

Chapter 28 The Apologetic Meal

After carefully considering her reaction earlier, Debbie realized that she did not mean to give the secretary a hard time. So when Carlos' employee apologized to her like her life might have depended on her forgiveness, she simply nodded and said, "It's okay. Which floor is his office on?" Then, she shrugged and added, "I can go there myself." Her tone was much friendlier than earlier. It was enough to reassure Rhonda that the mysterious young lady had no intentions of having her fired from her job.

She shook her head and insisted, "No, Miss. I was instructed by Carlos himself that I needed to accompany you upstairs." At Hilton Group, the CEO's requests were orders that no employee dared to defy. In simple terms, whatever Carlos wanted, he would get it one way or another.

Sensing the nervous tone in Rhonda's voice, Debbie could tell that she was afraid of Carlos too. That was a piece of information which did not surprise her at all.

The man wore a stern expression most of the time. It would be more of a surprise if someone claimed the opposite and that Carlos could not hurt a fly.

In Debbie's opinion most people feared Carlos like Jared and she did. Both of them, for the record, were usually hell-raisers. In front of Carlos, however, they would quickly become as timid as mice.

The secretary seemed determined to do her job, so Debbie nodded and followed her to the 66th floor.

As much as it was spacious, the whole floor was rather quiet. Perhaps it had something to do with the fact that it was time for many employees to clock out, but Debbie sure felt like the place was as silent as a graveyard at midnight. Next to the CEO's office was a small area consisting of several desks, and on the door was a clear sign which read, "Office of the CEO's Secretaries".

Unlike her presumption earlier, five people were still working in the office, and through the glass, she could see a sixth seat which was vacant at the moment. It took Debbie a lot of effort not to exclaim her awe. Carlos, the CEO of Hilton Group, had six secretaries! Then it occurred to her that, as the boss of such a huge company, Carlos probably had tons of work to handle every day. It was only appropriate that he needed so many secretaries.

A man wearing glasses got out of his chair, and walked to them when he saw Rhonda with a lady he had yet to meet. "Hi, Rhonda. This is...?" Although he could not put his finger on it, the man thought Debbie looked rather familiar.

For someone who appeared to be in his twenties, he looked like a model student at university. With a smile lingering on his face, it was difficult to see him as anything else but a nice person.

Shooting Debbie an awkward look, Rhonda turned to the man and replied courteously, "Tristan, this lady is here for Carlos."

In spite of Rhonda's efforts to introduce the lady, Tristan was too distracted by Debbie's bewitching smile to pay attention. But soon enough he was back to being professional. "Hello, miss. Nice to meet you. Please, follow me," he said, politely gesturing with his hand towards the CEO's office. Offering a small smile, Debbie followed Tristan while Rhonda stayed behind. The young lady could tell that the older woman was relieved to pass her over to Tristan.

Upon reaching the door, the male secretary knocked on the door lightly. "Come in," came Carlos' deep, cold voice.

Instinctively, Debbie clutched the meal box close to her. Of all the times when she could lose her nerve, it just had to be at a point when she was halfway through the final step of her plan.

Would he be displeased to see her? There was a chance where Carlos would get so angry that he might grab the divorce papers and sign them at once. Then again, he could be in such a good mood that he might gladly agree to let her out of the marriage.

Her mind, a little all over the place, was filled with so many questions as she walked into Carlos' office.

The office was at least 300 square meters, decorated from the furniture to its walls in shades of black, white, and gray.

A state-of-the-art, high-tech desk was placed by the window. In front of it, were a white sofa and a glass table. Against a wall was a wine cabinet and on the opposite side was a bookshelf with a water dispenser next to it. In spite of its enormous space, the place looked clean and simple with its minimalist style.

On the left side was an indoor golf court. Some famous paintings and calligraphy were hung on the wall. Meanwhile, on the right side was the CEO's private lounge.

When Carlos raised his head from what he had been working on, he saw the girl at the door. A faint light flickered in his eyes at the sight of her.

Putting down the pen, he stared at Debbie who was looking around curiously. The young lady's attention was on everything else in the room but him.

When she felt his eyes on her, she paused from her subtle exploration of the room and withdrew her gaze from its decoration. After hearing Tristan close the door behind her, she took a few steps towards him.

During that short moment, she tried to calm herself down. Once she did, she remarked, "Um, Carlos." Immediately, she remembered Rhonda's and everyone else's reactions earlier and corrected herself, "Oh, I'm sorry. I mean, Sir. I'm sorry to interrupt you. It's just that... er, I made this at home. I'd like it if you could have a taste."

Carlos raised an eyebrow in disbelief. What was she up to? Was this her way of apologizing? After their previous encounters, he had the impression that she was a very stubborn feisty girl. She did not seem like the type to back down from a fight. Certainly not from him. So why was she apologizing to him all of a sudden? Was it all just some elaborate trick?

