

Wedded Bride 541

Chapter 541 Gary Meets Charlie

"Okay!" Leila said, nodding her head in agreement. Chris then left and made her way to Gary.

The sun had set in the horizon. The old man recently took up a new hobby — gardening. And he took great pleasure in the activity. An area in his backyard had already been set aside as his garden. When

Chris arrived, he was taking care of the flowers.

She headed to the backyard and saw Gary removing weeds. He wore a leather apron and had a sickle in his hand.

Chris paused at the entrance of the garden. She took a moment to watch her grandfather working with his flowers. Smiling, she called out, "Grandpa!" Upon hearing her voice, Gary straightened and turned towards the girl. "What brings you here? As you can see, I'm busy," he said.

"Grandpa, can you leave your flowers for a while and come with me? Our guests have arrived," the young woman urged. When he didn't move, Chris became impatient and walked towards the old man.

She thought of dragging him out with her.

"Stop! Stay there. I'm coming," Gary exclaimed. He had just finished watering the flowers, so the

flowerbeds were a bit muddy. Gary feared his pregnant granddaughter might be injured walking on wet

soil, so he did not want her to come closer.

He may be old, but Gary was sturdy and walked towards his granddaughter steadily. Then he stopped and brushed off the dirt on his clothes and apron. "Who are your mysterious friends? Are you not going to tell me?" he asked curiously.

"You'll know when you see them," she replied with a mysterious smile. Chris was determined to surprise her grandfather. The old man took off his apron and strode towards the house. He stopped as the girl grabbed his arm, looking puzzled. "Aren't you going to change clothes before meeting our guests? You have mud all over them," she pointed out with a slight frown.

Gary looked at his clothes and agreed with his granddaughter's assessment. So, he headed upstairs to put on clean clothes. As he came down the stairs, Leila was fidgeting on the couch, her expression tense. She felt so uneasy that she didn't even notice the boy was no longer beside her.

Leila's presence was a complete surprise for the old man. He remembered the time Autumn and Charles were fighting a lot over this woman. 'Is she the guest Chris was referring to?' he wondered.

"What's going on?" the old man asked, as he turned to his granddaughter with a stern look. Autumn

might no longer be with them, but Gary was not about to allow a wretched woman to take her place as his granddaughter-in-law.

Chris didn't answer him. Instead, she looked around for Charlie and wondered where he was. "I'll explain later," she told Gary.

She turned to Leila and asked, "Where is Charlie?" The boy was nowhere to be seen. "Bring him in now," she ordered Leila.

"If Charlie doesn't come in soon, grandpa will lose his temper," she muttered to herself.

Leila whirled around to look for the boy and found him staring at a chessboard. "Charlie, come here.

Say hello to your great grandpa," she directed the child.

Both Gary and Chris were looking at where the boy stood. When Charlie turned around, the old man was stunned.

Charlie stared at Charles' grandfather, and then looked at him from head to foot. Finally, he greeted him courteously, "Hello, great-grandpa."

"Great-grandpa?" Gary mumbled in disbelief. 'I wonder who's going to tell me what is happening, ' he thought, giving the ladies a puzzled look.

Chris took it upon herself to make the introductions. "Grandpa, this is my brother and Leila's son, Charlie. Isn't he a spitting image of Charles?" she said cheerfully. She motioned for him to come nearer. "I was struck by their resemblance the first time I saw him. I'm still amazed when I look at Charlie now," she said, while looking at her adorable nephew, and smiling sweetly.

"You mean to say..." Gary paused. "You mean he is Charles' son?" he asked. His eyes widened as he pointed at Charlie.

"That's right, he is," Chris affirmed with a nod. Looking back at the boy, she continued, "Look at him. He looks exactly like Charles. I'm sure even if I didn't tell you anything, you would have guessed their relationship."

Gary couldn't hide his confusion. He asked, "What is this?" After a brief pause, he instructed his granddaughter, "Follow me."

The pregnant woman knew her grandfather would be having many doubts. She turned to follow Gary, but before leaving the room, she told Leila, "Make yourself at home. We'll be right back."

Chris knew that bringing Leila and the boy to the Lu family home was not a good idea. But she truly

wanted to help her brother finally let go of his wife and move on with his life. It was for his sake that she decided to plot to bring Charles and Leila together.

"Close the door!" Gary hissed at Chris as soon as he entered his study. She obeyed his command.

Then she became excited again and chattered, "Grandpa, doesn't the boy look very much like

Charles?" She ignored Gary's silence. "You know what? When I first saw him, I freaked out." There was

no change in his grave expression, so Chris quickly changed her strategy. "It wasn't easy for Leila to

raise him by herself. So, I was wondering..." There was only stony silence from Gary. "Maybe if she

and Charles gets married, it will do both father and child good. What do you think?" she persuaded, as

she used her most persuasive tone.

"What do you think you're doing?" Gary asked, his tone full of reproach. "You know how much Charles

loves Autumn. Do you think he will accept them?"

She was hoping for a change in reaction. "That's why I brought them to you," Chris added. With a wry

smile, she reasoned, "We both know how stubborn Charles can be and he will never accept Leila. But

she is the child's mother. Shouldn't that count for something? If we can help her get married to Charles,

then maybe he will finally forget Autumn. You don't want to see my brother suffering forever, do you?"

