

## **Wedded Bride 531**

### Chapter 531 The Encounter

As Sheryl was checking out the kindergarten facilities, she heard a boy's voice from the fence. "Can

you help me get down?" he pleaded.

She followed the direction of the voice and saw the boy sitting on top of the fence. Sheryl found herself

staring at a cute little boy with big eyes, and his suit with matching serious expression amused her.

Sheryl surmised the little boy must have been up there a long time and didn't know how to make his

way down the fence. Fortunately, he saw someone to ask for help.

Squinting due to the sunlight, she asked, "How did you get there?" He was seated, but Sheryl felt a little

nervous that he might fall. She held a hand over her eyes to see better and waited for his reply.

The contempt she heard in his voice surprised her. "Are you stupid? Of course, I climbed to get up." At

that moment, Sheryl recalled an obscure man's face and his voice gently saying, "Stupid!"

The memory shocked her a little, and she remained still.

"Hey! Did you hear what I said?" His voice broke into her thoughts. She peered at him again. The boy

now seemed nervous, afraid of being seen by others.

Before she could help him down, Sheryl wanted to put the boy at ease. "Are you a student at this

kindergarten?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yes, I am." The boy now looked at Sheryl with fearful eyes. He pleaded, "Please help me down. I'm scared."

The woman took pity and helped him get down slowly. Once his feet touched the ground, she asked him pointedly, "Tell me honestly why you climbed the fence."

His face blushed in embarrassment. Reluctantly, he admitted, "I don't like being in school." He slowly looked into Sheryl's eyes.

The boy had already learned everything they were teaching in kindergarten and didn't care to mingle with other children not as intelligent as him. He resented the feeling of isolation, which was why he didn't want to be in school.

"But why?" Sheryl prodded. It confused Sheryl how someone so young could appear so mature.

"Where are your father and mother?" she inquired. Horrified at the thought, the woman added, "Do they

know you tried escaping from school?"

The boy mumbled, "I have no father." Then he quickly lowered his head in humiliation.

His expression and behavior made her feel sorry for the boy. And she was reminded of Shirley, whom she raised alone. While her little girl also had no father, there was Anthony who played the role of her father.

"Don't be sad, little boy," she automatically consoled him. With her maternal instinct, she hugged the child for comfort.

Charlie was an unusual boy. He didn't like being close to or touched by anyone, including his mother, Leila.

When Sheryl wrapped her arms around him, his instinct was to push her away. But surprisingly, he felt reassured in her arms.

It was like feeling motherly love for the first time. He remained still for several minutes without saying anything.

And he suddenly didn't want to end the embrace.

Sheryl felt like she was hugging her Shirley. She understood how difficult it was for a woman to raise a child on her own, so the young mother did her best to provide him with a bit of care.

'Children like him should be in school and be given the proper care by his parents,' she thought.

Sheryl was guessing that the absence of a father to love him was the main reason the little boy was running away from school.

Finally she asked, "What's your name?" She squatted to be eye level with Charlie and started rubbing his shoulders.

"Charlie Zhang," he answered. Up close, she was surprised to notice that the boy's eyes were big and bright, just like Shirley's.

Charlie's eyes were almost magical that anyone looking into them would be deeply attracted.

"Charlie," Sheryl repeated while holding his hand. She knew she just couldn't leave the young boy alone so Sheryl inquired, "Can you tell me where you're going?"

"The library," he replied quickly. His answer amazed Sheryl. Here was a little boy going to the library. She was expecting him to say a game room or an amusement park. His choice of the library was something she never imagined.

"What did you say? Where did you say you were going?" she asked again. Charlie looked at her strangely for repeating the question. But Sheryl was truly in disbelief.

"I'm going to the library," he said again. As soon as he learned to speak, Charlie learned everything his teachers were teaching in school. Sitting in class bored him, and it was a waste of time to stay there without learning anything new. So, Charlie often escaped to the library to read books. This time the teacher blocked the secret door of his escape route, so he had to try another way.

Fortunately, Sheryl saw him. Otherwise, he didn't know how to get down from the fence. She patted his head and smiled. "Well, let me take you there." Sheryl thought it was too dangerous for him to go there alone, so she offered to drive him there. When they arrived, Charlie approached the assistant and politely requested, "Please hand me the book called Astronomy and Geography on the top of this shelf."

"Someone borrowed that book. I'm going to check if it's back. Please wait a minute," the assistant answered Charlie pleasantly. Charlie was obviously a familiar face in the library.

The assistant found the book and Charlie moved to sit down at a nearby desk and started reading. Sheryl approached him, curious as to what he was reading. It startled her that the book was not for children yet the boy was so engrossed in it.

'He can already understand that?' she wondered. His maturity and attitude made her think if he was a genius.

Then she thought about her daughter. The girl was about the same age as Charlie and was smart. But she still couldn't count numbers correctly.

In her mind, it was such a huge difference between the two children.

Charlie was quite absorbed with the book so Sheryl didn't bother him.

Other librarians saw the boy and greeted him, "Wow, your mother is also here, Charlie!"

Another said, "Your mom looks very pretty, Charlie."

He would smile but say nothing.

Realizing that Charlie was too concentrated on his book, Sheryl stepped out of the library to buy a hamburger and drinks in case he got hungry or thirsty later.

She chose hot drinks even if it was summertime because Sheryl believed they were more healthy for children.

The boy was preoccupied reading that he didn't notice Sheryl go out. When he finished the book and wanted to leave, he couldn't find the woman and started to panic.

Worry was written all over his tiny face. His expression of one brow arched was similar to that of one man. Charlie didn't speak but walked very quickly, and the frown on his face was an indication of his feelings.

He was walking fast searching for Sheryl when she noticed his nervous expression as she came back to look for him.

His worried look vanished the minute he saw the woman. As she approached, he stared into her eyes and asked, "Where did you go?"

#### Chapter 532 Charlie Dropped Out Of School

Seeing Sheryl approaching with drinks and a hamburger in her hands, Charlie got the answer to his question. However, he still wanted to hear it from her.

Looking at Charlie's morose expression, she explained, "Hey. I just bought some food for you."

At her words, a big smile spread on his face. Suddenly, Sheryl realized that Charlie must have thought she had left him without saying goodbye.

Somehow, she found herself liking this remarkable boy. Instinctively, she felt a strange connection with him and a strong urge to take care of him.

Teasingly she asked, "Why were you looking nervous just now? Were you afraid that I left without telling you?"

Blushing slightly, Charlie avoided Sheryl's gaze. "Of course not! I don't care about you," he said trying to sound uncaring.

"You don't have to admit it if you don't want to." Feeling pleased, Sheryl smiled to herself secretly. She knew that he cared about her although he tried to act indifferently.

Spontaneously, she gave Charlie a big hug and asked him happily, "Are you hungry? Please eat before the burger gets cold." Sheryl placed a wrapped hamburger in Charlie's little hands.

Normally, Charlie was very strict in food and never ate junk food like hamburgers. But this hamburger was bought for him by Sheryl and he didn't want to refuse her. The affection in her eyes when she looked at him made him happy.

Sitting down beside Sheryl, he took a small bite from the hamburger. He was surprised to learn that it tasted good and began to eat earnestly.

"Do you skip school often?" Sheryl asked him curiously. Opening a can of soft drink, she put it beside him.

Looking a little embarrassed, Charlie nodded and said, "I've already learned the knowledge taught in school. I prefer to spend my time on what I like."

That sounded incredible coming from such a small boy, but she knew he was telling the truth. The book she saw him reading was too advanced for his age.

Looking at Charlie sternly, she said, "If you already know what they taught at school, you should tell your mother. Don't skip school again, otherwise, your teacher and your mother will worry about you."

Sheryl knew that she could reach Charlie with her words, so she tried to persuade him not to make a habit of skipping school.

Tilting his head, he looked straight at Sheryl and said, "My mom doesn't care about me."

Comparing Leila and Sheryl in his mind, he felt closer to Sheryl, a woman he just met by chance. He wished in his heart that she was his mother instead of Leila.

