.

Seeing Sue's tensed expression, Sheryl thought that the food must've really been cooked and given by Anthony. The truth was, she was pleased and touched at how thoughtful her boyfriend was. Despite their recent argument, he was still worried at her and Shirley's health. She was indeed really thankful for being loved by him.

Without thinking too much, Sheryl played dumb and simply enjoyed the food. Despite trying to hide it, her honest daughter frankly blurted out the words, "Aunt Sue, did Tony give this to you? It tastes just like how Tony cooks it. It is really delicious!"

After hearing Shirley say these words, Sheryl stopped her and lectured, "Haven't I told you before not to talk while eating?"

"Go on, and enjoy your meal before it gets cold. It's your favorite braised pork chop, right?" Sheryl added.

'She really is my daughter. Like me, she loved ribs so much that she never gets sick of eating them, ' she thought to herself while letting out a faint smile.

Sue felt that Sheryl knew all along that the food was actually sent by Anthony, yet remained silent at the presence of her daughter.

After their lunch, the full little girl felt sleepy. Shirley was used to taking an afternoon nap. Seeing her daughter yawn time to time, she carried her sweet girl and headed towards her bedroom. She lulled her to sleep before leaving the bedroom.

While waiting, Sue relaxingly lounged in the sofa. Watching Sheryl go out from the bedroom, she asked blandly, "Is she asleep already?"

Sheryl nodded silently so as not to wake her sleeping daughter. She headed to the fridge, grabbed some fruits and came over to Sue. "Do you want some?" Sheryl asked and sat beside Sue.

Sue intended to wait for Sheryl to ask and talk about Anthony. However, Sheryl didn't even mention his

name, not even once. Upon slowly losing her patience, she finally gave in and asked, "So what happened between you and Anthony, huh?"

Sue found Anthony a really good fit for her best friend and had high opinions of him. She often told her that no other man would be as excellent as Anthony and more fitting to be her boyfriend. In her eyes, he was perfect in almost all aspects. Not only was he a hunk, but was well-off as well. More importantly, he had done a good job in taking care of both Shirley and Sheryl. Such a good man like him was so hard to find.

"Did he call you?" Sheryl worriedly asked. She then thought to herself, 'I never should've said those mean words to him. He always treated me and Shirley well. Moreover, he treats Shirley like his own. I am more than indebted to him than anyone else.

I totally regret it, but my pride keeps stopping me from saying sorry to him.'

"Yes, he actually did," Sue replied as her brows furrowed. She added, "I was sleeping at home and was planning to get up late. I finally had my long-awaited day-off, you see. My phone rang and upon seeing Anthony's call, I excitedly answered his call. I thought he was going to ask me out on a date, but he called me instead to help him deliver you and Shirley lunch. It was so annoying."

After saying these, Sue stopped for a moment and stuffed a piece of honeydew into her mouth. She

continued, "Sher, I don't understand. Did he do anything wrong? Just why did you get mad at him?"

Sue then thought to herself, 'To be honest, Sheryl is an excellent woman, but Anthony is way more outstanding. His background, capabilities and status are of a different level than Sheryl's.

After all, she is a single mother. The society thinks differently of her. But Anthony has not only accepted her, but treated her daughter like her own. He really is a good man.

But it seems like Sheryl doesn't cherish him the same way.'

Chapter 512 Let the Past Remain In The Past

"You don't understand the whys and wherefores of this matter." Mildly scolding her friend Sue for

doubting her side of the story, Sheryl continued, "It was really Anthony who got mad with me, I swear!"

"It's impossible! Are you sure it's not the other way around?" How could she believe Sheryl? She had never seen Anthony lose his temper.

"I've never known a man as mild tempered as Anthony. Besides, he dotes on you, so how could you condemn him like this?" Sue asked, perplexed. What her friend said was true. Anthony doted on

Sheryl.

"Nevertheless, I'm telling the truth." There was no use convincing Sue. What Anthony did was so out of character that even Sheryl was stunned. It was the first time she saw this side of him.

Anyway, it was too late to change her mind about the job, so she decided to face the music.

"Give me the full account right now," Sue urged Sheryl. Eyeing her friend thoughtfully, she could not wait to hear the full story.

'It might be that there is more to this than meet the eye. What blunder did Sheryl commit that made the normally calm Anthony lose his temper?' Sue thought curiously.

"You remember we had a job interview with BM Corporation and they gave us the offer? The offer is very generous enough to cover my daughter's school fees and one year rent for my apartment. I thought he would be happy for me but instead, he got mad and tried to talk me out of taking the job."

Fixing her glance at her friend, she continued, "I have my daughter to think of, shouldn't I seize every opportunity to earn money while I can? It's not easy being a single mother and I'm not getting any younger."

"Your argument makes sense," said Sue, nodding her head in approval. Despite the many hardships she had been through, Sheryl never gave up. Her tenacity and persistence were qualities that Sue

admired in her friend.

"It's a demanding position as one of the models for the show of BM Corporation. To be honest, I was really surprised you got the job. This is a rare opportunity, and we should make the most of it."

Admiration were evident in Sue's voice. Indeed, Sheryl was a woman to be reckoned with.

Moreover, Sheryl had raised her daughter Shirley into a lovely girl.

'If I were Sheryl, I doubt if I would have had the courage to give birth to the baby.' Sue marveled inwardly at Sheryl's brave decision.

"Definitely." Sheryl's aggressive tone cut into Sue's reverie. "I can't understand why Anthony was so against this offer. It's not as if I don't know Y City. I used to live there for goodness's sake. Needless to say, in our ensuing quarrels I gave him a piece of my mind."

"So, all this ruckus between you and Anthony was just for this matter?" Incredulity was evident in Sue's voice.

As far as she could tell, Sheryl was determined to accept BM Corporation's offer regardless of

Anthony's opposition. In her opinion, as her boyfriend, Anthony should support Sheryl's career instead

of standing in her way.

Looking at her friend, she knew that fame was not important to her. She only wanted to provide a good future for her daughter.

It didn't cross Sheryl's mind that Anthony would disapprove anything regarding her work as he had always been her staunch supporter. Interfering with her job was something he had never done before.

"Exactly this matter," Sheryl said, sighing deeply. "Now, can you understand where I'm coming from?"

Anthony was out of line in asking me to refuse this precious opportunity. Hence our violent argument."

"Hmm... maybe Anthony has another reason for not letting you take this job." The idea suddenly popped in Sue's mind. Switching to a more comfortable position on the couch, Sue turned earnestly to Sheryl.

Having been friends for a long time, they were at ease in each other's company. Sue felt very much at home in Sheryl's apartment.

"Another reason?" Wrinkling her brow in concentration, Sheryl couldn't think of any. "If he has another reason, he could have explained it to me."

"Maybe... it was hard to explain." A mysterious look passed Sue's eyes. "Sheryl, I remember you told

me before that you've lost your memory. Is it true?"

"Of course, it's true. It's not something to lie about." She had gotten used to living without a past to look back on. What was important was that she was content with her present life. She had a lovely daughter, a devoted boyfriend and her bosom friend, Sue. On top of that, she had a flourishing career without the need to recall the past.

"Let the past remain in the past," Sheryl said succinctly. Having no recollection of her past was a blessing. Forcing a smile, Sheryl hoped that her friend would drop the subject.

"But Shirley needs paternal love," Sue continued much to her chagrin. "Your daughter is a pretty girl, but she doesn't take her looks from you except for your nose. So that means she gets her looks from her father. He must be a very handsome man!" Sue deduced with twinkling eyes.

"That man is as good as gone." Instinctively, Sheryl was averse to the man Sue was referring to.