"Do you think your plan will work?" Gary asked carefully. Then he sighed. "Your brother is obstinate.

And even I can't force him to do something he doesn't want to."

"Grandpa..." Chris pleaded, her brows furrowed. "I'm doing all this for Charles' sake. Autumn has been away for three years. I can't bear to see my brother hurting from her loss for the rest of his life. I only want to help him."

She saw the hesitancy in her grandfather's face. But she was not going to give up. "Charlie is such an adorable kid. Can you bear to see him growing up with only a single parent?"

"Is that boy really Charles' son?" he asked with narrowed eyes. 'Is grandpa softening up?' Chris wondered. "Of course he is!" she assured the old man.

Reaching out for his hand, she squeezed it for comfort. She went on, "You saw the boy yourself. He looks exactly like my brother. No one will doubt he is Charles' son."

Then Gary burst out, "What has Charles done?" The situation truly bothered him. 'I'm glad to see my great-grandson, but I just don't like his mother, ' he thought.

"How could he have cheated on Autumn with Leila when they were so good together?" A heavy sigh

escaped his lips.

"Grandpa, it's not time for this," she cautioned her grandfather. "It's done. Charles and Leila are old enough. And if they get married, it will be a good thing for all of us. Don't you think so, grandpa?" she prodded.

Gary said nothing.

When they finally came out of the study, Gary kept staring at Charlie and couldn't take his eyes off the boy.

Chapter 542 Bonding Over Chess

Gary noticed the deep interest shown by Charlie as he stared at the chessboard.

He wondered if the young boy knew how to play the game. The older man came closer and asked, "Charlie, would you like to play chess?"

Charlie nodded and his eyes lit up at the question.

"Well then, let me teach you how it's played," Gary offered. He asked the boy to sit on his lap and patiently explained the chess pieces, how they moved, and the rules of the game.

To his surprise, the child was very responsive and quickly picked up the game. Finally, he challenged Charlie to play a game.

"Great!" Charlie exclaimed excitedly. Since he had just learned how to play, the little boy was not equal to Gary's prowess in the beginning. But as they continued playing, Gary felt somehow challenged. And he was even about to lose this game to a child, even if playing chess had long been just a hobby of his. As their playing progressed, Charlie impressed his great-grandfather with his seriousness. He carefully thought of his moves and seemed to be developing strategies.

It was then that Gary realized he and his great-grandson had forged an inexorable bond between them.

"I lost the game," Charlie told the old man. As much as he hated losing, the child had to concede defeat.

But Gary suddenly said, "There is hope for a reversal." While analyzing the position of the pieces, he urged his great-grandson to try.

Charlie looked up to Gary, and with all seriousness said, "I better accept failure gracefully."

While playing chess with his great grandfather, Charlie kept glancing at Leila, who was chatting with Chris happily and paid no attention to the conversation between Charlie and the old man.

Gary had to admire Charlie's resolution and decision. It impressed him very much that at such a young

age, the boy behaved maturely.

"Tell me, do you like this chess set?" he suddenly asked the child. After spending time with Charlie, he made up his mind to give his favorite set to him.

However, the boy was too well-bred to grab his offer although he wanted nothing more than to accept it.

"Do you like play chess?" Gary prodded him. The old man wanted to hear the boy say yes.

A little shy, he admitted having a love for the game even when no one took time to teach him to play it.

"Since you love it, you deserve this gift," Gary said. He began to pack the chess pieces and handed the board to Charlie. Gary challenged the boy, "Improve your skills and then play with me again."

"Thank you! I appreciate it very much," Charlie beamed. The boy felt like he had received a treasure.

"Charlie! Return that prized gift to Mr. Lu immediately!" Leila's voice jolted both Charlie and Gary. But with the demand to give back the chess set, she offered, "Return that, and I will get you a new one later."

"It is only a game for the child," Chris spoke up. "When Charlie grows up, he will be entitled to all our family properties," she told Leila.

But Leila was adamant. "It is too early to be talking of those things." She refused to give the impression that if she married into the Lu family, she would be exploiting their properties.

"I don't wish to hear any more of it!" Gary said loudly. He was annoyed with Leila's reaction. "It's just a chess set!" The old man lowered his tone. "Charlie has every reason to accept it."

Turning to his great-grandson, he said affectionately, "Please accept it to honor our promise of playing chess again."

"Okay," Charlie said simply. Deep inside, he was smiling triumphantly.

And so it was that Leila had to resign herself to Gary's decision. Chris was pleased and motioned everyone to the dinner table. "Nacy's dishes are ready. Let's all go and have dinner."

"Good," her grandfather said with a smile. He took Charlie's hands in his, and with great affection asked, "Tell me, what do you love to eat?"

The two may have only spent an hour together but the bond forged between them was evident.

Leila, who had lived with Charlie his whole life, never had that opportunity to become close to the boy.

Seeing the boy and his great-grandfather already close was upsetting.

During dinner, Gary plied Charlie with all kinds of food. It surprised him to discover that the food Charlie loved eating were the same ones Autumn fancied. He couldn't help blurting out, "Charlie enjoys the same food Autumn loved."