His words tugged at her heart. Sighing gently, she said, "Anyway, what you did was wrong. Do you understand?"

Charlie thought for a while and said, "Yes, I understand."

"That's my boy!" Sheryl said with a bright smile. Sheryl lovingly ruffled Charlie's hair. Somehow, Charlie

welcomed her gentle touch and didn't feel it repulsive like Leila's touch.

Looking at Charlie, she could tell that he was a well-mannered boy. He ate his food carefully and

quietly like a nobleman. Suddenly, a picture of Shirley popped in her mind and she stifled a laugh. Her

daughter's behavior was the least ladylike. Shirley and Charlie were poles apart in terms of personality

except they were both smart and too mature for their age.

Smiling to herself she knew that if she told that to Shirley, she would no doubt argue with her.

"Did you like the hamburger?" Sheryl asked Charlie, pleased that he finished all the food that she

brought him. Looking at her watch she told him, "It's time to take you back to school."

Reaching the gate of the kindergarten, Sheryl gave Charlie one last hug and a kiss on his cheek. As

she was about to leave, Charlie turned and asked her, "Will you come to see me again tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?" Sheryl echoed, gazing down at Charlie's hopeful face. She truly liked this boy. But he was

not her son and they just met by chance.

She didn't like to part with him but she never thought of coming to see him tomorrow. His question

caught her off-guard.

When her foot got better, she would resume rehearsal and finish the show. Then she would return to America.

"You don't have to come if you don't want to," Charlie said, disappointment evident in his downcast eyes. When he saw Sheryl's hesitation, his heart beat heavily and he felt like something was blocking his throat. It was a strange feeling for him.

"Charlie..." Sheryl called his name softly. "I came to Y City for work and I'm free today because I twisted my ankle. I have to get back to work when my ankle gets better. Our conditions are similar. You can skip school for a few times but most of the time you have to attend school, right?" she asked him seriously.

Charlie stared at Sheryl with a longing look on his face. Sheryl sighed. It was so hard to refuse him anything when he looked at her like that. Taking out a pen and paper from his bag, she wrote down her number. Then she said, "Okay, this is my phone number. I promise I will come to see you when I have free time."

"Hmm... Can I call you if I miss you?" Charlie asked shyly. It WAS the first time he let his guard down

with anyone and he felt uneasy. He didn't like depending on anybody even Leila, his mother. But it was

different with Sheryl; he felt so bad at the thought of not seeing her again.

"Sure, you can call me anytime," Sheryl promised him. Then she added, "If you call me and you can't

reach me, it means I'm still at work. I promise that I will call you back if I miss your call. Is that all right

with you?"

Charlie smiled and nodded. "Okay, let's make a deal by entwining fingers." He used to feel it was too

childish to make a promise in that way. But somehow he wanted to do so with Sheryl.

They entwined fingers solemnly. Charlie entered the gate of the kindergarten feeling happy and finally

acting like a normal three-year-old.

Meanwhile, Leila came home early and started preparing a big dinner for Charlie. She wanted to talk to

him about Charles during dinner.

Still feeling full from the hamburger he ate in the afternoon, Charlie just picked at his food.

"Are you all right, Charlie? Why aren't you eating your food?" Leila asked. It was the first time she saw

Charlie eating without appetite.

"I'm all right," he answered. His attitude towards Leila was totally different from the way he treated

Sheryl. He said indifferently, "I'm going to my room now."

"Wait!" Leila called sharply after Charlie. Charles had been avoiding her recently. He delegated most of

his works that he needed to finish with Leila to David. She was getting frustrated. She wanted to talk to

Charles about Charlie, but he never gave her a chance.

She had decided to tell Charles everything and introduce him to Charlie. But before that, she had to tell

Charlie so he would know what he should do tomorrow night.

"Charlie, I want to tell you something..." Her words were interrupted by the ringing of the phone. It was

Charlie's teacher. The teacher complained about his truancy today and warned Leila that if Charlie

continued skipping school, then he would be expelled. She told Leila to take the matter seriously.

Charlie was obviously listening to her conversation with his teacher. Thinking that he would have to

change school anyway once he was reunited with his father, Leila turned back to the phone. "I have

been busy recently and that's the reason why I sent Charlie to your kindergarten. If you will order him to

quit school for such a trivial matter, then I think I have no need to continue letting him stay there. I will

send him to a better kindergarten when the summer vacation is over," she told the teacher haughtily.

Leila put down the phone and turned to look at Charlie. "You don't have to go to school tomorrow."

Charlie's face lit up at the news. "Okay!" he answered with pleasure. Finally! Charlie nodded his head

in agreement. He never wanted to go to school from the beginning. Now his wish was fulfilled. He could

spend his time on what he liked.

### Chapter 533 Striking Resemblance

"You're a good boy, Charlie," Leila began. "There's something I want to tell you." She was a bit nervous

and furrowed her brows as she continued, "You're going to meet someone tomorrow. I'll bring him here

to meet you and I hope you can talk to him calmly."

Leila didn't tell Charlie who he was going to meet, but she knew that Charlie must be clear about the

man he would meet.

Charlie frowned at Leila's announcement. "Are you really so eager to be with that man?" the boy asked

bluntly.

The question and the tone of his voice shocked Leila. She knew Charlie could be straightforward but

still didn't expect his reaction. And while the child never opened his heart to her, Leila always thought

Charlie hoped to be with his father.

"How can you ask me that?" she replied. She had no other choice but to make things clear for him.

"That man is your father. He never came to see you before because he didn't know about you." She

paused to calm herself. "Are you mad at him?"

He said nothing. She continued as she wanted she could persuade Charlie to come to terms with the

situation. "Your father is a good man. If he knew he had a son, he would love him and take good care of him."

In his heart, Charlie had no doubt that his father would love and care for him.

But he was confused about Leila, and how his father never knew of his existence.

"If like you said he didn't know about me, what about you?" he inquired with a frown. "I'm sure he

knows about you, right?" Again, Charlie's words shook Leila, so her frown deepened. Even knowing his character, she never expected such a young boy to speak harshly to her or to be on the mark.

She felt a hint of embarrassment but calmed herself. "Charlie, I don't think you understand," she

mumbled. "You're our son. And I'm sure he loves you very much, and it has nothing to do with how he treats me," Leila explained.

The boy sighed after listening to Leila. It was not a typical reaction from someone very young, but he

was unlike other boys at his age. He already knew the truth behind her words. The man did not love

Leila. Charlie was also very wise for his age. He was beginning to understand that even if she could be

with that man, she would never be happy to stay with him.

"Okay, so follow your heart," the boy said without emotion. With those words, he turned to go back to

his room.

One thing that pleased Charlie very much was having a cell phone of his own, which Leila bought for

him. That meant he could call Sheryl any time. He dialed her number and connected immediately. The

boy smiled as he heard her say, "Hello, this is Sheryl."

He kept silent. Charlie had been trying to understand why he liked being with Sheryl and talking to her.

After all, she was still a stranger to him, and they only met yesterday.

Then he jumped at her next words. "Hello? Charlie, is that you?" She asked tentatively after waiting for

several seconds to hear someone on the other end speak.

"How did you know it was me?" The boy was obviously shocked at being identified.

His call came in as she was eating and once sure that it was Charlie on the other end of the line, she

got up and walked out to take the call. Sheryl smiled while explaining to her little friend, "I know because

only you know this number."

"Is that true? You're not kidding me?" Her reply surprised the boy, who clenched his phone in happiness.

"Of course, I'm serious," Sheryl responded, a smile on her lips. "So, why did you call me?" she asked curiously.

"Nothing. I just wanted to talk to you," he said simply. If she didn't know she was talking to a young child, Sheryl would think it was a sensitive man who was speaking over the phone.

She grinned and said, "Well then, have nice dreams, Charlie."

"Wait!" The woman was about to hang up when she heard his plea. "Sorry, but I won't be going to school tomorrow," Charlie said. "You can call me if you miss me."