She believed that she got away from that man by the grace of the Almighty.

"How could that man be lost?" Sue asked indignantly. 'Is it possible that he has never even tried to look for Sheryl and his child?

Though Sheryl has lost her memory, it is probable that her subconscious still retains a memory of that significant man, ' Sue thought to herself.

"Sheryl, how can you remember that you lived in Y City before and forget everything else?" Sue was bent on learning more about Sheryl's past.

"It's also a mystery to me. All I know is that I used to live in Y City before migrating to America," said Sheryl. "What I remember distinctly is my American life with Anthony."

"How about your family? Do you remember them?" Sue pressed her. 'It's all unbelievable. Could it be that Sheryl has forgotten everything except her daughter and Anthony?' Sue asked herself.

"It's hard to recall even my family!" Shaking slightly, Sheryl pressed her index fingers to her temple.

She used to try her best to recall her past, but no matter how hard she tried, she just couldn't remember anything. And Anthony had even scolded her that time after knowing what she was doing.

Chapter 513 Telling Lies

"Maybe..." Sue hesitated. "Anthony overreacted because he was thinking of your miserable past in Y City," she suggested. "And Shirley's father is there, which is why he's strongly opposed to your going back. The man only wants to protect you but is going about it the wrong way." She waited for a reaction but got none. While quiet, Sheryl was actually pondering Sue's words.

'Her assumption makes sense. I did escape from Y City. And before I lost my memory, I wrote a letter to myself warning me never to go back to that place, ' she thought.

The woman argued with herself, 'But this show is important to me, so I can't miss it. No matter what I'm going to face there, I have to go and finish the show.' Sheryl took a deep breath.

Sue's voice broke into her thoughts. "Sher, I believe you need to talk with Anthony. I'm sure there's a good reason why he seems to have become so unreasonable." She peered at Sheryl before cautiously saying, "Maybe, he's just trying to protect you." What was important for Sue was her friend's happiness.

Sheryl considered Sue's words and then nodded. "I see" was all she said.

When Sue left the apartment, she headed straight to a car. Anthony drove her there. The whole time she was with Sheryl, he stayed inside the vehicle waiting patiently and staying out of sight.

"How is Sheryl?" he asked the moment Sue entered the car. Anthony could tell Sue was irritated, but he was excited to hear about Sheryl.

In reply, she grumbled, "Next time you call me, it better be for some good news. Did you know I was in the middle of a dream when you called? You may be a cute guy, but you can't treat me like that! Do you

know how annoying suddenly being awakened can be?"

Anthony accepted her scolding and apologized, "I'm very sorry. I had no one else to call for help. I was afraid of getting into a fight with her again if I came to the apartment myself."

Sue huffed, "She told me you fought because you disapproved of her going to Y City. Is that right?"

Anthony looked away briefly.

Then he nodded, but did not explain.

Her brows furrowed, she hesitated before asking, "Is it because Shirley's birth father is there?"

Anthony's head snapped up.

He met Sue's eyes directly. And his panic-stricken look confirmed Sue's suspicion.

"Ah, so I was right," she blurted. 'I knew it! Anthony would never have snapped at Sheryl for no reason,

' Sue thought.

He raised his hands in surrender. "You got me," Anthony admitted. Embarrassed, he explained, "We've gotten on so well these last years. And I don't want anyone or anything disrupting our peaceful life."

Sue sneered at the man, "You're lying!" She paused and looked at him. "You're just not secure enough in your relationship. You're afraid Sheryl will fall in love with that man again if ever they see each other

when she goes back," she said.

Anthony bowed his head, slightly embarrassed. In a low voice, he admitted, "You're right." He winced inwardly and thought, 'I can't hide anything from her.' Worry lined his face as he confessed, "You don't know what Sheryl went through in the past. Just this time, I want to be selfish and keep her to myself. I'm hoping she'll always be my Sheryl. So the thought of losing her is my greatest fear."

Anthony looked so forlorn that Sue felt sorry for him. "You don't need to worry so much. Sheryl seems to have completely forgotten the past, including that man. So, he should no longer be a threat to you. Always keep in mind that you are her boyfriend. And if you have no faith in yourself, how will others believe in you?" she encouraged.

He let out a sigh of relief and said, "Thank you." Hurriedly, he offered, "Let me take you home."

But Sue smiled politely and refused, "Don't bother. I can grab a taxi." She paused and added, "My place isn't very far anyway." Summoning her courage, Sue advised, "Why don't you go talk to her? She's probably waiting for you."

Then she got out of the car and left. Anthony also stepped out and began pacing back and forth,

looking at Sheryl's apartment with hesitancy. Out of the blue, his phone rang and the caller ID said it

was Shirley. He answered the phone and heard a little girl's voice. "Did you fight with Sher, Tony?" she

asked angrily.

"No, we didn't," he assured the little girl. Anthony was rubbing his forehead to smoothen the wrinkles as

he paced. "Recently, I have been very busy," he said. "There's nothing to worry about."

"Is that so?" Shirley sounded suspicious. Anthony shut his eyes to imagine Shirley with pouting lips and

eyebrows nearly meeting as she spoke over the phone. But all he could see was her lovely face, which

brought a smile to his lips. She never failed to make him happy.

"Don't you believe me, sweetie?" he asked affectionately. Anthony paced some more, while waiting for

a reply.

"I'd like to believe you, but you two are behaving strangely. By the way, Sher has a fever. I told her to

call you, but she refused. She said you were busy and that I shouldn't bother you. Are you truly busy,

Tony?" the girl asked.

He panicked at hearing Sheryl was sick. "Your mom has fever?" he asked. The doctor made up his

mind quickly. "Wait for me, Shirley. I'll be right there," he said and ended the call.

There was no time for misgivings. Anthony dashed up the stairs to Sheryl's apartment, a worried expression on his handsome face.

When Sheryl heard the doorbell ring, she thought Sue had forgotten something. She was speaking as she opened the door, "Did you forget something?"

Her eyes almost popped out when she saw her boyfriend standing at the door.

He quickly snatched her hand and inspected her from head to foot. "Are you all right, Sher? I heard you had a fever. How are you feeling now?" he fired the questions without pausing for breath, looking very worried.

Sheryl was, of course, stunned. "What are you talking about?" she asked. Confused, she quickly denied, "I don't have a fever."

It was Anthony's turn to look surprised. Then he caught sight of Shirley sitting on the couch, her eyes looking straight at him, and he understood what had happened. Disappointment in his eyes, he thought, 'She's learned to lie to me.'

His eyes hardened, and sternly, he called out, "Shirley!" Inside, he was telling himself, 'This is not good.'

I need to correct this habit of lying.'

The little girl knew she did something wrong and pursed her lips. Head bowed low, she approached the angry man and said, "I shouldn't have lied to you. I'm sorry. But you lied to me, too, didn't you?"

Anthony was taken aback. "When did I do that to you?" he asked. He was trying to recall what he told the girl.

"You told me you were working. But I saw your car downstairs. And you're not the only one who didn't tell the truth. Sher lied to me, too," she replied, darting glances at both adults. Sheryl and Anthony were at a loss for words.

"You two were fighting. But you told me you weren't," Shirley accused. With her brows knitted, she turned to Anthony and demanded, "Tell Sher you're sorry and you two make up. Because if you don't, no one will make lunch for me."

She sighed inwardly, 'When Sher is in a bad mood, she becomes upset and absent-minded. So, how is she going to take care of me?'

Chapter 514 All The Effort Anthony Made Was Worthwhile

With her small arms wrapped tightly around her doll, Shirley said, "That's the matter between you adults. I'm going to bed now."