"Grandpa, please watch your words," Chris cautioned. It distressed her that Gary was insensitive and had to say such things. "Why did you have to refer to Autumn all of a sudden?" she asked.

Gary realized his mistake as he noted Leila's uneasiness.

"Leila, please forgive my grandpa for his careless remarks," she apologized. She moved to comfort the other woman, who paled at hearing Gary mention Autumn. "Are you all right?" Chris asked.

Leila was starting to feel the futility of trying to pass herself off as Charlie's mother, knowing the boy was Autumn's flesh and blood.

Gary's casual words brought her back to reality.

She was fully aware of the blood relation between Charlie and Autumn, although no one else knew the truth.

"Are you okay?" Chris asked again. She was beginning to worry about Leila and tried to lighten up the mood. Finally, the other woman said, "I am fine, thank you."

Charlie couldn't help but be curious about the conversation among the three adults. "Great-grandpa, who were you just referring to a while ago?"

"Oh, forget that," the old man dismissed the inquiry. He now wanted to steer away from the issue and picked up two sweet and sour ribs to put on the child's plate. "You can enjoy as much as you like!" Gary said brightly.

Chapter 543 Chris In Distress

Noticing Gary's hesitation in discussing Autumn, Charlie didn't pursue the topic. After finishing his meal, he got distracted in studying Gary's chessboard. Meanwhile, the old man and Leila sat on the lounge.

"How old is the boy?" asked Gary curiously while gazing at Charlie.

"He's almost four years old," Leila replied calmly. To make her lie more believable, she purposefully made Charlie a year older than he actually was.

"When did you and Charles... get together?" Gary asked with interest. He intended to figure out what was going on between his grandson and this woman. He was extremely satisfied with his great-grandson, who looked exactly like Charles at his age. However, he didn't take kindly to the thought of Charles' cheating on his wife. If he really had a relationship with this woman after marrying Autumn, he

would teach him a lesson.

"Grandpa, we never really... dated," Leila said, looking embarrassed. She had a feeling that Charles'

grandfather was not a pushover. Trying to act shy, she continued, "It happened when Charles got drunk

while we were on a business trip in Europe," she said in a low voice. "He mistook me for Autumn and I

didn't resist him because I was infatuated with him. Later, I found myself pregnant with his child."

"Is that so?" There was sarcasm in the old man's voice. Looking up, Leila found Gary looking at her

suspiciously.

"Yes," Leila said in a firm voice. "The other day... Mr. Lu got drunk and we..." Leila's voice trailed off

intentionally.

Gary snorted, assuming what happened next.

His blood boiled with anger when he heard his grandson repeated his mistake.

'We men from the Lu family have always been loyal to our wives and there is no exception. How can

Charles break this old tradition?' he thought angrily.

"I'll teach him a lesson when he comes back," Gary threatened. His eyes were kindling with anger at

his grandson's lack of control.

Blood rushed to Leila's cheeks at Gary's word. After a slight hesitation, she said, "Grandpa, it's not his fault. He didn't force me. Besides, it's been more than three years since Autumn left him. He is a virile man with needs..." Her eyes pleaded silently. "I hope you can understand him," she said.

Gary's face turned livid with anger. He threw Leila a scathing look. "Miss Zhang, I prefer you to address me as Mr. Lu. You are not my grandson's wife, so you have no right to call me grandpa."

Hearing Gary's disparaging words, Leila realized that he had no intention of treating her as part of their family.

Blushing with mortification, Leila lowered her head. Chris who was silently listening to their conversation suddenly cut in. "Grandpa, don't be so serious. Leila is going to marry Charles sooner or later. She is like a family," she said in favor of Leila. "I don't see why she can't call you grandpa now,"

Chris told Gary.

Looking angrily at his grand-daughter, Gary said insultingly, "She can call me grandpa only after she gets married to Charles and not before. I never saw a lady who talked so familiarly on their first meeting."

Feeling seriously chastised, Leila held back her anger. Charles' grandfather was turning out to be a pain in the neck. Smiling sweetly, she turned to Gary saying, "Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Lu, for being familiar on our first meeting."

Witnessing Gary's hostility towards Leila, Chris jumped to her defense. "Grandpa, I brought them here because I wanted you to side with them. I thought you would be happy to see Charles' son. Leila gave him a good upbringing. He is such a well-mannered and smart boy. Why are you treating her like this?" Chris complained.

"Be quiet!" Gary snapped at Chris, looking at her thunderously. "You're married off and this is not your home anymore. So don't meddle in your brother's affairs," he lectured sternly.

"You..." Shock kept Chris from uttering another word. 'I did all this for Charles' sake, but grandpa scolded me like this. He made me look like a fool in front of Leila, ' she thought angrily.

"You're right. This is not my home anymore. After all the things I did for Charles, this is all the thanks I got, a scolding from you. I'm not blaming anybody. It's all my fault for caring too much for my brother. Now that I know I'm not welcome in this house, I'm leaving," she said emotionally.

Leila tried to stop Chris as she said hurriedly, "Miss Lu, please don't be angry with your grandfather. You

misunderstood his meaning."

"Let me go!" Chris shook off Leila's hands violently. "I wash my hands of you. If you want to be in this family, figure it out yourself. I can't help you anymore," she told Leila angrily.