Smiling, she told him, "Okay, I will Charlie." Sheryl had just ended the call when Leila suddenly opened the door. She heard the boy talking and wanted to check. "Who were you talking to, Charlie?" she inquired.

His heart was pounding, but there was no way he was telling her the truth. Charlie turned to look at her,

and said with impatience, "It's none of your business." Annoyed at the intrusion, he said loudly, "Get out of my room!"

Leila was used to Charlie's attitude and behavior, so she said nothing and walked out.

The next morning, Leila prepared breakfast for Charlie before leaving for work. Alone at home, the boy got up, washed his face, and rinsed his mouth. He decided to visit Sheryl at her hotel, which she mentioned when they met.

Charlie was so eager to meet her, but couldn't figure out why he had the strong urge to be close to Sheryl.

Sheryl's feet were much better today, so she insisted on rehearsing.

Director Ang was not pleased seeing her and said sarcastically, "I suggest some people giving up this early, so they don't clip the wings of the rest of us."

His words hit Sheryl directly and she turned pale.

Sue noticed her friend's reaction and rushed to Sheryl's side to assure her. "Don't be angry. It's better to focus on yourself."

"Thank you, Sue. I know that. And I'm not mad." She smiled at Sue. While still not fully recovered,

Sheryl knew the only way to appease their director was to do her best at rehearsal.

And she did that, which pleased Director Ang so much that he stopped frowning. He praised her

performance, and said, "I hope you continue to persist and exert every effort to perform well. If you don't

progress, I will be upset again."

Sheryl blew out a breath and sighed in relief. The rehearsal went smoothly. When she was about to

take a break with Sue, she noticed Charlie walking in with his backpack. Sheryl was astonished to see

him there and rushed towards her young friend. "Charlie, what are you doing here?"

"I came here to see you," the boy replied. Charlie was overjoyed seeing Sheryl. And while he couldn't

help smiling at her, he controlled his real feelings and appeared to be calm.

"You came for me?" she asked. The boy's answer stunned her, and she wanted to be sure it was what

he meant.

Charlie pouted and said nothing, but it was only because he felt embarrassed to say that he really

missed her and wanted badly to see her.

He may be a little boy, but he had a strong sense of pride.

Sue spoke up to break the silence. "Sheryl, who is he?" She had been staring at Sheryl's young visitor,

thinking he looked quite familiar and that she had met him before.

"This is Charlie," Sheryl introduced him with a smile. "We met each other yesterday," she added.

"Charlie, this is Sister Sue." She was looking at the boy while touching her friend's arm.

The boy hesitated slightly, then turned to Sue and said, "Nice to meet you, Aunt Sue."

"What? You just called me Aunt Sue?" she gasped. Quickly, she corrected, "Call me Sister Sue, please.

I am still a young woman." She was taken aback by the child's reference to her. And no matter how

hard she tried to convince him, Charlie refused to address her as sister. Meanwhile, Sheryl was

amused by their exchange and giggled.

Sheryl excused herself to change clothes so she could take Charlie out to eat. Suddenly, Sue pulled

her and whispered, "Sheryl, do you still remember the man I mentioned before? He knocked over the

breakfast box I bought for you, remember?"

Her friend thought for a moment and then nodded. "Yes, I remember." She stared at Sue. "But why you

suddenly mention something that happened a long time ago?" she inquired.

Sue kept staring at the little boy. "Listen to me, Sheryl." She took a deep breath before saying, "This boy looks very much like that man." Sue could not hide her excitement. "I was just so surprised at the resemblance."

#### Chapter 534 Is This Your Son

Sheryl was taken aback. She asked Sue in a doubting voice, "Are you very sure?" She paused,

reflected and then said flatly, "Sue, you are reading too much into this. Perhaps they just look alike.

Charlie told me he didn't have a father."

"Maybe you are right, Sheryl," Sue replied. Inhaling deeply, she said with a sigh, "I would pity the child if he were that man's son."

Sheryl decided to move on. "I'm going to have dinner with Charlie. Would you like to join us?" She invited Sue with a pleasant smile.

Sue shook her head as she lazily replied, "Much as I would love to, I think I will pass. I'm so very tired after several days of rehearsal. I need to get some rest."

"Well then, see you later!" Sheryl said giving a small, cheerful wave. She took Charlie's hand and walked briskly towards the door. Charlie turned around and courteously told Sue, "Goodbye, Aunt Sue!".

Sue's face reddened when she heard Charlie call her "Aunt Sue".

As they walked out, a concerned Sheryl asked Charlie, "How did you get here? Does your mother know that you are here?" Frowning to herself, she thought, 'Although he is smarter than most kids, he is just a little child. It is dangerous to be out alone with the bad guys roaming the streets.'

Charlie looked up at Sheryl and proudly said, "I checked the route online before coming here. I boarded bus No.12 from the front of my house. I then got off and took bus No.7. After five stops I reached the hotel."

Sheryl stared at the boy, dumbfounded. 'He is such an amazing child. So logical and capable of handling himself when he is just three or four years old. I marvel at his mother. She has raised such an excellent child,' she exclaimed inside.

Charlie had no idea what Sheryl was thinking. If he knew her thoughts, he would have told her that his intelligence had nothing to do with Leila.

Leila never paid much attention to his studies. He learned more from watching TV than from his mother.

In Shining Company

Leila stared anxiously at Charles' office door. These days she seldom saw or met Charles. He rarely came to the office. Even today he was coming only because some important documents needed his signature.

Only David was allowed to enter his office. Anyone who wanted to meet Charles had to go through David.

Leila had turned to Chris for help, but Chris could do nothing about it. Chris had only informed her that Charles would go to work today. On learning this, Leila was determined to somehow meet her boss Charles. She planned to bring him to her house so he could meet Charlie.

Charles sensed that Leila was planning to corner him. As soon as David finished his reporting, Charles left his office in a hurry. He naively believed what happened between him and Leila that night would go away if he didn't mention it or think about it.

However, Leila was unwilling to let it go easily. Noticing Charles walking out of his office, Leila dashed forward and stopped him. "Mr. Lu, we need to talk," she gushed.

Charles knitted his brows at the sight of Leila. When he saw the confusion in David's and Alice's eyes,

his forehead wrinkled into a frown. He shifted his gaze to Leila and said, "Okay. Follow me!"

Charles strode back into his office, followed by Leila. Before she could close the door and utter a single

word, he said in a low, angry voice, "Leila, I don't know what happened that night. I was drunk and I

don't remember anything."

With a scowling face, he continued, "If I offended you that night, I apologize to you. Just tell me what

you want. I'll try my best to make amends."

Charles thought he could get away by offering some monetary compensation to Leila for sleeping with

her that night.

Cunning Leila had other plans though. "Mr. Lu..." Leila said with a bitter smile. "You didn't force me. You

owe me nothing."

Charles frowned, absorbed in his thoughts. 'I must settle this now. Otherwise, she will keep pestering

me with this.'

He pushed away Leila's empty words and said, "Anyway, it was my fault. I should take responsibility.

Tell me, what do you want from me?"

Charles knew his own character well. He would never lust after other women even if fully drunk. There

was only one explanation for what happened that night — Leila had set him up.

Charles could not believe Leila wanted nothing from him. She had been waiting to corner him at the

first given opportunity.

"Mr. Lu, I said I want nothing from you..." Leila explained. She lowered her head and said, "Mr. Lu, I

admit I like you very much, but I have my own principles and pride. Please don't regard me as an

shameless woman."

Charles stifled a snort and then snapped back sharply, "If you want nothing from me, why were you

hanging around and preventing me from leaving then?"

"I..." Leila stammered in fear. Hesitantly, she went on, "I came to... explain what happened that night.

You got drunk and mistook me for Autumn, your wife, so you..."

"Stop talking nonsense, woman," Charles growled at her. Forehead wrinkled in contempt, he said, "How

could I take you for my wife? Impossible!"

Charles was contemptuous of Leila, and women like her. He would never degrade his wife by mistaking

Leila for her.