Shaking her head at Shirley's words, Sheryl met Anthony's amused look.

The tense atmosphere in the room dissipated somehow at Shirley's unexpected remarks. Sheryl smiled reluctantly and said to Anthony, "Shirley is a precocious child and always says what's on her mind."

Then she added, "As you can see, I'm all right. You don't have to worry about me."

Before Anthony came, she had already decided to call him to resolve the problem.

But now that Anthony showed up, she changed her mind. She was feeling too embarrassed to tell him what she wanted to say.

"You should go home. It's late," she told him instead. Suddenly feeling tired, Sheryl turned her back to go to her room. At this moment, Anthony caught her hand and pulled her in a tight embrace.

Sheryl struggled to escape from his arms, but Anthony stopped her. "Stay, Sher. Let me hold you for a while," he said in a pleading voice.

Surprise kept her rooted to the spot. It was the first time Anthony showed his weakness in front of her.

He had been her rock for three years. But now he looked defeated and unsure of himself. Sheryl didn't have the heart to push him away so she let him hold her.

They stayed locked in each other's arms for some time.

Reveling in her closeness, Anthony greedily smelled the sweet fragrance of her hair. His arms tightened suddenly as a thought crossed his mind. He was afraid that if he let her go back to Y City, she would turn back to Autumn, Charles' wife.

When Autumn decided to take that medicine three years ago, he was very happy. He would never have had the chance to be with her had it not been for that. But now he felt that their destiny was pulling them back to that city again. 'What if they meet again and everything goes back to the way they were?'

The fear in his heart made Anthony hold Sheryl tighter. "You're hurting me," Sheryl complained, frowning at Anthony.

Relaxing his arms around her, Anthony apologized quickly.

"What's wrong with you? You look weird tonight." Unaccustomed to seeing him like that, Sheryl asked in a puzzled tone. Anthony looked away, embarrassed at her question.

After hesitating for a moment, she said, "I'm sorry for being so cold to you these days. I was a little mad with you. I didn't mean to hurt you."

"It's all right," Anthony said, gently ruffling her hair. "I also did something wrong," he admitted gruffly.

"What happened?" she asked teasingly. "Did we just apologize to each other?" Sheryl tried to joke lightly to ease the tension in the room.

"Sher, I think we need to talk..." The seriousness in Anthony's voice caught her attention.

The teasing smile disappeared from Sheryl's face as she nodded. "I have something to say to you, too."

After passing the interview with BM Corporation, it was only a matter of days before she had to leave. If

Anthony didn't want to take care of Shirley, she would have no choice but to take her when she left for Y City.

This was an important matter that she had to clear up with Anthony to avoid any more misunderstandings between them.

Extricating herself from his arms, Sheryl went to the kitchen to prepare some tea. After giving a cup to Anthony, she said, "After thinking hard about it, I've decided to take BM Corporation's offer. If you can't take care of Shirley for me, I'll have to take her with me to Y City."

A girl who has a boyfriend or a husband that she can depend on is a lucky girl. With that point of view,

Sheryl thought that if Anthony was willing to support her, she could think of herself as a lucky girl indeed.

Would Anthony support her? Sheryl hoped so.

Being a single mom put her at a disadvantage in her relationship with Anthony. A successful doctor and a bachelor deserved more than what she could offer.

If she didn't work hard to earn money, she would never be equal with Anthony in their relationship.

Her efforts to establish herself in her career and make a good living were not only for Shirley but also for herself. She wanted Anthony to be proud of her.

She had never told this to Anthony. But now she felt that he should know. He should understand why she couldn't refuse a job like this.

"Anthony, I know you're not happy with this job, but you've never said it openly. I really appreciate that.

You've always supported me in the past. I made it through only because you always stood behind me."

Taking Anthony's hands, she continued, "You have given me and Shirley your full support during these years. And you did a good job in taking care of Shirley, so I really appreciate you."

"Sher, it was my pleasure to do that. You don't have to thank me for that." Anthony frowned, taking in

her words.

"I know you don't need my appreciation, but that's how I feel. I want you to know that it means a lot to me." A bitter smile escaped her lips.

"Sher, I did that because I'm your boyfriend. It's the natural thing for me to do." Gripping Shirley's hands, he added, "As a girlfriend, you shouldn't have said those words. Have you ever thought of me as your boyfriend?"

His question upset Sheryl. Pulling her hands from his grasp, she said, "Of course I think of you as my boyfriend! I want to spend the rest of my life with you. That's why I'm working so hard. Why don't you understand me?" Annoyance and hurt were evident in Sheryl's tone.

"What? Can you say that again?" Anthony couldn't believe that he heard her aright. He couldn't contain his excitement, grabbing both her hands and squeezing them tightly. "You just said you wanted to spend the rest of your life with me?" The excitement in his voice made Sheryl smile.

"Yes, you heard it correctly." Sheryl blushed as Anthony's longing eyes met hers.

"But I want you to say it again," he said in a tantalizing tone. Tenderly, Anthony pulled Sheryl in his

loving arms. It was pure bliss holding her knowing she finally returned his feelings.

Anthony felt that all the effort he made was worthwhile. It seemed as if he waited an eternity to hear those words from her, but it was all worth it.

Chapter 515 Sheryl's Worries

Despite feeling embarrassed, Sheryl repeated her words. Upon seeing her flustered face, Anthony quickly grabbed and held her in his arms. "Sher, your words make me see how much you value this relationship," Anthony said in a loving tone. "And it truly makes me happy to know that we can spend our lives together in the future," he further added.

"You are truly a naughty man!" Sheryl replied at the sight of the happy, innocent-looking man. Anthony smiled earnestly and held Sheryl closer after hearing her reply.

After some time, Anthony pulled Sheryl from his arms and stared at her with serious eyes and said, "Sheryl, as a physician, I am confident that I can support you and Shirley financially and share the burden with you. At the very least, you can trust me with this."

"Anthony, I have no doubts in your capabilities. I know you have a stable job and you're well-off. But please try to understand, I am a single mother and was an independent woman before I met you,"

Sheryl said. A gleam of confidence and sincerity was seen in her eyes. Sighing, she continued, "Do you

have any idea why our relationship has been filled with doubts and distress from the very beginning?"

Stunned by her question, Anthony couldn't find the right words to say. Seeing her so eager to hear his reply, Anthony finally said, "I can promise my lifelong commitment to you, regardless of what the world says." His words sounded upset, but determined.

Upon hearing him say these words, Sheryl was moved by the sincerity of his promise. But her feelings of doubt and fear made her say in reply, "My past, including whether I was married or not, is nothing to me." "But the reality that I am a single mother is something I couldn't hide or try to change," Sheryl added in conclusion to the doubts she was feeling.

After finishing her words, she took a deep sigh and made a woeful glance at her daughter's room.

"Anthony, you are a well-off bachelor. You deserve someone who is richer and more beautiful to justify your family's name. What I am trying to say is that a single mother like me is not a good match for you,"

Sheryl said.

All this time, Anthony's parents were against their son's relationship with Sheryl. They became more furious upon learning their possible marriage.

If only Craig were alive, then their possible marriage would easily become a reality.

However, not even Craig knew the existence of Sheryl.

Sheryl's real given name was actually Autumn. But even this remained a secret to Craig.

By hiding her real identity, Anthony never would've thought how much trouble this could bring on him.

"I understand. Now, I can finally see why you are caught in a dilemma," he replied. If Sheryl were given

the chance to be Anthony's mother, she would definitely do the same. She would also be furious that

her son was marrying a single mother. How could he choose someone like her despite other women

with better qualities and standard of living?