"That's enough!" Gary barked at Chris. 'Chris was spoiled by us. She got used to getting her own way, ' he thought.

His anger subsided a little as he looked at Chris storming angrily out of the room. 'It's so late. Where will she go?' he thought worriedly.

Cursing and sobbing, she strode hurriedly towards the door. As soon as she stepped out of the room, she ran into Charles who was just about to enter the door.

Steadying her with his hands, Charles asked, "What's the hurry? Where are you going at this hour?"

"Charles..." Chris sobbed at her brother's chest. Looking up at her brother tearfully, she said, "I did all this for you, but grandpa berated me..."

Frowning, Charles tried to understand what Chris was talking about. He looked towards the living room.

His eyes were narrowed as he caught sight of Leila. Then he brought back his attention to Chris who

was obviously distressed.

'What the hell is she doing here?' he thought, scowling heavily.

"Mr. Lu..." Leila addressed Charles with an awkward expression. With one look at Charles' expression, she realized that he didn't know about their visit.

'He doesn't want to see me here, ' she thought, feeling embarrassed.

"What are you doing here?" Charles asked coldly. Leila bit her lip, not knowing what to say. Before Leila could answer, Chris interjected, "I invited her."

With knitted brows, he turned sharply to Chris. "You did this?"

"Yes," Chris confirmed. "She is your son's mother. I asked her and Charlie to join us for a meal. What is the problem?"

"Why are you so nosy?" he growled at his sister. "It's none of your business. Why are you interfering?" he snapped angrily.

"You..." Chris faltered, her face turning pale. At first, it was Gary, now Charles was also biting her head off. She never expected that Charles would react like this. "I never expected that you and grandpa can treat me like this. I'm leaving this house and I'm not coming back," Chris shouted at Charles.

Pushing Charles out of the way, Chris turned to leave. The minute she took a step, she felt an excruciating pain in her abdomen. Clutching her stomach desperately, Chris suddenly collapsed to the ground.

Leila rushed to her side feigning concern. "Are you all right, Miss Lu?" she asked.

"It hurts..." Chris groaned, her brows furrowed in pain as she clutched her belly. Leila turned to look at

Charles who was gently lifting Chris in his arms. "Is she going to have the baby?" she asked worriedly.

Chapter 544 Chris's Boomerang

Gary and Charles wasted no time to bring Chris, who was in labor, to the nearby hospital's emergency room. They were immediately assisted and attended by the doctor and nurses on duty. Upon seeing that Chris's water already broke, they rushed her to the adjacent delivery room..

More than one hour had excruciatingly passed. Very tensed, Gary and Charles sprung out of their

seats as both saw the attending doctor came out of the delivery room. The doctor then happily

announced that Chris was lucky for normally and safely giving birth to a healthy baby boy. Charles and

Gary breathed a deep sigh of relief and rejoiced. Leila and Charlie followed them to the hospital. On

hearing the news, Leila felt somewhat envious of Chris.

The hospital staff already transferred Chris into her ward located at the second floor. Before they went to her ward, Charles said to Leila, "It's very late. Take Charlie back now." Then he turned to Charlie and said in an affectionately voice, "Charlie, it's late and you need to sleep. I'll see you tomorrow. Is that okay?"

"Okay," Charlie relied. After a short pause, he added with a hopeful expression, "Dad, I want to learn how to play chess."

"Chess?" Charles sounded somewhat stunned but then voiced his approval and support, "No problem son. I love that you are interested in playing chess. I'll take you to a chess training club tomorrow."

"Thanks, Dad!" Charlie replied gladly. Leila was happy to see the growing affinity between Charlie and Charles.

"I'm going back with Charlie now. See you, Charles," Leila said, looking affectionately at Charles.

Charlie would already fall asleep now if he were at home, so Leila had to take him back home.

Charles escorted Leila and Charlie to the taxi waiting area outside the hospital lobby. He hailed a cab, opened the door and let Leila and Charlie go inside. He then returned to Chris' ward after the taxi left.

After entering the ward, Charles saw Gary nagging Chris. Charles decided to give them some space.

He got out of the room, walked to the lobby and sat on the bench. Back in Chris' room, Gary was still on his sermons. "As an expectant mother, you should have been more careful. Sam would surely blame me if anything bad happened to you."

Seemingly annoyed by his grandfather, Chris fired back in a cold tone, "Please mind your own business." Chris turned her face to the left to avoid facing Gary. Obviously, Chris harbored a grudge against his grandfather who slighted her very recent suggestion of replacing Autumn with Leila by forcing Charles to marry the latter.

Gary knew that for the same reason, his granddaughter was still mad at him. He tried to again reason it out with Chris, "We cannot allow, by any means, an undesirable woman like Leila to marry your brother! Chris, you are a mother now. You should know better and be more understanding."

"But..." Chris tried to counter but then reflected for a moment. 'Indeed, it would also be against my will to marry anyone else other than Sam, ' Chris told herself.

Yet still she reasoned out, "Grandpa, Charles' case is different." Chris tried to expound on her rebuffed suggestion about Leila and Charles. She was convinced she did it out of good will. Then, she faced

Gary and in a mild tone uttered, "Leila's child, I supposed that... Charlie would be enough to make Charles move on and forget the traumatic loss of Autumn."