On hearing this, Leila felt enraged. Deep inside she knew that she was nothing compared to Charles' wife. "Mr. Lu, I know you don't believe me. But I have proof," she said, gnashing her teeth.

"What proof?" Charles asked, looking at Leila in confusion and surprise.

Leila hesitated and then replied, "Do you have time after I get off from work? I want to show you the proof."

Reluctantly and warily, Charles nodded his agreement.

In the meantime, Sheryl sent Charlie home after dinner. The boy was sitting on the couch watching TV when Leila and Charles arrived at her apartment.

As he parked his car, Charles was on his guard. Frowning, he asked, "Why did you bring me here?"

He had driven Leila to her apartment once before, so he recognized this place. He wondered, 'Leila told me she would show me the evidence. But it turns out that she brought me to her rental house.

What game is she playing at?' he wondered warily.

"Don't tell me the great Charles Lu is afraid now? Come on!" Leila sneered in a mocking voice. "Don't

worry. You are not drunk today, so I can't trick you to sleep with me or do anything else. I brought you here only because I want to show you proof."

Perplexed, Charles furrowed his brows and followed Leila upstairs.

He was extremely curious about the proof Leila kept talking about.

"Charlie!" Leila called from outside her apartment. As she pushed the door open, she found Charlie watching his favourite cartoon. As she stared at his face, her lips curved into a triumphant smile.

She was confident that her plan would work. Her son looked so much like Charles.

Leila turned around and welcomed a waiting Charles, "Come in, please." She moved aside to let

Charles hesitatingly enter. As soon as Charles entered the room, he caught a glimpse of the back side of Charlie's head and innocently asked, "Is this your son?"

Chapter 535 Charles Meets Charlie

"Yes, he is," Leila answered, looking at him with a satisfied smile. Turning her attention to Charlie, she demanded, "Charlie, where are your manners? Come here! There is someone I want you to meet."

Knowing their visitor's identity, Charlie pretended not to hear his arrival. But since Leila called his name, he had no choice but to face this man. Switching off the TV reluctantly, he walked towards Charles slowly. He was not looking forward to meeting the father who had abandoned him.

His back was facing Charlie and he didn't notice him standing behind him. Glaring at Leila, he said

impatiently, "I didn't come here to see your son. I came here to look at the evidence you have. Show me now." Charles' voice was laced with distaste.

Smiling smugly, Leila responded calmly, "Just turn around and see for yourself." She nodded her head towards Charlie. Frowning, Charles turned around and found the small boy standing straight in front of him. His gaze narrowed as he studied Charlie.

It was like looking at himself when he was at that age. His heart was beating fast as he wondered why this little boy resembled him so much. No matter how much he racked his brain, he couldn't think of a reason.

"What the hell is going on?" Charles almost shouted at Leila. A dreadful feeling overpowered him as he saw Leila's malicious smile.

"I think you already know the answer. The truth is staring you in the face. Do you still need me to explain to you?" Leila replied, looking at Charles challengingly.

His mind was rejecting the possibility, but the sick feeling in his stomach was telling him something

else. Seizing Leila by the throat, he growled at her furiously, "Explain!"

Before deciding to bring Charles to her house, Leila had already made up her mind to make him

believe that Charlie was their son.

She knew that she was taking a big risk for lying blatantly but she had no choice. Instead of showing

fear at Charles' anger, she just smiled at him and said, "Charles, you're scaring the child."

Releasing his hands from her throat, Charles tried to control his temper. He didn't want to frighten the

boy.

Turning to Charlie, he noticed that the boy seemed unaffected by the scene. Nevertheless, he stooped

down and spoke to him in a soft tone, "Good boy, you can go to your room now. I need to talk to your

mother."

"Okay," Charlie answered cooperatively. It seemed he had no intention of being Leila's pawn. Returning

to his room, he turned up the volume of the TV to drown the voices from the living room. He was not

interested in listening to their argument.

He was just surprised that he felt no repulsion towards his father.

Charles fixed his blazing eyes on Leila. "I'm waiting for your explanation," he said in a cold voice.

Scowling at Leila, Charles didn't bother to hide his contempt.

Pouring a glass of water, Leila took her time in answering Charles. "Do you remember when we went to Europe on a business trip?" she asked.

"Yes." Charles nodded curtly. His eyes clouded when he remembered about the trip. Autumn threw a tantrum because of a silly necklace.

That event stuck on his mind. 'But what the hell has that got to do with the boy?' he thought to himself.

With a frown, Leila went on with her story, "You got so drunk one night and you mistook me for Autumn. I told you I had feelings for you. When you reached for me that night even thinking that I was Autumn, I couldn't resist you so I didn't push you away."

Smiling bitterly, she continued, "I regretted what happened the following morning. I felt guilty because Autumn helped me a lot and you were my boss." After a small pause, she added, "Anyway, it was all my fault. I owe you and your wife. I took two photos while you were sleeping. I look at it every night before I go to sleep."

Faking a bitter smile, Leila handed two photos of her and Charles lying naked on the bed. Charles' face

turned pale as he looked at the photos. Leila giggled inside at the look on Charles' face. She could see that he was starting to believe her story.

Feeling ashamed and angry, Charles focused his gaze on the pictures in his hands. He had no recollection of sleeping with Leila that night, but he couldn't ignore the evidence in front of his eyes. He felt guilty at having betrayed Autumn's trust. Most of all he hated Leila, but he couldn't help believing her words.

"I planned to resign after that but when I saw you pick up a gift for Autumn, I wished you bought that necklace for me..." Leila confessed. "I came back to the shop later to buy the same necklace. I pretended it was a gift from you to make Autumn jealous," she said hesitantly.

"Because of that, Autumn almost lost her baby. I felt sorry for her. When you confronted me because of that, I realized that Autumn would always be the most important person for you." Leila said sadly. "That was when I decided to give up on you." Charles had been listening intently to what Leila was saying and his face darkened as he realized the malice in Leila's intention from the beginning. Autumn almost lost their babies because of jealousy. Leila intentionally tried to come between him and Autumn no matter what she said to the contrary.

"Unfortunately, I found out I was pregnant with your child. I hesitated for a long time, but in the end, I decided to give birth to our child. After all, he is my child and I can't give him up," Leila said looking at Charles intently.

"I never regretted my decision. Charlie not only looks like you, but he also has your intelligence and personality. He is too matured for his age. Overall, he is an obedient and sweet boy." Looking coyly at Charles, Leila exclaimed, "Whenever I feel troubled and frustrated, I just take a look at Charlie and my troubles disappear. He is my reason for living."

"Is that so?" Charles sneered disbelievingly. "If you are such a great mother, why did you appear again? Why are you telling me this all of a sudden?

"Didn't you decide to be a single mother?" Charles asked her in contempt. 'I couldn't care less about Leila, but now I have to face her because of Charlie,' he thought darkly.

Leila put on a wry smile and replied, "Actually I planned on bringing him up on my own. I thought I was capable of giving him everything he needs. I know that I can give him a good life, but I realized what he needs is a father..."

When I met you at the bar, I realized that I still have feelings for you. You're not only the one I love but you're also the father of my child. Every time you call me, I never turned you down even though you can only talk about Autumn. I feel happy as long as I can see you."

#### Chapter 536 A Counter Proposal

With a bitter smile, Leila continued, "My heart broke when I saw you in despair after Autumn disappeared. At that time, I believed I could take care of Charlie alone, but later found out I was wrong. The boy always pretends to be strong in front of me. But like other children, I know he yearns for a father's love. He expects excursions to the amusement park or the aquarium. I kept thinking I could both be a mother and father to him. Then I realized he always needs his father's care and love. So, however hard I tried, I couldn't replace his father."

She paused to take a breath. "Since then, I've thought of how I could give him a complete family." Miserable, Leila buried her face in her hands and cried out, "It was all my fault! I should have pushed you away when you thought I was Autumn."