Anthony's parents' disagreement to their relationship was perfectly understood by Sheryl. She

respected their views so much that she could even give up Anthony if he were to find a better and

perfect woman for him.

"But Sheryl, really, you don't need to worry about such trivial things," Anthony added. "I am a grown up

now and I can make my own decisions, including marrying you. If my parents disagree with us, I'll

move out to live with you and Shirley, and I won't go back to my parents' home." Anthony concluded

while staring directly at Sheryl's eyes. Sheryl's eyes widened by the words she just heard.

"That is absolute nonsense!" Sheryl exclaimed in disapproval. "Your family means a lot to you! I can't even give you half of what they gave you!" she further added furiously. Shirley, still enraged by the words she just heard, continued, "A year ago, you were unable to make it to your dying grandpa's bedside just before he passed away. And then you've remained depressed for half a year! How could you say that?"

Anthony, after reflecting to the words he just said, managed to swear, "Shirley, right now, you are more important than my family. I don't see any other better option than this."

Sheryl, despite being moved again by Anthony's perseverance to make their relationship prosper, remained calm and continued to talk sense over him, "Anthony, if I were to marry you, I wish to receive best wishes from your parents too. I don't want to have a wedding without gaining their favor."

Sheryl was a woman of virtue. After hearing her say these words, Anthony was moved by her opinion.

But he couldn't deny that getting his parents' approval was a difficult task.

Despite working hard to gain his parents' approval to his relationship with Sheryl, he, not even once, succeeded.

"Anthony, I would like to promise you one thing. I will work hard to bring Shirley up to become the best woman she could be. Of course, I will do the same for myself so that I can become fitting for you in the eyes of your parents and other people. I will definitely put an end to those endless gossips," Shirley confidently said. Elated by what he heard, Anthony tried to talk to Sheryl in a mocking tone, "Sher, why don't you just turn a deaf ear to those baseless comments?"

Anthony's words were meant to boost Sheryl's confidence and avoid such trivial thoughts. However, his suggestion made her feel more determined to prove those people wrong.

"But your parents have the same opinions," she exclaimed. "In their eyes, I'm merely a gold digger.

Even if I married with you, your parents would still look down upon me. With that, Shirley would be slighted without the due love and care," Sheryl continued.

Pausing right after saying these words, Sheryl added, "Honestly, I don't have any idea what to do when that time comes. As a result, I have to work harder so that I am able to hold my head high in front of your parents."

Anthony felt nothing but pure happiness from Sheryl's words. He then cunningly said, "So right after what you just said, does this mean that you now promise to marry me?" His face gleamed in

anticipation to what Sheryl's reply would be.

"Really? How could you think so?" Sheryl jokingly said to tease her boyfriend. With her face blushing red from embarrassment, Sheryl uttered, "How could you expect me to say yes when you haven't even knelt down and brought a ring? Make a proposal first, and I will give some time to think it over."

"I knew it! I do have a good chance of getting a sweet yes from you with a proposal," he replied with excitement. Despite all that they had went through, he knew that there was no other woman for him but

Sheryl. Not being able to contain his excitement at the thought of their possible marriage, Anthony grasped her hands. He felt like he was the luckiest man on earth at that time.

After saying her words, Sheryl tried so hard to bury her embarrassment and simply smiled at Anthony for her reply. She then added with her lips curling to a sweet smile, "Well, you can try if you want to."

He was truly overjoyed by the idea of having a family with his beloved woman. Sheryl, on the other hand, tried to shift the subject and talked about her upcoming fashion show.

"Anthony, would you please support me as a model for that fashion show? I badly want to be a part of it," she asked. Sheryl paused and continued, "This offer is a huge deal with great benefit in all aspects.

There is no way I would let this slip!"

Hesitant by the thought of it, Anthony said while wavering, "Sheryl, I know how badly you want it, but..."

"I know what you are about to say", Sheryl replied, cutting Anthony's words. Pausing for a moment,

Sheryl continued saying, "Even before we started dating, I had been living in Y City for so many years. I

also know how much you don't like the place for carrying my weals and woes. Also..."

Sheryl paused, took a deep breath and continued, "Also, I know how uneasy you are while thinking that

Shirley's father might live there. Am I right of all these, Anthony?" Sheryl ended while staring at her

boyfriend's worried eyes that had a slight pain in it..

Chapter 516 Anthony Agreed

As Anthony remained silent, Sheryl went on, "It doesn't matter what happened in the past. And nothing

is more important to me now than you and Shirley. I lost my memory and you're the only one who was

with me when I needed someone to depend on. That man, he means nothing to me. Not even once

have I mentioned his name in my letters. It must've been because my past with him was full of

unpleasant things. This is why I don't want to associate myself with him in any way I can."

Then, Sheryl slowly placed both her hands in Anthony's cheeks, gently brushed them and said, "I only

care about you now. So please, have more faith in yourself, in me and our relationship. Can you do that, for me?" Her words came in a gush of wind that was filled with love, enough to rekindle her boyfriend's hope for their relationship.

He stared at Sheryl who was doing her best to comfort him, his dull expression slowly lit up and a ray of hope was seen in his eyes.

Thinking how ridiculous he was for worrying about such things, Anthony thought to himself, 'Three years have passed, and a lot of things have changed. She is Sheryl now, different from the Autumn before. Moreover, she is my woman now.

I'm the one who kept her company when she needed someone to depend on. As for Charles, he's long been gone from her memory. He no longer exists.

Sheryl has even forgotten his name, his existence. So, what else do I have to worry? We get along just fine. I understand her needs, including Shirley's. We have shared and gone through a lot together for the past years.

Maybe I was being too sensitive. Maybe I was just worrying for nothing.

This woman, she worked so hard for our future. I shouldn't put her down nor let her give up the chance

for us to be together.'

After persuading himself, he grabbed Sheryl's hand and said tenderly, "Sher, if you are already so sure of your decision and have already made up your mind, then I won't stop you anymore. You can go there and fulfill your dream for that fashion show." "As for Shirley, I'll help you look after her so you can rest your mind and focus on what you want to achieve. We'll wait for you," Anthony added in a calm and promising tone.

When she heard him say those words, a smile lit up on her face. She said in relief, "Thank you, Anthony. I won't let you down." Sheryl might have gained Anthony's approval, but a sense of guilt was slowly filling her heart. She could only lower her head to keep him from noticing the inexplicable anxiety in her eyes.

What she confided to Anthony was just a trivial reason for her decision to visit Y City. The real reason behind her decision was because of a voice. A voice kept on resounding in her mind, telling her to return to her hometown.

This familiar voice piqued her interest to have a look at the city where she had lived, but forgotten

completely.

The desire to know why someone kept calling her name and who it was kept growing in her. If she could run into some former acquaintances, maybe she would gain the answers to her questions.

In Y City

Charles' life was in turmoil and his daily life became a rerun. After getting off from work, he would directly head to the bar for a drink. One day, Chris and Gary stayed at home and had lunch together.

After their meal, the old man let out a sigh, "Autumn has left for three years now. But look at your brother, he hasn't gone any better. He's been burying himself in work and alcohol. I just don't know when he can let her go."

Gary kept on worrying for his grandson's welfare. After learning about Autumn and her twins' disappearance, he became seriously ill and his health started to slowly deteriorate.

As for the Zhao family, they decided to leave the city after Autumn disappeared. They initially decided to settle here for her, but when they couldn't find her after looking everywhere, they decided to desert the place and forget all the painful memories they had here.

Also, it was said that Abby's son was diagnosed with congenital heart disease. The poor mother had

wept so many times for her child.