Gary sighed and interjected, "But... it turned out that your 'perfect idea' was rather unacceptable." Gary again sighed and continued, "Charles, your brother, is too stubborn to just blindly accept that suggestion."

From Chris' voice and facial expressions, Gary sensed the sincerity and goodness of her intentions. As he gazed at her granddaughter's pale face, Gary read the growing regrets and helplessness. To break the solemn atmosphere in the room, he spoke, "I have informed Sam of your condition over the phone. He will fly back tomorrow. You need to take a good rest before meeting him."

"I want to see my son right now," Chris intentionally changed the topic and demanded.

Charles who decided to go back to the room, just entered. He heard what Chris said and was quick to reproach her. He prevented Chris from seeing her son.

Chris was too weak to speak loudly. Perplexed, she inquired, "Why? Why can't I see my son?" Her weak baby boy was kept in an incubator due to the premature delivery.

With a mug of hot milk Charles incidentally bought on his way to his sister's room, he served it to Chris,

and then declared, "Your son is well taken care of in an incubator. A nurse will bring him to you as his condition stabilizes."

"But Charles, I am dying to see and hold my baby!" she pleaded earnestly.

A strong pity for his sister filled Charles's heart. To pacify her, he had no recourse but to use his cell phone to shoot photos and videos of his nephew while inside the incubator after she flipped through the photos and watched the videos of his son.

"Now, please have a sound sleep my dear sister," Charles requested with empathy. He wanted Chris to take a restful sleep so she could restore her energy.

Chris tacitly succumbed to his brother's request. Charles, upon seeing that Chris was already sleepy, turned to Gary, "Grandpa, I'll stand-by with Chris tonight. I can already take care of her and my nephew.

Please go home now and get yourself some rest also."

"Are you sure?" Gary hesitantly answered. Gary was worried about leaving the hospital but Charles strongly insisted. Charles escorted Gary to the hospital lobby and to his car.

After sending Gary off, Charles returned to his sister's room. Chris was awakened by Charles'

movements. She gazed at her brother and took advantage of the situation by asking, "Charles, why can't you give Leila a chance to be your new wife?"

Charles found it unnecessary to argue with Chris over the matter. Particularly, it involved his principle.

So he kept quiet.

"Anyway, Leila is Charlie's mother. You should give Charlie your due love and attention." Chris

continued and tried to remind Charles of his fatherly responsibilities.

As a new mother, Chris was already fully aware of Leila's maternal feelings.

She understood that it was difficult for Leila to raise Charlie by herself.

She believed that Leila's parenting skills should be highly credited for Charlie's excellent attitude and demeanor.

Charles glanced at Chris annoyingly and then firmly blurted, "I will never let Charlie be uneducated and astray, Chris!"

Chris could not help but ask Charles reassuringly, "So you mean... you are willing to accept Leila too?"

Sensitive of his sister's current condition, Charles tried to be cautious and patient as he explained the matter to his recovering sister, "Not to worry my dear sister. I will take the full responsibility over

Charlie's future. As for Leila, I don't want to marry her but I will instead extend to her the financial support that she will need."

"Charles...is it ... because of Autumn?" Chris finally collected all her courage to straightly ask Charles of her concern about Autumn.

Chris believed that it was expected by Autumn as well, whom Chris was also sympathetic about, that Charles should start a new page in his life after her death.

The thought that Leila was an acceptable woman for Charles lingered in Chris' mind. She believed that her brother was being too unfair for not considering Leila as an excellent replacement of Autumn.

"Even if Autumn had been dead for so long, I... I could never take Leila as my new wife. Nobody can replace Autumn's place in my heart." Charles objected roughly and continued,"And as for you, my dear sister... you should better mind your own business and not bother yourself with that nonsensical idea."

Grudgingly, Chris conceded,"Well brother, since you do not want to listen to my advice and hate to be prodded about it, I'll have to let you do whatever it is that you like. If that will make you happy." Then, she continued,"Good luck to you Charles. As for me, I would rather focus on taking care of my baby

boy and myself!"

Chris really saw his brother's strong indisposition about marrying Leila. She finally resigned and decided to leave everything to Charles. She felt relieved.

The following day, Sam, who decided to take a day off from his own business, was already at the airport. He took a flight three hours before dawn to see Chris. He hurriedly hailed a cab and reached the hospital at exactly 5:00 a.m. Gary had told him the room number, so he went directly to the second floor and easily found Chris' private room. He carefully pushed the door open. Charles, who fell asleep on the brown leather couch in front of her sister's bed, was startled by the faint, squeaking sound of the room's door hinges. It slightly woke him up and then he got fully awakened by the sight of Sam who showed right after the door opened. Both looked at Chris who was still in deep sleep.

Charles while rubbing his eyes quietly stood up and greeted Sam in a barely audible voice, "Hey Sam."

Sam raised his right arm to silently acknowledge Charles. Charles tiptoed to Sam and gently grabbed his left arm, pulled Sam out of the room and then carefully closed the door in an effort not to awaken Chris. He walked side by side with Sam going to the nursery to see his son. On their way, Charles explained the incident to Sam in an apologetic tone, "Sam, first of all, I have to admit that it was my

mistake last night.... I... I made Chris so emotionally upset to the extent that it triggered her premature delivery. I'm very sorry but that wasn't my intention. You know that I always pray for the safety of Chris and your baby. My conscience would consume me if something bad happened to both of them and... I would really be so ashamed to face you."