And... well, could the girl even cook? All the questions that lingered in his mind as she stood before Carlos made him remember something from the past. The day they had registered for marriage, Carlos recalled, he had told Philip that the girl did not have to do anything and that as his wife, she was to be treated like a queen.

There was no pressure for Debbie to learn household chores or anything that required putting her hands to work. If that had been the case these past few years, then why did she feel the need to learn how to cook? Was it one of her hobbies? Because Philip had never mentioned it in his reports.

For a long moment, Carlos did not say anything in response. His silence made the lady very nervous. "What the hell does this mean?" she thought frantically.

"Is he angry? Does he not want me to show up here?"

The possibility of her last thought made her feel a bit embarrassed. Regardless, she opened the thermal meal box anyway, and said, "As soon as you try everything I will leave right away."

But Carlos wasn't completely listening any more. The moment she opened the box, a burnt smell filled the room -- and hence, Carlos caught a whiff of it.

Wincing Carlos thought, "What was that? Did she even check if it was edible?"

Debbie caught the man's expression. "A frown? Why is he frowning? He has not even tasted it yet. Was it because it does not look good?"

She clasped her hands together and began to explain, "It may look awful but it tastes good." "She's right," Carlos thought. "It does look awful." "Julie had tasted it and she said the same. It's really good. You should have a try," Debbie persisted. For tonight's mission, she did not even eat the dishes herself so there would be plenty for him.

Disregarding the mildly horrified look on his face, Debbie took the chopsticks out from the meal box and handed them to him.

Initially, he was hesitant to accept them, but the expectant look on her face made him decide not to disappoint her.

Once he did, Debbie started to introduce the dishes excitedly. "This is Dongpo tofu. Well, this is um... Why is it black? Um, it's supposed to be red braised pork." She looked at the burnt dish and giggled at Carlos, embarrassed.

"This one," she went on, pointing at another dish, "is supposed to be stewed pork ball in brown sauce. How come it's black too?" Her voice trailed off as she examined her cooking. The food did not seem to have looked that way earlier. Not to her anyway.

Due to Carlos' taste in food, his extensive experience with different cuisines prepared by brilliant chefs across the world... Debbie's dishes did not appeal to him at all. They looked so hideous that he did not have to taste them to know that the taste would not be good.

"Oh, oh, I know this one. These are boiled shrimps. They didn't become black," she exclaimed excitedly. "Of course, these wouldn't be black. All you needed to do was throw them in a pot and boil them," Carlos thought to himself.

His hand holding the chopsticks felt like it had been tied to a stone; it was too heavy to lift. But Debbie prattled on. "Carlos, this is the first time I have cooked. I-I came here to apologize. Last night..."

She lowered her head. The look in the man's eyes dimmed. Her next words somehow made him feel relieved like a thorn had been removed from his heart.

"I shouldn't have gotten drunk. I won't cause you any more trouble in the future. Will you forgive me?" She widened her innocent eyes, putting on another expectant look while staring at Carlos. The man remained silent the entire time she talked.

Finally, he nodded. Her eyes were filled with surprise and joy. Somehow, seeing her so happy made him feel happy too. At the moment, there were no words to explain the logic behind the connection. Simply put, the young lady's delight lightened up the mood in the room, and he was more than fine with it.

"You haven't taken a bite yet," she suddenly said. Uh-oh. He had thought that she had forgotten about the dishes. Quite frankly, he had nearly forgotten about them himself.

Among all the dishes, the shrimps were the only one that seemed like they would not give him a stomachache. So he decided to pick up a shrimp.

But before his chopsticks could lift one from the meal box, she put her



hand on the chopsticks and said, "Shrimps need peeling. Peeling is rather time-consuming. Better leave this one for last. Try the other dishes first."

Carlos' face darkened. Dropping the shrimp and picking up a lump of red braised pork, he put it into his mouth, and slowly chewed.

His face froze -- and as much as he tried to refrain from doing so, he still ended up spitting it out into the bin.

"Gosh! She calls that thing red braised pork?" the shocked CEO thought. "What was that taste? Hard to say. It was bitter, salty and... just weird."

After wiping his mouth with a clean tissue, he grabbed the glass of water on his desk and gulped it all down. The taste was still stuck in his mouth.

Puzzled, the naive young lady watched his reaction. "Is it that bad?" she asked genuinely.

Looking into her innocent eyes, Carlos said coldly, "Are you really here to apologize? Because I think you are really here to provoke me." His first suspicion earlier was right. The young lady standing before him was the same girl he had to deal with in the past, be it on the cruiser or in the club, or any other time. She was the same as she had always been. How gullible of him to briefly believe that she was ever there to make amends for her mistakes!