Her chest heaved before she made the tears stop falling. Then she moved closer to Charles and gripped his hand. "Mr. Lu..." she pleaded, tears pooling in her eyes. "I love you! I gave birth to Charlie for you. Autumn is no longer in your life. Can't you give me a chance and give your son the family he

deserves?" she begged him. Sniffing back the tears, Leila went on, "I promise to serve you well and

take care of our small family. I won't mind even if you don't love me. Just let me stay with you."

"Let me go!" Charles shouted while shaking off her hand violently. His attitude towards Leila did not

change, even after learning of Charlie's existence.

Charles did not hate the boy. It was Leila he couldn't accept.

She stared at the hand he shoved away but persisted, "Mr. Lu, I know you're mad at me. But the boy is

innocent." Looking at him with pitiful eyes, she begged, "Can't you do this for our son's sake?"

"Leila, I wish..." he stopped as he felt the fury rise. "I could kill you now!" The words came, out of

exasperation.

It was deathly silent. Charles' eyes were full of hatred. If looks could kill, Leila would probably be dead.

She had no idea what to say.

Several minutes passed before she got over her fear and found the courage to reason with Charles. "I

know you hate me. But things happened. Charlie is your child. If you don't believe me, go have a DNA

test," she dared.

Leila expected Charles to have misgivings and prepared for the suggestion.

Brows wrinkled, Charles was totally lost in his thoughts. 'He looks exactly like me. Even without a

paternity test, I believe he's my son.' The boy he could accept, but Leila as the birth mother, he could

not.

Suddenly, he barked at her, "What do you want?" If he couldn't avoid the woman, he would at least

figure out her intentions. It was the only way to put an end to this.

Leila remained silent, so he asked impatiently, "Now that you've laid out your secret weapon, you must

want something from me. So tell me, what is it that you want?" He sneered and added, "Or should I ask,

how much do you want?"

Hearing him say those words was like a slap to the face. "Mr. Lu, am I such a shameless woman to

you?" The hurt was all over her face. "I admit I'm poor. Still, I managed to give the boy a good life and

take good care of him. How could you even think I want to blackmail you?"

Charles cared little for drama. "Get to the point, Leila! Name your price. I don't want to waste time on

you," he said. She saw Charles had run out of patience, so Leila went straight to the point.

"I've always believed that Charlie deserves a complete family. That's why I feel sorry for him. The boy is

insecure because he has no father. I tried to find someone to marry since you never wanted me. But then I thought of Charlie. What if my husband maltreated him? I also feared that no man would be good enough so I'll end up living a miserable life."

She paused, waiting for a reaction. When none came, Leila continued, "But you're different. You're Charlie's father, so I know you will treat him right."

When she noticed Charles put on a straight face, Leila hesitated, unsure if she should continue or not.

Gathering the courage, she said, "I feel fortunate to have met you again. You lost Autumn, but I have your child. I gave up on you because you and Autumn were happy. I couldn't bear the thought of destroying that happiness. But I don't want to miss the chance of being with you again. So, I will fight

for my son and me." She looked Charles in the eye while saying. "I hope you can accept Charlie and me. We could be happy together, the three of us." Leila pressed on, "Will you agree to my proposal for the boy's sake?"

Before Charles could say something, Leila hurriedly explained, "I know you can never forget Autumn, but I don't mind this at all. I only ask one thing from you — let me be with you, and I will do anything for

you. I'm confident that you will learn to love me in time."

"You won't mind even if I can never forget Autumn?" Charles asked as he sounded incredulous.

The woman nodded. With a small smile, Leila declared, "I believe you'll learn to appreciate my kindness

and accept me one day. I truly hope you can consider my offer for our son."

"You won't mind..." Charles snorted, and then plastered a cold smile on his face. "But I do!" he

thundered. Leila was taken aback by his raised voice.

When Charles learned that he and Leila had a child, he mourned for his wife even more and was so

sorry for the indiscretion.

"If I truly offended you in the past, I apologize," he told Leila. "I will take responsibility for the boy. If you

agree, I will bring him into the Lu family and raise him as my son. I'll give him the best life, and will

make sure he receives the best education in spite of his family name," Charles offered. Leila didn't like

how the negotiation was turning out.

"What do you mean by that?" she queried.

"As for you..." the man frowned again. "All I can do is compensate you. I'll give you money. It doesn't

matter how much you want," Charles offered.

And if Leila wanted everything he possessed, he would agree as long as the woman promised never to bother him again.

### Chapter 537 Adults Make Mistakes Too

A flustered Leila responded, "Impossible! I will never agree to it." The woman had been planning this for so long. She had always intended to use the child to get Charles to marry her. Leila became frantic after hearing the proposal to take Charlie away from her. She needed the boy to succeed in her plan.

"Mr. Lu, he means everything to me. I will never part with my son," Leila declared. Her eyes and voice were steady as she spoke.

The only way Charles would get his son was to accept her as well.

"Is that so?" Charles asked, looking at Leila with bored eyes. "It is not my wish to separate the two of you. If you want to stay with the child, I am okay with it. I will give you money every month for your needs. But that's all I can do," he explained.

She stared at him in disbelief. "How can you be so mean to us, Charles?" she cried out. Leila was confident that everything would go as planned. But hearing Charles' proposal made her realize how naive she was, and how ridiculous her plan had been.

'The only woman Charles would ever treat with respect is Autumn, ' she conceded.

"I should have learned my lesson from the past. So I wouldn't have gone through all this scheming. But,

there is no turning back now. I still have to try," Leila mumbled to herself.

She took a deep breath before speaking again. "I gave birth to your son four years ago. You can never

imagine what I suffered during this whole time. I never dared approach you because there was

Autumn. But she's been gone for three years already. Will you continue to hold on to her memory and

stay single the rest of your life?" Leila argued. Glancing at Charles, she continued, "You came to me

first. If only for your son, you should consider marrying me so he can grow up with a happy family.

Have you ever thought of that?"

The man's eyes turned cold. "Whether I decide to get married or not is my business, and it has nothing

to do with you!" he snapped. This time he sneered, "Since you bore the child, I will not turn back on my

responsibilities for him. I will take care of his living and other expenses. But, it is not my duty to care for

you. If you allow him to live with me, I promise to give him the most comfortable life and let you visit him

regularly. However, if you intend to keep him with you, I will send you money every month for

expenses. Those are your only two choices."

"You.. you..." Leila stammered, and was suddenly at a loss for words. Then she let out a desperate

laugh. "I did so many things to please and serve you. But in your eyes, I am still nothing compared to

Autumn!" she said bitterly.

"Don't degrade her," Charles responded coolly, as contempt glimmered in his eyes. Being compared to

a shameless woman would dishonor his wife, and he would never allow that.

His words stung, so Leila quickly changed the subject. "Why don't you go talk to our son?" she

suggested. With a confident smile, she said, "I'm sure he'll make you change your mind."

She looked Charles straight in the eye, and uttered, "The best gift you can ever give children is a

complete family. He yearns for nothing but his parents' love."

"I'll talk to him," he agreed. "Yes, living with both parents is always good for a child's development,

but..." he paused. "If his parents get together against their will, it will be a disaster for the child,"

Charles said, with a hint of guilt in his voice.

Leila didn't have to ask that he speak to Charlie. Charles had every intention of talking to his son. And

even if he detested the boy's mother, he would never be cruel to his son.

Charles stood up and headed towards the child's room. He hesitated before knocking. After two short

raps on the door, he asked softly, "Can I come in?"

A young voice from behind the door called out, "Come in!" Charlie didn't want to overhear what the two

adults were talking about outside his room, but their voices carried through his bedroom.

The man opened the door gently and found the little boy in bed reading a book. He stared at the child

and was overwhelmed with joy. He was cute, Charles thought. Had his mother been anyone else but

Leila, he would feel more affection for him.

Guiltily, he thought it was a pity for the innocent child to live under such circumstances.

Awkwardly, he addressed Charlie, "Hello there." He never thought meeting his son for the first time

would make him feel nervous, but it did. He also felt a little guilty at the thought that he had never done

his duty for the boy.

But while he despised Leila, Charles kept in mind that the boy was innocent.