Sam was earlier informed by Gary about the incident. He knew that it was Chris's mistake. He deeply sighed and in a consoling tone said,"Charles, it was all Chris's fault. It was her twisted idea and actions that induced her premature delivery. I am very much indebted to you and Gary for taking good care of her."

"Chris is my dear sister. She deserves my care and affection, Sam. The same way that she deserves Gary's and yours. Since we were kids, she always wanted me to be happy. So many times she tried to fix things for me just to make me smile. She's quite stubborn sometimes but that's how she is and I truly love her for that." Charles replied gently and calmly,"Now that you are here, I will leave Chris and my nephew to you buddy. It's already morning, I have to go back to work. Promise I'll be here tonight."

Sam was in heaven after seeing his son. In his best mood, Sam invited Charles,"Why in a hurry?

Please join us in breakfast!" Sam tried his best to persuade Charles for the breakfast he incidentally bought while on his way to the hospital, but Charles graciously declined and took off.

Chapter 545 Mr. Lu's Son

"Please look after Chris while I'm gone. I have some matters to attend to."

Remembering that he had promised to take Charlie to learn chess, Charles excused himself with a promise to come back later. Now that Autumn was gone, Charlie was his only motivation to live in this world.

On his way to Leila's house, Charles passed by a well-known restaurant to buy an assortment of breakfast for Charlie. He didn't know yet what food he liked so he bought different kinds.

Arriving at the front door of the house, Charles rang the bell. Still in his pajamas, Charlie opened the door for him.

"Dad!" Charlie called excitedly, throwing himself in Charles' arms. Putting down the bags of food on the floor, Charles gave Charlie an exuberant hug. His heart was filled with elation as he hugged the little boy.

Charles was very pleased that Charlie had accepted him as his father without reservation. "I bought breakfast for you. Go and wash yourself," Charles said, ruffling his son's head playfully.

Almost skipping with joy, Charlie went to the bathroom to wash himself. He came out a few minutes

later impeccably dressed. His eyes widened in surprise when he saw the table spread with a variety of breakfast dishes.

"Why did you buy so much, Dad?" he asked, looking puzzled. Approaching the table, Charlie seated himself opposite to Charles.

"I didn't know what food you like so I bought different kinds, just to be sure. After today, I will know what

I should buy next time," Charles said, smiling ruefully.

The sound coming from the dining room woke Leila up. She came out of her room only to find Charlie sitting at the breakfast table with Charles. Not quite believing it, she rubbed her eyes to make sure that she was seeing correctly. Looking up, Charles noticed Leila and said briefly, "I'll take Charlie out with me after breakfast."

"Hmm, alright," Leila said, secretly happy that things were working out as she planned. Knowing that

Charles was getting attached to Charlie, she couldn't be happier. The more they grew closer, the more she liked it.

She knew that Charles wouldn't be able to turn his back on his own son. That meant that as long as

Charles believed that she was Charlie's mother, their lives would be intertwined. Sooner or later, he would have no choice but to accept her.

"Wait," Leila said, remembering something. "You can take him out today, but you should pay attention to the food he would eat. He is allergic to potatoes so don't let him eat anything with potatoes in them."

"Potatoes?" Charles asked sharply. Frowning, Charles distinctly remembered that Autumn was also allergic to potatoes. 'What kind of coincidence is that?' he wondered.

Turning to Charlie, he saw the boy wiping his mouth with his napkin.

"I'm full, Dad," Charlie said, smiling happily. Because of his excitement, he ate quickly and with less decorum than he was accustomed. He couldn't control himself since he was very interested in chess.

Throwing his napkin on the table, he turned to Charles excitedly. "Let's go now!"

"Alright!" Charles answered with a grin. His momentary thought about Autumn was discarded as he looked at Charlie's excited face.

"There are some of Charlie's things in this bag. There's a change of clothes and a pot. Just don't forget

to let him drink some water with it when he gets thirsty," Leila said, proffering a small bag to Charles.

"Okay," Charles nodded, accepting the bag from Leila. It was the first time for Charles to take care of a

child and he felt a little anxious. However, his anxiety left him as he looked at Charlie's trusting face.

Suddenly, he felt happy and proud to go out with his son. 'We're like two peas in a pod, ' he thought,

smiling to himself.

Charles took him to the Children's Palace for the chess class. After a few hours, Charlie went out of the

classroom, rushing excitedly to where Charles sat waiting for him. "Dad, the teacher praised me for my

intelligence," he gushed out excitedly.

"Oh, really? That's great!" Charles said, lifting Charlie up in his arms and giving him a light hug. "You

are smart because you took after me," Charles told his son proudly.

"I think so," Charlie concurred happily. He always thought that he had no similarities with his mother.

His appearance, character and IQ were far removed from Leila as night is different from day. Since

reuniting with his father, he finally knew whom he took after.

"Are you hungry? Do you want to go for lunch, now?"