Knowing that she would never be happy staying in this place, her husband decided to elope with her family and leave the city behind.

Noticing the sorrowful and worried look on the old man's face, Chris comforted him, "Don't worry about Charles, Grandpa. He will soon get through all this." With a frown, she continued, "He's no longer a kid.

He could handle himself now, better than anyone else could."

"Just how could he handle himself without..." Gary mumbled lightly, as he gave a bitter smile. "How could I not worry about your brother? It has already been a long time since his wife's death. Yet, he still couldn't move on, let alone trying to move on. He's only known work and alcohol every day. Tell me, how could I not worry about him?" the old man exclaimed with a pained look all over his face.

Hearing this, Chris didn't know how to console his beloved grandpa. After a long pause of thinking, she knitted her eyebrows and said in an assuring tone, "Don't worry. Charles loved Autumn deeply, so it's normal for him to act like this. But if he gets to go out on a date with another woman, he'll get over her and the pain for sure. He could then start afresh."

"See another woman? Do you think he could find another one?" Gary responded with his mouth agape.

Despite being rich and a hunk, Charles had never entertained other women despite Autumn's

disappearance. No other girl could match her, he thought. Instead of dealing with them to help him

forget her, he kept ignoring them and attacking them with mean words. Soon enough, those women

decided to stop upon realizing how deep his love was for his wife.

Chris' thoughts weren't something new to Gary. And every time he thought about this, he would have a

headache. He could only shake his head in disappointment and voiced his opinion, "I'm afraid that will

never happen. No other woman is any better than Autumn for your brother, not even if she is a celestial

maid."

Not even once did Gary blame Charles for behaving that way, and for not being able to forget his wife.

He just hated to see his beloved grandson live in pain.

"We never know, Grandpa. We can only wait and see," Chris said in a comforting tone with her lips

curling into a mysterious smile. "I'll help him get things back together and make him pull himself up.

Someday, he'll be okay," she further added.

Gary couldn't believe Chris' words, and he thought she was just joking. But looking at the concerned

look on the old man's face, Chris was already planning how she could bring Charles and Leila together.

After having her lunch, Chris made a call to Leila and asked her to meet up in a desert shop.

Leila was overjoyed at the thought that she could get Charles soon. While Andy had been looking for

Autumn's son back then, she had made great efforts to hide the boy and even returned to her

hometown. Andy had stopped tracing her later. Leila didn't return to Y City until she learned the news of

Andy's family's departure from the city.

With Chris' help, Leila believed that she would get married to Charles soon.

At the desert shop, while Leila was approaching Chris' table, Chris could no longer stop herself from

saying, "Leila, now's the time. Don't just sit while waiting, you need to make a move. Please, hurry up!"

Chris' concern for her brother was obvious by the way she furrowed her brows while saying her words.

Leila, stunned by the urgency from Chris' words, said with a wry smile, "I know. I know I need to hurry

up. However..." Chris interrupted, "However?" "You know your brother, he's wary of me. If I make some

moves quickly, he would easily learn my intentions. And when that happens, I know he will push me

further away," Leila replied as if she was about to be in tears.

"Stop hesitating. I have an idea," Chris said while frowning. After a long pause of thinking, she suggested, "You used to be Charles' secretary, right? Perhaps you can handle the work in Shining Company. I heard he needs a secretary and you are a perfect fit. After taking over Sun Company, he's become a lot busier. Go ahead and apply for that post."

Despite seeing Leila's puzzled face, she went on, "This way, you can help Charles with his work. At the same time, you can find a chance to get closer to him and cultivate your feelings. And oh, you can take of him as an incentive. He has a lot of things to do in a daily basis that he could no longer take care of his own. As long as you work for him, you can show him how much you love and care for him." "This is a good opportunity for you to be closer to him, you shouldn't let this slip," she added with a sense of urgency.

"Do you think that'll work?" Leila asked hesitantly. Leila couldn't help but feel uneasy about Chris' plan. She knew that it would fail easily, given Charles' sharp intuition. But it might go well too, and she would like to hold on to this little hope.

"Of course, it will!" Chris replied immediately. The look on Leila's face was full of doubts. Her hesitant expression made Charles' sister wrinkle her forehead. Chris impatiently asked, "Do you want to marry

my brother or not?"

Shocked by Chris' sudden question, Leila was rendered speechless. "I... Of course I do!" Leila

admitted with a blush. 'Now is not the time to hesitate. I should grab this chance before I lose him

again, ' she told herself.

"I see. If you want to get married to him, stop hesitating and start taking actions as soon as possible. If

you keep on acting slow, soon enough, he'll grow farther away. If that happens, when can you get

him?" Chris lectured while pouting, with her arms crossed. "And even if you can wait, haven't you

considered your son's situation?" Chris continued as he seriously asked Leila.

Chapter 517 Leila's Ploy Works

Leila sat quietly for a long time, carefully thinking what to do. She was still unable to make up her mind.

After Chris left, Leila kept thinking about her suggestion. Leila felt what Chris proposed sounded quite

reasonable. Yes, she wanted to marry Charles, and the best way to get intimate with the man was to

spend more time with him.

Love, she believed, would follow in time.

But Leila still had certain misgivings. Voluntarily applying for a position in the Shining Company was not

a good move. Charles would easily see her real intention. She needed to figure out a plan. 'How can I make Charles ask me back to his company?' Leila thought.

As usual, Charles called Leila that evening to ask her out for drinks. She hesitated but then finally declined his invitation. "Mr. Lu, much as I also want to have a drink with you, I'm too tired to go out," she said with an excuse. "You know I have to work hard to raise my son. I've been at the supermarket the whole day, and I am exhausted, so I want to rest early tonight," Leila told Charles.

"You're working at a supermarket?" Charles couldn't keep the surprise out of his voice. He knew Leila was competent and highly educated but now she was just working as a salesperson to earn a living for her son. Her revelation shocked Charles, and he wanted to know why.

"Why are you working at the supermarket?" he inquired. Charles hoped his question did not offend her. He held the phone and couldn't help feeling baffled at Leila's current employment situation.

The woman he knew was arrogant, so it was difficult to imagine her accepting a job as lowly as a supermarket salesperson.

"Yes, I am working at a supermarket as a saleswoman now," Leila admitted. "You sound surprised.

Why? Is it because you never expected me to be doing this?" she asked. He couldn't see her smiling

bitterly. Leila drew in a breath before continuing, "You do know I am a single mom. So I need to make money to support our life, and take care of my son." Leila saw the opportunity to set her plan in motion.

"I had offers from some companies before, but I had to refuse them because I had to take care of my son. When I tried applying again, I was told to stop working and look for another job when my son is big enough and doesn't need too much attention," she said lengthily.

There was a pause as she thought of what to say next. "Mr. Lu, you were born into a prominent family, and don't have to worry about such trivial matters. But, like most everybody else, I have to work hard to earn a living. If I don't work, I won't have a source of income," she wove her story smiling. Sighing, she ended with, "So, I'm afraid I can't go out drinking with you anymore."

Leila was taking a huge risk with this strategy. Each time Charles asked her out for drinks was a chance to become closer to him. But their past outings got her nowhere.

She now knew that to get more intimate with Charles required a reckless move such as this.

If this risk paid off, then things would hopefully fall into place. But if she failed, Leila knew she would lose her last chance at becoming close to Charles again.

As she ended her tale, Leila fidgeted while waiting for Charles to say something. He was silent for a long time, making her even more nervous. Leila was on her way to getting upset, with a sinking feeling that it was over. She was close to accepting defeat.