"Hi!" Charlie answered back, imitating his father's serious tone. They gazed at one another, amazed by

their strong resemblance.

'He has the same eyes, nose and mouth as mine. There is no doubt that he's my son, ' Charles thought proudly.

"I've seen you," Charlie blurted out. The man was taken aback.

"Have you?" Charles asked. Sensing that Charlie wasn't uncomfortable around him, the father found the courage to move closer. "Where?" he asked gently. Charles slowly sat down on the edge of the bed.

"She has a picture of you in her room," the boy replied. He was referring to his mother's room. Although he acknowledged Leila was his mother, he never felt the urge to be close to her.

"Has she ever mentioned me to you?" Charles inquired, a little flustered over their conversation. Somehow, he wanted to know what the child thought of him.

"Sometimes," Charlie answered casually. Then the boy frowned and turned serious. "She told me you were a wonderful man and that she wanted me to become a great person like you when I became an adult. But I don't want to be like you when I grow up."

His words stunned Charles. "Why not?" he probed.

"You don't like her, do you?" the boy pointed out. He tilted his head while looking at his father.

Charles decided honesty was best. "No, I don't like her," he admitted. It astonished him that even the

little boy could sense that his father could never love his mother. But Leila refused to accept that.

"So, if you don't like her, why did you date her? And why did you have me?" Charlie fixed his eyes on

the man that was his father, while peppering him with questions. He may only be four, but his wisdom

was far beyond his age. But as intelligent as he was, there was one thing that he couldn't understand.

The boy could not help but wonder what was going on between Charles and Leila.

To his mind, lovers were supposed to be together. So, he couldn't comprehend why two persons who

didn't even like each other would have a baby. He bowed his head and played with his fingers like

confused children usually do.

Finally, Charles spoke and using a fatherly tone, said, "Come here." He gestured for Charlie to come

closer. After a brief hesitation, Charlie flung the quilt that covered his legs, and crawled towards his

father. Charles took the boy in his arms and began to explain, "It was a mistake."

Unsure whether the boy could comprehend what he was saying, he thought carefully before

continuing, "Like kids, adults also make mistakes. It's not a shame to do something wrong. And for as

long as you can make things right and take responsibility for your actions, everyone deserves to be

forgiven. Do you understand what I'm saying?" He looked at his son in the eye.

Charlie was watching his father intently and nodded in agreement.

Chapter 538 You're Not To Blame

"Would you... would you be able to forgive me?" Charles asked his son. The seconds felt eternal as he

was waiting expectantly for his answer.

"I won't blame you if you can't," he said interrupting the uncomfortable silence. Then Charlie replied

diplomatically, "She told me that she gave birth to me secretly and you couldn't have known that; so I

don't blame you for anything."

Relieved, Charles returned a warm "Thank you." He was happy that Leila had not taught Charlie to

hate him. That was the least she could have done.

He hugged his son and swore to be there for him more, from now on.

"So now," Charlie started inquiring, "will you and her... you know... be together?" It was simply a curious

question from a little boy; he didn't intend anything by it.

However, Charles was surprised by his question. He wasn't sure where he was going with it, so he

replied hesitantly, "No, we won't."

Charles worried that Charlie would be disappointed by his answer and decided to explain, "I don't love her so I can't force myself to be with her. However, you are my son and that will never change. I may not be with her, but my love and dedication towards you will always be there."

"Does that make sense? Does it bother you?" Charles asked. He gazed at his son, worried about his reaction.

"Honestly, I knew you don't want be with her," revealed Charlie. He was a down-to-earth kid, with no unrealistic expectations. So he was in no way disappointed. "In fact," added Charlie, "I have tried to get her to realize that as well, but she just doesn't believe me."

Charles was impressed by his son's maturity. However, he still wondered if there was any other reason for his question.

So he attempted to find out, "Now that you know I won't be with her, would you like to come live with me

instead?" The thought of leaving Charlie, even temporarily, was becoming hard for him to handle. All it would take was for his son to agree to live with him, and he would do whatever it took to make that happen.

Charlie was torn. That was a big decision to make, and he wasn't sure how he felt about it yet. "I can't

answer that right now," concluded Charlie after a few moments of thoughtful consideration.

"Take your time," his dad encouraged him. With a loving smile, Charles added, "You can call me once

you decide, or you can stop by my office and let me know as well."

He handed Charlie his business card, and as he was getting ready to leave, he reminded him, "Don't

forget to let me know what you decide, okay?"

"Okay," Charlie answered. With a quick nod, Charles excused himself and left his son's room.

As soon as he stepped out of the room, he saw Leila on the phone outside, on the balcony.

Once she noticed him, she hung up immediately. With quick steps, she walked over to him and

asked, "Did you finish talking to Charlie?"

Charles wanted nothing to do with her. His indifferent attitude towards Leila was no longer a minor

hiccup in her plans; now, his heart had truly become impenetrable. Without even an inflection in his

tone, Charles stated, "Yes; do think carefully on the two choices I offered you and call me as soon as

you decide."

What a discouraging statement that was for Leila! Ironically, his words came right after she had been on the phone with Chris, complaining about not knowing how to win her brother's heart anymore. She was losing hope, and his words were making it even harder. All the effort she had put into it took her nowhere. Chris felt like her only silver lining.

Chris also never expected Charles to be so determined. She asked Leila to be patient and not try anything for a while. She promised to think of some way to help her.

Right as he was getting ready to open the door and leave, Charles suddenly remembered something and turned towards Leila adding, "Oh, I almost forgot one important thing." On the same cold tone he continued, "You don't have to work anymore."

"What do you mean?" she questioned him anxiously. He couldn't be saying what she thought he was! The last thing Leila wanted was to lose her job. That meant she would not be able to even see him anymore.

Leila never expected Charles to be this cruel. What would she do now? And how could she continue fighting for his affection?

"Charles Lu, why are you doing this to me?" Leila complained. Then, on an even angrier tone, she

began retaliating against his unjust treatment, "I have sacrificed so much for you! Do you really not see it?"

No, Charles didn't see it that way. Refusing to let her get to him, he uttered three piercing words, "You

disgust me." He wasn't going to continue but couldn't help himself, "I know your kind really well.

Everything you've done is just for wealth and status. If I were a penniless man, would you still want to marry me?"

Leila was perplexed by his assertion. She had never actually thought about why she loved Charles.

Was he right? Was it just because he was handsome and rich? Did she love anything else about him?

Leila opened her mouth to say something, but those thoughts he had just put in her mind wouldn't let her speak. She kept wondering would she love him if he were just an ordinary man? Entirely focused on her plan all these years, Leila had lost sight of the "why" behind it.

No, it had to be Charles' personality that she loved, and not his wealth or looks. Otherwise, why hadn't she fallen in love with other men who were also rich and good-looking?

"Don't think of me like that!" She finally found her words. "I'm not the kind of women you assume I am."

Leila reached out to hold his hand but Charles walked away. He then attempted to conclude their

pointless argument, "Leila, I'm telling you for the last time, we will never be together! Forget about that.

Just tell me how much you want and I'll do my best to provide you with it."

But Leila ignored his words and, instead, tried to get closer to him. Charles pulled away abruptly and

yelled, "Tell me your conditions, woman, before I lose my patience! This is your last chance!" Leila jolted

backwards at his screaming. His threats felt like a slap in her face.

She was frightened. She kept trying to physically reach out to him and calm him down, but Charles was

enraged beyond limit. Unable to take his rejection any longer, she forcefully hugged him tight and

pleaded, "Charles, don't leave me! I promise I will stay beside you regardless of what you decide to do

in the future. I will fix all of my shortcomings just to be with you."

Her words came with crying and sobbing, so that Charles wouldn't have the heart to push her away.

Out of nowhere, Charlie opened the door of his bedroom and yelled at Leila impatiently, "Enough! Didn't

you hear he doesn't love you?"

His words came as a shock to both Leila and Charles. She was hoping Charlie would be on her side.