Charles asked, staring mesmerized at the little boy in his arms. Kissing Charlie on the cheeks, he felt a

sudden peacefulness in his soul. No matter who this boy's mother was, he was prepared to love him with all his heart.

"OK, Dad. I want to eat meat."

His son's innocent words made him freeze. It reminded him of a familiar voice that was so dear to his memory, a shy voice saying, "I want to eat meat." Goosebumps exploded all over his body.

The way Charlie said it sounded eerily the same as the voice from his memory.

Noticing Charles' stillness, Charlie asked, "What's wrong with you, Dad?"

Charlie had never called Leila "Mom", but the word "Dad" rolled off his tongue easily. When he was with Charles, he was just like any normal kid, innocent and cute.

"OK, Dad will take you to eat meat," Charles said, shaking off his nostalgia. Charles took Charlie to a nice restaurant to eat barbecue. Normally, he didn't like serving others, but now he was very pleased to roast the meat for his son. He filled up Charlie's plate and let him eat until he was satisfied. Putting down the tools for barbecue, Charles looked at his son with affection.

"Are you full, son?" Charles asked. Handing the juice to Charlie, he felt sorry that he couldn't spend the

whole day with his son as he planned. He just received a call from his staff asking him to come back to the office for an important meeting.

He had planned to take Charlie to the library, but now he had to go back to his office.

Since it was his first time to go out with Charlie, he felt guilty to cut their time together short. But there was an important matter he had to settle in the company and he couldn't ignore his commitments.

"Charlie, Dad wants to discuss something with you," he said, not really knowing how to tell him in such a way so as not to disappoint him. "You must have heard me on the phone just now. It was a call from the company. I have to go back for an important meeting right now. I have planned to go to the library with you after lunch, but..."

"Dad, can I go with you?" Charlie asked excitedly. He wanted to see where his father worked. "I want to see your office," he added, looking expectantly at his father.

"You want to go there?" Charles asked, surprised at Charlie's request. He frowned, looking doubtfully at Charlie. He was thinking to send Charlie home early and then proceed to his office after dropping him off. But now, hearing his request, Charles explored the possibilities in his mind.

He knew his staff would be shocked if he showed up with Charlie in tow.

Looking at his son's expectant eyes, Charles didn't have the heart to refuse him. Finally, he nodded

and said to Charlie, "Fine. But it's boring to stay in my office. Are you sure you want to go?"

"Yes, I want to go. I have my books with me if I get bored," he assured Charles. The truth was, Charlie

didn't want to go home. He liked being with his father and enjoyed his company even if they were just

sitting together quietly.

Nodding, Charles knew there was no excuse to refuse Charlie's request.

'Besides, the people in my company are bound to find out about Charlie eventually, so what's wrong

with bringing him now?' Charles thought.

As expected, the moment that Charles entered the lobby with Charlie by his side, news started to

spread like wildfire. Everybody was speculating about the identity of the little boy. To everyone's

surprise, once they got a closer look, they saw that the boy was the spitting image of Mr. Lu!

Chapter 546 The Meeting

The receptionist who saw Charlie up close said that she rather suspected the little boy was Mr. Lu's

illegitimate child.

Her comments were strongly rebuked by Charles' fans until Coco posted the photo of the boy in the

group chat. Then everybody fell silent.

'There's no denying the boy's paternity. He is the exact mirror image of Mr. Lu.' Everyone who saw the photo would be hard put denying the evidence of their own eyes.

"How could this be? How did Mr. Lu managed to conceal a son of his age?" Alice and David, who were working closely with Charles every day, had no idea that Charles was hiding a skeleton in his closet.

The photo was enough proof that the boy could be nothing else but their boss' son.

Looking puzzled, David scratched his chin absent-mindedly. "That's impossible. Mrs. Lu has been dead for more than three years..."

The origin of the boy was a big mystery for both of them. Alice gasped suddenly, covering her mouth as an insane thought crossed her mind. "Could it be that the boy is Leila's son?" she asked unbelievably.

Leila had been absent for a few days, which was unusual. Now their boss suddenly turned up at the company with a young boy who looked exactly like him. If the boy was really Leila and Charles' child, it added up.

As the next Mrs. Lu, Leila would have to resign from her job at Shining Company, so no need for her to report work anymore.

"Don't talk nonsense." Dismissing Alice's guess as bizarre, David scoffed and said, "How could Mr. Lu possibly have a child with Leila?"

In his opinion, Charles had always been a devoted husband to Mrs. Lu.

Looking at the boy in the photo, he was probably born while Autumn was still alive. David couldn't believe that his boss had an affair with Leila.

"But..." Alice knew her guess was reasonable knowing Leila had been infatuated with Charles from the beginning. She was about to argue with David, but she caught a glimpse of Charles carrying the little boy in his arms as he stepped into the office. She quickly swallowed the words on the tip of her tongue.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lu." They greeted Charles in unison with respect, but their eyes were glued to Charlie pointedly.

Anticipating his staff's reaction, Charles didn't bat an eye at their curious expression. "Charlie, dad's office is over there and dad is going to have a meeting in the Conference Room. You can wait for me at the office and play for a while. Is that okay?" he asked the boy softly, putting him down gently and pointing his fingers to the direction of his office.