She began to regret all that she just told Charles, but there wasn't anything she could do to remedy the situation. Instead she smiled bitterly and said, "Mr. Lu, I am so sorry. I have to hang up now." Still no reaction. "I need to give my son a bath."

It truly disappointed her that she screwed her chances with Charles, so she took a deep breath and was ready to hang up.

But before she could do so, Charles suddenly spoke up, "Wait a minute, Leila."

Hearing his voice suddenly made Leila nervous. Was the situation about to change? She didn't realize how tight she held the phone, but her voice was shaky as she asked, "Do you want to say something, Mr. Lu?"

After realizing Leila's situation, Charles began thinking how desperately he needed people to help him manage the day-to-day company affairs. Leila could help him manage the company. It would also be good to have her around to remind him of his missing wife. Charles was sure that if Autumn were still

alive, she, too, would be a single mother, like Leila.

He considered all this and became determined to help his former secretary. Charles thought it would also make him feel better to help Leila at this point in her life. He also hoped that Autumn would meet someone who would want to do the same for her.

He drew in a deep breath and asked, "Are you available tomorrow?" Before she could respond, he added, "If you're free, come to Shining Company. I want to talk to you." Charles couldn't believe how relaxed he sounded while speaking. And Leila was beside herself with joy.

Cheerfully, she replied, "Yes, of course, Mr. Lu. I will be there tomorrow."

But she controlled her excitement and pretended to cough slightly to ease her embarrassment. "I mean I will be free after bringing my son to school in the morning," she told Charles. "I'll be free around ten o'clock, Mr. Lu. Is that a good time for you? Will you be in a meeting then?" she asked politely. "I don't want to inconvenience you," Leila hastened to add.

"So, I'll see you at ten o'clock tomorrow. Just wait for me if my meeting isn't over," Charles told her. He hesitated before speaking again. "Anyway, get a good night's rest. I'll hang up now."

Leila hung up and couldn't control her excitement. She did it! The woman could not stop giggling as she slumped on the couch. Charlie looked at her with disdain. He got up and was about to leave the room when Leila stopped him.

"Charlie, mom will have a new job by tomorrow. Are you happy for me?" She shared her good news with the boy. It was a big deal for Leila, but Charlie remained indifferent. He didn't care about her good news and looked at her with cold eyes.

The boy looked Leila in the eye and mocked, "Don't be so cheerful. I'm sure that in a few days, they will dismiss you."

Leila was not discouraged by his words. "No, Charlie. I can assure you it will be different this time. Now, I have a better chance to keep my job," she told him. Leila flushed in embarrassment at Charlie's words. To earn a living, Leila had been forced to accept jobs she did not like. But because she was educated and overqualified, she would become arrogant and complain about everything. Eventually, she would be fired or would resign. And Charlie was aware of her employment history in the last several years.

Nothing could change her mood, not even the boy's apathetic attitude. "Charlie, you have to trust me

this time," she said. "I promise that this time, I will work hard to provide you with a better life," Leila said emphatically.

"And I will not only make a lot of money but also bring your father back," she added.

Her last words made Charlie stare at Leila. His expression remained passive, but he asked, "Really?"

His tone aloof, Charlie mockingly said, "Well, congratulations!"

Charlie may be a young boy, but he was more mature than most children at his age. Though Leila

always treated him well, he found it difficult to show affection for her. And he could never figure out why

he never felt close to Leila, except that it was like instinct to stay away.

And this instinct told him to seek advantages but avoid disadvantages.

"So, what do you want for breakfast tomorrow?" she asked the boy. Smiling, Leila offered, "I will prepare it for you." While waiting for his response, she heaved a sigh of relief.

"Thanks, but there is no need to prepare breakfast especially for me," Charlie declined. His tone was cold, but Leila ignored this. He walked back to his bedroom.

Leila was grinning from ear to ear, as she leaned on the couch to rejoice over her victory.

The next day, Leila still cooked a hearty breakfast for Charlie and kept urging the boy to eat some more.

He stared at the egg Leila handed him, and then frowned. Charlie set it aside quietly and said, "I am already full."

After a few moments, he announced, "It's time to go to school." Charlie put his fork down, wiped his mouth gently and looked at Leila to signal he was ready. Today, there were no mood swings.

She was surprised by his desire to leave for school. Leila asked to be sure, "Have you finished eating breakfast? Please give me a moment so I can walk you to school." Leila quickly stood up to clear the dishes and got ready.

Unlike most children who held their parents' hands while walking, Charlie always walked by himself, with Leila by his side. He had never walked hand-in-hand with his mom.

He always looked like a young adult in a suit.

Chapter 518 Meeting Old Acquaintances

Charlie always looked tidy in his suits. He walked steadily towards school while Leila carrying his small bag followed. People who came across the two found them a little strange.

When they arrived, she escorted him up to the school gate and watched him enter. Then she hailed a taxi that would bring her to Shining Company.

Now standing in front of the Shining Company gate, Leila could not believe how quickly time flew. Four years ago, she left this company in shame and never expected to be back one day.

Staring at the magnificent gate of the company, Leila dreamed of the day when she would marry Charles and become the only hostess of the Lu family.

In the past four years, not only things but people had changed.

Shining Company continued to stand proudly, but its design and décor, as well as the employees, were almost different. Leila came across several familiar faces, who all smiled in greeting but whose eyes looked confused. Nobody remembered her name. But it did not matter. Leila simply smiled at them out of politeness and then went on her way.

She swore that one day, everyone in the company would know who she was.

David was shocked when he caught sight of Leila in the premises. He had brought some files to the meeting room. He frowned as they came face-to-face. He couldn't help but ask, "Leila? What are you doing here?"

Many years may have passed, but David still looked at Leila with disdain. He could never forget the devious things she had done before and couldn't help feeling disgusted at the sight of her.

"Get out of here! You are not welcome in this company!" he growled. He wanted Leila to leave because the meeting would soon be over and if Charles saw Leila there, he would blame David for not keeping her out.

David was trying his best to drive Leila away.

"David, it's so nice to see you again," she said in greeting. She flashed a friendly smile like those shared among friends.

Alice chose that moment to make an appearance. She didn't notice Leila, but pushed David and berated him, "Why are you standing there? Have you prepared the files already?" She eyed him angrily.

"Mr. Lu will need them soon."

"Alice, nice to see you again," Leila interrupted with a slight smile.

Annoyed, Alice turned to see who greeted her. After a brief hesitation, she said, "Leila?" She wasn't sure it was Leila, and only recognized the woman after she spoke in greeting.

Leila nodded, while Alice gave her a puzzled look. "We haven't seen each other for a very long time," she said. Alice looked at her closely. "You've changed a lot," she noted.

"Have I?" Leila asked, smiling. In return, she complimented, "You look as young as before, and even more beautiful." Most women appreciated flattery, but not Alice.

Alice accepted the compliment with little reaction. Finally, she gave Leila a reluctant smile and asked, "So, what brings you here?"

David snorted in annoyance, "She can only bring trouble here!" He couldn't help but add, "Have you no shame, woman? Many years have passed, and you're still dreaming that Mr. Lu would marry you. Are you insane?"

Alice tapped David gently and shushed him, "Shut up, David."

"Why? I just told the truth," he snapped. David could not be pacified and kept throwing dirty glances at Leila.

Years ago, David's harsh words would have pushed Leila to lose her temper. But she had changed a lot and kept her composure. When David finally got tired and stopped talking, Leila said, "You were wrong about me. I'm here today because Mr. Lu asked me to come."

David's eyebrows rose. "Oh, stop lying! How can Mr. Lu allow you to come?" He spat the question in disgust.