As if she hadn't heard anything the kid said, Leila ran up to him begging, "Charlie, help me convince

your father not to leave. Ask him to stay and live with us."

"Shut up!" Charlie ordered her. "He is my father but not your husband. Love can't be forced. If he

marries you because you begged him, it's very likely that you two will get divorced sooner or later. I

keep telling you that; why can't you see it?" he persisted.

Her face fell as she heard Charlie speak. Leila never expected him to be against her, and could not

snap out of her shock. The only reason she took him and raised him was for Charles, and now all her

sacrifice was proving to be in vain.

Charlie ignored Leila and turned over to his father saying, "You can go now. It's okay. You don't need to

be here anymore."

Although Charlie was a kid, his mannerisms were just like those of an adult. He knew to stand up for

what was right, and Leila's attitude was only making him angry.

Chapter 539 Leila's Sinister Plan For Charlie

Charles agreed and told Charlie, "Okay, I'm leaving now. Please don't forget to call me."

"Okay," Charlie politely answered. Charles stopped for a while and looked back to Charlie, then waved

goodbye. Charlie nodded and waved back. As Charles was about to open the door, Leila tried to grab

his right arm to stop him from leaving, but Charlie was quick to stop her. "Enough! Don't you feel ashamed?" he sharply whispered in a cold tone.

Startled, Leila murmured, "I...I just want to..." Leila watched intently as the door was opened and then closed by Charles. Her knees faltered. Then little by little, she squatted on the floor while Charlie supported her as she slid. She wanted to drag down Charlie with her so she could ask why he didn't help her in stopping Charles from leaving. But she melted as she gazed at Charlie's face and recognized the striking resemblance with Charles'.

Charlie went to the kitchen and came back shortly with a glass of water. "Here, please drink this." Then he added solemnly, "What if you managed to make him stay? He would be physically present but his heart would be somewhere. So, you won't achieve anything even if he is here."

Nobody could ever imagine that a kid could utter such words like an experienced man. Leila pulled him abruptly and said, "Yes, I can't make him stay, but you can!"

Leila felt so convinced that Charlie was her last chance to get Charles and she was determined to make full use of it.

She grasped Charlie's right hand tightly and bitterly said, "Listen, you are his son. If you have asked him

to stay, he would have been obliged to. Why didn't you do it?"

"What would you do if I did make him stay?" Charlie confusedly inquired. "What do you want to do next?" he followed up.

Leila was visibly surprised by Charlie's questions. "I..." She suddenly lost her words and became speechless. She had to admit that she could not do anything to make Charles fall for her. She knew that Charles didn't love her, and his unwavering affection was still with Autumn, his dead wife.

She once was very confident that Charles would learn to love her if she persisted. But she was wrong. She only proved to him that she was an unscrupulous woman after all the flirty efforts she exerted.

Charlie sighed deeply and said, "Please think it over. I'm already tired and sleepy. I'm going to bed. Good night."

Leila nodded and lovingly replied, "Good night, Charlie. Let us just pretend that this did not happen okay?" Alone, she couldn't help but wonder, 'Apart from Charles, there are so many good and attractive men out there. Why can't I teach myself to just love somebody else?'

From a squatting position, Leila decided to sit on the floor. For a long time, she stayed there still trying

to figure out whether she would continue being persistent or just give it all up. Then, the phone rang.

She got up and walked to the phone. She picked it up and with a gloomy voice answered, "Hello." Chris

was at the other end of the line. Chris didn't notice Leila's sullen mood and asked directly, "Did my

brother leave?"

"He left," Leila answered.

"Great! Hey Leila, I just had this very good idea to make my brother fall for you," Chris excitedly told

Leila.

She thought Leila would be ecstatic to hear her idea but Leila just sneered and asked, "Really? You

said the same words last time."

With no more cards to play, Leila was already hopeless.

She failed miserably in her last attempt to captivate Charles. Truly heartbroken and desperate, Leila

even wished to die.

"Stop with all the nonsense girl, it's different this time," Chris said with a mixture of smile and

embarrassment. Then she boastfully added, "Okay here's my genius plan. It doesn't matter if my

brother won't agree. But, my grandpa must know and meet Charlie. He must know that Charles is the

father of Charlie and his great grandson. I'm pretty sure he will force Charles to marry you. Believe me,

you can get my brother if grandpa will support you. Brilliant, right?"

"Are you sure that your plan will work?" Leila asked in a bitter tone. Then she coyly questioned, "Do you

think your grandpa would accept me as his grandson's wife?"

"Yes of course. Why not?" Chris said. Determined to make Leila agree, Chris continued, "If grandpa

won't accept you, I'm cent percent sure that, at the very least, he will accept Charlie. And, since you are

Charlie's mother, he will be compelled later on to help you too. Trust me, that's how it goes in our

family. Then, I'll do my best to persuade him to force Charles to marry you. Autumn has been dead for

years now. I believe my grandpa is also hoping that Charles would soon get rid of her memories and

move on."

Discouragement was quite audible from Leila's voice, so Chris insisted, "Leila, I know you went through

excruciatingly tough times, but you have to stand up on what you really want and stick with it. You

chose to be with Charles, so pursue it. This time the chance of success is extremely high. So, might as

well give it a try. I will take care of everything for you. All you have to do is to bring Charlie with you.

The three of us will have dinner with my grandpa. I am very confident that he will be very happy to see Charlie. I know he has been waiting for so long to have a great grandson."

Eventually, Leila was convinced and submissively replied, "Fine Chris, you won. Have you decided when and where?"

Chris celebrated in her mind. She felt proud and absolutely right in thinking that no matter how difficult, Leila would buy the plan and own it without regret.

With a little pause, Chris confidently replied, "I'll meet you and Charlie tomorrow. Here in our house. Make sure both of you are here before seven, okay? Bye then!"

She surmised it would be better to do it the soonest time so that Charles would have no time to think and refuse.

As Chris was about to hang up the phone, Charles entered the living room. Chris immediately put the phone back to its cradle. As usual, Charles seemed very depressed. Chris approached him and greeted, "Charles, have you eaten dinner? I just ordered Nacy to prepare some soup with tomato and beef. Do you want to have some?"

"No, thanks," Charles answered indifferently. He was so upset and didn't have the appetite to eat

anything. The only thing that he wanted to do was to take a bath and go to bed. In his mind, he had this

ardent wish that when he woke up in the morning, his life would be back to the way it was when

Autumn was alive. Always happy and complete.

As he was going upstairs, Chris sweetly called, "Charles, please hold on. We will have two guests

coming tomorrow night. Can you come home earlier and have dinner with us?"

Puzzled, Charles with his raised eyebrows inquired, "Guests? Who are they?"

Chris felt anxious but tried to strongly contain her emotions. She replied back with a grin, "It's a surprise.

You will know when they arrive here tomorrow. Charles, you stand as the host of our family. Remember,

it will be impolite if you won't be here to welcome them."

Still gloomy, Charles gave an obscure answer. "I'm not sure yet."

But, Chris insisted, "My dear brother, I know your days are always hectic just by taking care of our

family business and, I must admit, you are doing a great job. Please, just for tomorrow night. I will really

be so delighted if you could, at least, show up?"

Chris grabbed Charles' hands and begged, "Please, the two guests I invited are very important to me.

Please be certain that you will attend the dinner. If you will be late, I will just tell them to wait for you.

They know you very well so I'm sure they will understand. Please be here tomorrow night."

Charles was already full of Chris' pleadings, so he reluctantly agreed. "Okay fine, I knew you will not

just take no for an answer."

Chris smiled victoriously as Charles finally conceded to her fervent request. "Thanks!"

The following morning, Chris woke up unexpectedly early. Revitalized from a very good sleep, she

excitedly stood up and went to the kitchen. She found Nacy. She instructed her to buy the needed stuff

for the planned dinner. At first, Chris wanted to join her, but Nacy refused and rationalized, "Miss Lu,

you are pregnant. The market is very dirty and crowded. It's not safe for you to go there."