Suddenly, Alice dragged David aside and whispered, "Did you forget what Mr. Lu said earlier?" David frowned. "He said someone was coming in for an interview. Have you forgotten?" she reminded him.

He was momentarily puzzled before the frown settled back on his face. Of course he remembered. But he never expected it to be Leila.

A brow arched, he mumbled, "What the hell is Mr. Lu doing?" It made him very uncomfortable. "How could he call her in for an interview?"

"It's none of your business!" Alice retorted. She was also frowning now. "Just go back to work and I'll handle this," she ordered David.

When he left, Alice apologized to Leila. "I'm sorry for everything David said. Please don't mind him.

He's just poor at hiding his feelings, and he has a habit of accusing others. But, he is a good man."

Alice tried her best to settle the matter calmly because she didn't know what Leila's reason for being in the office was.

But Leila assured her, "Don't worry. I'm not taking his words seriously. We were colleagues before and I know David is a kind man, though he is often bad-tempered."

Alice heaved a sigh of relief. "Yes, you're right."

Leila moved to correct misimpressions. "Actually, he might have misunderstood my actions in the past," she began. "So I can understand why he was so unfriendly just now. It's not his fault," Leila explained.

"All right then. That should settle it," Alice said. Smiling, she offered, "Would you like anything to drink?"

She thought for a moment and said, "How about orange juice?"

"Okay, thank you." Having served as Charles' assistant for many years, Alice was very capable and could handle any problem.

Leila began to realize how isolated from society she had become. Sitting with Alice, she felt awkward as she saw how much confidence a successful woman had, just like Alice.

"It looks to me like you and David have a special relationship," Leila pointed out. Holding the juice in her hand, she looked at Alice. Charles' assistant gave an embarrassed smile. "Oh, it's that obvious."

Her cheeks turned pink. "Yes, we are together." Alice thought it was pointless to deny and conceal their relationship.

Leila was a bit surprised but kept a friendly smile on her face.

"Really? So, when are you planning to get married?" Leila asked.

"We haven't decided yet," Alice replied. Feeling at ease speaking to Leila, she was about to raise

another topic when Charles came out of the meeting room. He nodded when he saw Leila and

said, "Oh, you're here."

Leila wanted to come forward, but he quickly entered his office, while handing Alice a file. "This file is

from BM Corporation. Study it carefully, and then I want your feedback by the end of office hours," he

instructed.

BM Corporation's headquarters were in the United States, and it had a small branch in Y City. Even as

a small company, it had taken away big business from Shining Company. Charles didn't mind it at first

but now decided to take actions against the competition to prevent further losses.

"Okay, Mr. Lu," Alice nodded and accepted the file. "I made an appointment for you with the consultant

of Lighten House Company tomorrow evening. And his wife will be joining him at the meeting," she

added.

Chapter 519 One Step Closer

"I see," Charles said. Autumn's disappearance was a big blow for Isla. Three years had passed, but she still had not gotten over the loss of her best friend. Apart from Charles, Isla was the only other person who could not let Autumn go.

And because they felt the same way, Charles was always hesitant to see Isla.

He feared that he might slip into endless sorrow once again if he met Isla.

"Has David sorted the documents?" he asked Alice. He told himself to focus on business.

"I'll go and check it now," Alice replied. Since they'd been discussing business, Leila was left alone. As she stood outside Charles' office, she suddenly felt awkward. Charles realized he had kept his guest waiting for a long time. So he told his assistant, "That's all for now. I need to see your plans as soon as possible. You may go now," he told Alice.

Alice nodded, and then turned to leave. She noticed Leila and reminded her boss, "Mr. Lu, Leila has been waiting outside. Will I tell her to come in now?"

"Yes, ask her in. And by the way, bring me some coffee," he requested. Charles settled in his chair and waited.

Leila entered hesitantly, approached Charles' desk and stood stiffly. When she worked there, she could

handle anything. Now, she dreaded the changes. Even looking at Alice, she couldn't help but cast an envious glance at the woman.

Then the doubts started to creep in. 'What if I no longer qualify as a secretary?' she asked herself.

"What are you doing standing there?" Charles broke into her thoughts. "Have a seat," he offered. She gave an embarrassed smile and took the seat opposite her former boss. In spite of her nerves, she couldn't stop thinking how handsome he still looked.

"So, how does it feel to be back here?" Charles inquired. "There hasn't been any big change. What can you say?" he prodded.

Leila nodded, and then shook her head. Realizing how confusing her actions were, she hurriedly explained to Charles, "Yes, the place feels familiar, but the environment seems different. And it's somehow strange. When I worked here, I don't remember it being this intense. I look around now and notice how busy people like Alice and David are. It seems like no one has time for a break."

Charles laughed at her description and explained, "After incorporating Sun Company into Shining Company, there's more work to do. Recently, we've been planning to enter the fashion industry."

And this made him think. 'Women are now considered a main consumer group. The board members all agree it is a promising industry. We have to carry out our plans soon.'

"That only means you'll be even busier, Mr. Lu," Leila pointed out. The woman felt her patience running thin. They had been talking for a while, but so far, Charles had not offered her a job. But as impatient as she felt, she couldn't bring it up herself.

"Not only me. You'll be busy as well," Charles corrected her. Leila lifted her head to see if she heard him right.

He was smiling, and the words finally sank in. Leila's eyes widened in shock. "What do you mean, Mr. Lu?" she asked, wanting to be sure.

"Haven't I made myself clear enough?" Charles inquired pleasantly. "With the company growing so fast, we need more hands on deck. We've been hiring people. But I still haven't found a proper secretary. When we spoke on the phone, I thought you could handle the job," Charles expounded.

"You must be kidding, Mr. Lu," Leila smiled nervously. She wanted to test if Charles really wanted to hire her. So Leila pretended to refuse the offer. "It's been so long since I've done something like this. It's far different from being a housewife. I might not be competent enough for this job," she said.

Putting on a bitter smile, she continued, "Mr. Lu, I wish I could help you." Hesitating for effect, Leila added, "But I'm not sure if I can handle the work. And as you mentioned, this is a critical time for the company. I wouldn't want to hold you back."

Charles stared at her in disbelief. "What happened to you?" He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"Are you the Leila I knew? From what I saw before, you were a determined and fearless girl. Where did all that confidence go?" he asked.

Leila blushed in embarrassment. "Mr. Lu, you flatter me," she said. "But it's been a long time since I worked in a company. My fear is failing to meet your expectations," Leila argued.

"I believe you," Charles said, hoping to convince Leila. "Do you remember when you first worked here?"

You knew nothing. But you learned very quickly and did your job well. Have you forgotten that?" he encouraged her. "There is nothing you can't do as long as you're willing to learn," Charles reminded Leila.

She remained hesitant, and frowned a little. Leila asked herself, "Should I give in now?"

The man was persistent. "Just agree," he said. Charles had invited Leila to give her a job, but not to

persuade her to accept his offer. At her hesitancy, he was running out of patience, so he said coolly, "If you want to work here, you can go to the HR Department and finish your entry procedures. But I won't force you."

Leila shut her eyes briefly, and then finally nodded. "Since you put it that way, I won't decline the offer.

But I need to make one thing clear. I'm here to work. If you're not satisfied with my performance, tell me

and treat me like the other employees," she declared.

"I will do that," Charles replied as he gave a smile of satisfaction. Then he added, "As for your salary, you can talk to the people in the HR Department. I am sure you will receive more than enough for your needs." She mumbled her gratitude. "As for your working hours..." Charles paused.

He knitted his brows while giving it considerable thought. "I know you have a child who is too young to take care of himself. So, I am allowing you to leave the office, if necessary. There is only one thing I hope you can guarantee: you finish your work every day. You can bring it home and get it done after you've put your son to sleep. Are you agreeable to these conditions?" he asked. "Can you do that?" he asked Leila again.

"That will not be a problem," she responded with a confident smile. "Once I accept your offer, I promise to work hard and perform my duties faithfully. I will live up to all your expectations. You have my word on that," Leila vowed.

"I'm very glad to hear that!" Charles said, bursting into laughter. "Why don't you go straight to the HR Department and complete all the entry formalities?" he suggested. "And by the way, when can you start?"

"Tomorrow!" Leila answered immediately, eager to get back to work.

"Well then, I'll see you tomorrow." He smiled as Leila left his office.

Things went so smoothly she could hardly believe what was happening. When she finally signed her contract at the HR Department, Leila realized it wasn't a dream.

And in her mind, she was screaming, 'Now, I am a step closer to getting Charles!'

Chapter 520 Leila's New Job

When Leila went to pick Charlie from school, he noticed the bright aura radiating off her. Surprised, he stared at her glowing face but kept his questions to himself. Before they went home, they went to a supermarket and bought food supplies for the dinner that night. Once they arrived, she prepared and cooked the meal while humming a song to herself. While Charlie sat on the seat of the dining table, he

was staring and wondering at her sudden good mood. The dinner was served and they ate in silence until she spoke, smiling.

"Charlie, can you spare me a few minutes? There's something I'd liked to talk to you about after we eat." Chewing his meal, Charlie stared at the hopeful gleam on her. She was happy, but he couldn't stop getting unusual about it. He swallowed his meal, drank a gulp of water from his glass and asked, "What do you want to say?"

Leila leaned in and replied excitedly, "I found a job and I will start working by tomorrow! If I can't pick you on time, you'll have to wait for me at your teacher's office. I promise I won't make you wait too long." She sounded apologetic and promising at the same time but he dismissed it. Once she began working, she would have the liberty to do as she wished, just like before.

"You don't have to pick me up," he said monotonously as he continued eating his meal. "I have the duplicate key of the door. Also, I know the route back home," he added with a monotonous tone.

She couldn't believe how understanding he was of these circumstances. The school was located one block away from the house, and she was sure Charlie could do it all by himself. Considering his age,

she couldn't just let him be. "No, you are too young to go home alone. I must fetch you after each class."

Puzzled, Charlie stared at her and said, "The teacher said I am smart because I have an IQ of 150. I can handle going home alone from now on."

After his words, Charlie went to his bedroom soundlessly while Leila was left speechless. Recalling his words, she soon remembered she once had him take an IQ test some time ago. The result amazed her beyond words. He was surprisingly an exceptionally intelligent child. Although she was the adult, she always felt like an idiot next to Charlie. One look from him had made her rethink her actions, making her feel uncomfortable.

The next morning, she woke up early to make a healthy breakfast for Charlie and to prepare for her first day of work. After she did her other routines, she accompanied Charlie to school.

She barely arrived on time for work.

"Hello, Leila!" a voice greeted her as soon as she went in. Gasping for her breath, Leila turned to see Charles' frowning face. She stood straight and faced him. There was an automatic smile on her as he asked, "Why are you in a hurry?"

"I didn't catch the subway after I sent my son to school. Running out of options, I took a cab and was almost late when I arrived. I ran towards the attendance recorder to catch up in time." As she explained, she was breathless and embarrassed. "Mr. Lu, I will go out half an hour early and be on time tomorrow and onwards, I promise," she pleaded.

"Okay," he accepted hastily. He knew she was with a kid and understood her situation. In fact, he knew she came just on time. He looked at her and said, "Come to my office." Glad for his generosity, Leila followed him to his office.

The news about Leila returning to work had spread from the HR Department and throughout the company. Learning about the news, David and Alice were annoyed and disappointed about it. With hushed whispers, they talked about Leila as she passed the two.

David's frown was plastered on his face.

His eyes trailed after Leila's back as she followed Charles to the front.

Once at the front, everyone gathered in a circle and listened attentively to the announcement. Charles stared at the people and spoke, "I think all of you know I invited Leila to work."

His eyes darted to Alice and David, his words were on them and he added, "You were once colleagues with Leila. I believe you two will be the best choice to pair up with her. And, I expect you three will work together exceptionally for your team and for the company."

Charles' words took her out of her reverie. "Have some words for your colleagues," he said, asking in a low voice.

At that moment, she eased her nervousness before meeting their eyes and stated, "I'm overwhelmed and grateful to Mr. Lu for giving me this opportunity to showcase my ability. I will do my best in the work

along with my colleagues, and share each other's time and efforts together with each project."

"You are too polite, Miss Zhang," David exclaimed in an uncanny tone as he stared at her. "Mr. Lu thinks highly of you now. I think you will do just fine without help from us in the upcoming tasks as you did many years ago. I am confident you will adapt to your job quickly. I think we are the ones who should depend on you for promotion," he added. The last words were given as a joke but she could see past this along with his sneering smile that irked Leila the most.

Alice, who remained quiet by David's side, elbowed him as a warning to stop.

She understood that speaking against Leila might not be favorable to them. It might even displease Charles.

"I know about the disagreements between you two. As your superior, I will have you work to build your relationship for the better. As we are all professionals here, I would also like to emphasize that we must uphold our work ethics within this company," Charles added as he stared at them.

"Understood, Mr. Lu," they chorused in agreement. Charles was satisfied with the unified response and nodded.

The small assembly was done and the people went back to their individual tasks. Charles called Alice and David's attention and instructed, "Alice, please prepare the place for Leila's workstation. David, come to my office, now."

The two looked at each other, passing an understanding before David went with Charles. Once at his office, behind closed doors, David was faced with a questioning Charles. Arms crossed, Charles asked, "What's wrong with you? Why are you acting hostile towards her?"

Instead of replying, David lowered his gaze and remained muted. Charles' eyes narrowed at his actions. Obviously he was displeased with his behavior. Once again, he repeated his question with a

raised voice, "Tell me why you were acting like that towards her?"

"Mr. Lu, I am annoyed at her mere presence." Reluctantly, David unearthed his feelings towards Leila, turning serious as he spoke, "I think you know the kind of person she is, Mr. Lu.

She is scheming to earn your affection and favors. I don't understand your reasons for hiring her back."

"I am aware of her capabilities as a colleague but what she did to Mrs. Lu was beyond forgiveness,"

David spoke with conviction as his dark eyes met Charles'. "Now she is dead. Have you no conscience for doing this?"

The mention of his wife had awakened something in him, and his temperament darkened. He knew

David meant no malicious intention towards Autumn's memory. His expression turned grave, and his

eyes were dark as he met David's eyes. In a calm, dangerous tone, he spoke, "Are you done? I would

like to say something in return."

Sensing the change, David slightly grimaced and said hesitantly, "I truly believe having Leila back in the company is a complete mistake."

Letting his thoughts be known made him at ease. He wasn't ashamed for saying those words against

her even despite Charles' obvious displeasure.

"Do you want to hear my reason?" Charles sighed and stared at him.

He nodded and Charles proceeded to speak, "My reason for hiring Leila is simple. Our company is in dire need of staff equipped with experience like her. She can adapt to her new job. This will also reduce your and Alice's burden of tasks, giving you a leeway of your time, perhaps to date."

David's cheeks instantly flushed. Embarrassed at his words, he interjected immediately, "Mr. Lu, please don't say it like that. We do take our jobs seriously and wholeheartedly. Alice and I still have time to spend together."