Chapter 540 Visiting The Lu Family

Chris was unusually cheerful and excited since morning. She took her bath and got ready to go to the

market with Nacy. But Nacy did not agree with the idea of Chris's stepping out of the house in such an

advanced stage of pregnancy. She raised an eyebrow, and then replied, "I think you'd better stay home.

If you want something to eat, just let me know. You don't need to go to the market with me."

"Well... That's fine, then," Chris agreed reluctantly. She thought for a while with special emphasis on

the two expected visitors and said, "Get some more ingredients for today. We are expecting some really

important guests. Oh, well, buy some snacks and toys for children." Her face lit up with the mention of children.

"Got it," Nacy replied as she took a note of it in her grocery list. After Nacy left for the market, Gary woke up and came into the living room. Noticing Chris literally hopping around the house with a bulging belly made him worried. He approached her and asked in a concerned voice, "Chris, what are you doing? Why are you pacing up and down the hall in this condition? If you need anything just call the servants. You should be taking rest at this time."

"Good morning, grandpa!" Chris greeted cheerfully. "We are going to have some special guest today. They will be reaching very soon. So I asked Nacy to buy more food and other servants to do some cleaning," she said, smiling.

"Visitors? Who?" Gary stared at Chris with bewilderment as he asked. The puzzled look on his face soon turned into an angry frown. Old men of his age get very easily offended if they feel that they have been left uninformed about anything in the house. Demanding a reply, he asked, "Why did nobody tell me?"

A happy yet mysterious smile flashed upon Chris's face, which made Gary more curious. "What's going on? Will anybody care to tell me?" he asked, scratching his head. "You look so excited. It must be some of your important friends," he assumed.

Chris shook her head and said, "It's a secret. You'll know it at night." She grinned as she spoke. Gary tried his best to get the cat out of the bag but failed. Now he had no other option than to wait for the night and see it for himself when the guests arrived.

Nacy followed Chris's instruction and came back with lots of food ingredients. She even kept in mind that they were going to have a child visitor while preparing for the dinner. She stewed the beef in the morning so that it would remain tender when served for dinner. A lot of preparation took place as Chris got the house ready for the special guest.

#### Inside Leila's Apartment

Leila had a restless night. The anxiousness for the next day prevented her from getting a good night's sleep. She kept turning from one side to another. She could not believe that she was invited to visit Dream Garden as a guest. Finally, her dream to live a rich and affluent life was inching closer to its fulfilment. She woke up with tired eyes. But she was full of enthusiasm and excitement for the evening.

She prepared the breakfast in a jiffy and went to call Charlie for the meal.

Although Charlie had known Leila to be his mother from the time he was an infant, he was not at all

attached to her. They lived together but they were more like two strangers under the same roof. Charlie

was absolutely indifferent to Leila, and she was used to it.

Just like every morning, she knocked on the door and called Charlie to eat breakfast. The door opened

and Charlie appeared in clean clothes.

To be honest, Charlie's indifference hardly mattered to Leila. Obviously, she had kept Charlie to serve a

gate pass to enter Charles's life. The boy stood in front of her without even looking at her face.

"Charlie, can you get changed after breakfast? We need to go out and visit somewhere," she broke the

silence. Charlie was dressed in a black suit. Leila looked at the boy and frowned out of dissatisfaction.

She thought that Charlie's dress was not appropriate for the place and the people they were going to

meet. Here she was taking him to meet his great grandfather Gary. He ought to look more cute so that

he could grow fondness for himself in Gary's mind.

"Why don't you change into some better clothes?" Leila said in a suggestive tone.

"No," Charlie voiced his opinion briefly. Charlie was a very silent kid as compared to other kids of his age. Most of the times, he kept to himself. He did not even speak to Leila much. It was indeed unusual for a kid of his age.

Leila took a deep sigh. 'Even though I assumed this, I still dreamt that miracle would happen,' she thought bitterly.

"Charlie..." Leila called out his name in an indulgent manner. "Aren't you curious about where I will take you?" she asked.

Charlie didn't seem to pay heed to Leila's question and went on with his breakfast. The clear exhibit of indifference towards his mother was simply inexplicable. He pretended as if he never heard what she said and continued eating his breakfast without even raising his head.

"I'll come to know it once I get there," Charlie replied blandly without even looking at Leila.

Leila was speechless when she heard his reply. Kids of his age jump with joy by the mere mention of an outing. But, look at Charlie. He was just least bothered.

Leila knew that she had to prepare Charlie for the evening. Hence she took a sip of water and spoke to him patiently, "This evening we'll meet two people. One is your father's sister, so you need to call her

'Auntie', and the other is... your father's grandpa, so you need to call him 'Great-grandpa'. Got it?"

"Okay," the boy replied. 'It turns out she'll take me to Charles' family, ' he thought to himself.

"Be a polite boy when you get there. Spend more time with your great-grandpa and talk to him. It's your

first meeting, so you must leave a good impression on him, will you?" Leila urged him softly. Charlie

nodded his head in an affirmative manner when Leila finished talking. After the breakfast, Leila went to

the mall and bought some health care products for Gary. Though inexpensive, the products were good

enough to appease someone of Gary's age.

Around 3:00 pm, Charlie returned to his room, got changed and put on his new suits. He came back to

the living room and said to Leila coldly,"I'm ready!"

When Leila looked at him, she stood still, dumbfounded. The striking resemblance he had with Charles

gave her goose bumps.

On their way to the Lu family house, Leila made a call to Chris. As soon as she rang the bell, Chris

opened the door herself and greeted them with a wide smile. It had been the second time since she

met Charlie. With a bright smile on her face, she addressed warmly,"Hello, Charlie! Nice to meet you!

You're so cute."

"Charlie, this is your auntie," Leila said, as she nudged the boy and gestured him to greet her.

"Hello, Auntie!" Charlie greeted politely. Upon hearing this, Chris gave a wide smile. "Don't stand outside. Please come in and have a seat!" she urged gladly as she moved aside to make way for them to come inside the door.

As soon as they stepped into the living room, Leila's eyes roved around to see if Charles was home.

However, she didn't get a glimpse of Charles anywhere as far as her eyes went. A dash of disappointment came across her face.

"He doesn't know you'll come today. He isn't here not because he wants to avoid seeing you," Chris said reassuringly as she read Leila's mind. "He is tied up with some urgent work in the office, so he might arrive a little late," she explained.

Leila nodded politely. Since she was Charles's secretary, she knew how busy he was every day as Shining Company was on an aggressive expansion mode.

"Nacy, bring some fruits," Chris called out loudly enough to be audible from the kitchen. Nacy came out with some fresh apples and pears decadently served in beautiful cutlery. The moment her eyes fell

upon Charlie, she was completely taken aback. She was amazed to see how this small boy had the

same features as Charles did. She stood there in a jaw dropping silence and kept staring at Charlie.

"He... he..." she stammered with her mouth agape.

"Don't have a cow," Chris said to the shocked maid with dissatisfaction. "Give fruits to me. You go back

to the kitchen and mind your business," she commanded.

Chris brought a plate of fruits and snacks to her beloved nephew. "Charlie, have some snacks," she

said tenderly. "Oh, I also bought many toys for you. Do you like them?" she asked as she took out

many toys.

"Thank you, Auntie!" Charlie replied politely. He took a glance at the toys on the tea table, including the

transformers toys, toy car and other playthings. Actually he wasn't interested in these stuff. But

considering these gifts were from his aunt, he didn't show his real thoughts on his face.

"You're such a polite boy," Chris praised him and tried to touch his forehead and stroke his hair. Before

she could touch the boy, Charlie walked aside quickly and stared at her warily.

Chris was taken aback by this gesture and frowned out of amazement. She started at Leila expecting

her to come up with an explanation. Leila was prompt enough to read her mind and replied, "Don't mind.

Charlie is an independent boy. He doesn't like others touch him, not even me."

"Is he?" she responded, surveying the boy. Anyway, she was satisfied with her nephew. Shifting her

gaze to Leila, she said, "Just stay here and have a seat. I'll tell grandpa that you're here."