"Okay, Dad," Charlie nodded politely and headed regally towards Charles' office, carrying his school bag. Once he was out of earshot, David asked Charles while looking directly at his eyes, "Dad?"

"Sorry, I don't have a son of your age," Charles replied humorously, seeming to be in a good mood.

However, David still couldn't believe it. "Mr. Lu, please don't joke with me. How could you have a child of his age? How did you manage to keep him a secret all this time?" he said, looking baffled.

"I'm not kidding, David. He really is my son," Charles confirmed. "As you can see, he looks so much like me. It will be useless to deny that he is my son. Don't you think so?"

"But...how?" David persisted. The boy couldn't have come out of nowhere. "What about the mother?" he asked, going straight for the jugular. David had worked alongside Charles for a long time and had been one of his closest and most trusted employees. He felt he was at least entitled to an explanation.

Charles looked at David, his eyes devoid of expression before saying dryly, "It's Leila."

"What?" David asked, stunned. Alice, who was discreetly listening to their conversation, turned to David mockingly, her expression clearly said, "I told you so."

Ignoring Alice's smile of victory, David tried to grasp the impact of this information. 'Had Charles been carrying on an illicit affair with Leila behind Autumn's back?' he wondered.

"I still don't understand. Mr. Lu, how could this be?" Despite hearing the words directly from Charles'

mouth, David still didn't want to believe that Charles had anything to do with Leila.

Knitting his brows, Charles tapped David on his shoulders. "It's a long story. I'll tell you about it another

time. We will be late for the meeting," he reminded David. "Hurry up. Are the documents ready?"

"Yes, all the necessary documents are here." As if on cue, Alice appeared with the documents on her

hands. "Mr. Lu, the board is already waiting in the Conference Room."

"Okay, Alice, thanks. Can you please look after Charlie for me?" Charles asked Alice, nodding towards

the direction of his office.

"Sure," Alice replied readily. She was dying to know more about her boss and Leila's love child. Even

without Charles' asking, she would have volunteered to look after the boy just to satisfy her curiosity.

Taking the elevator to the Conference Room, David kept glancing uneasily at Charles. He was like a

child with something on his mind and wouldn't rest until he got his answer. Finally he broke the silence

and said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Lu, but what's going on between you and Leila?"

Knowing that David wouldn't give him a minute of rest, Charles decided to tell him there and then. "She

told me she got pregnant with Charlie when we went on a business trip to Europe. I was drunk, so I really had no idea what happened," Charles explained with a frown. "I learned about it only the other day. Charlie is almost four years old."

"Oh, I see..." David said, trying to assimilate the information. "Will you marry Leila?" he asked curiously. David thought it was an unpalatable idea. He didn't think Leila was good enough for Charles.

Asking himself this very question just that morning, Charles knew the answer was a big "NO".

Shaking his head, he looked at David seriously. "Charlie is my boy and I will take responsibility for him.

He will be my successor. But I can't marry his mother. I don't want to spend my life with a woman I don't love."

"But... you two have a child together," David said hesitantly. He knew that Charles would be under pressure from society to marry Leila. He couldn't help but get worried about the ramifications it would cause not only in Charles' personal but also his professional life.

"I will not be forced to marry Leila because of my son. The outcome won't be good for anyone." Turning to give David's shoulder a brotherly pat, he said, "I'll take care of it myself, so don't worry about me."

David decided to hold his peace. Once in the Conference Room, Charles was besieged with more

questions from his business partners.

Thanks to the convenience of modern communications, Charles' relationship with an unknown child had traveled faster than the speed of light. He had been the subject of speculations the moment he stepped in the building.

People on the board were quick to catch up on the grapevine. Most of his business partners were old men with a grudge. They believed that such a young man didn't deserve to run the company and they were just waiting for him to trip up. This breaking news gave them the exact opportunity.

Finally finding Charles' Achilles heel, the board wouldn't let him off the hook easily.

"Charles, you've managed the company well for the past two years and we are really grateful. But what you've done today was a surprise to us. If this news gets out, it's not just going to affect your reputation, it's going to affect the entire Shining Company."

The first one to air his displeasure was a board member of the former Sun Company. He used to work for Edward. He became a board member when Sun Company was absorbed by Shining Company.

He already held a grudge against Charles from the beginning. He would have been the Vice Chairman

of Sun Company if the two companies didn't merge. Instead, he just became a board member.

Charles was an astute businessman. He had the knack of knowing how to make good use of people.

He was an impeccable leader. A man of ability who worked for him was sure to receive recognition. On

the contrary, he would never put people who had no ability in an important position, much to the

chagrin of the venerable elders.

Chapter 547 The Beautiful Sister In The Photo

Feeling the need to respond, David responded to Mr. Shen, "Can you please tell me how Mr. Lu's child

would affect the normal operations of Sun Company and Shining Company?"

He believed it was necessary to argue with the elder directors present when it came to the matter of

Charles' son.

"David, you have no authority to speak in this meeting!"

Mr. Shen's sarcastic remark was meant to dismiss Charles' assistant.

But Charles was not about to allow an attack on his trusted man, so he questioned his rival, "Mr. Shen,

is it true your son has been accepted by a prestigious university in America?"

The question was surprising, but not unwelcome.

"Yes, he has," he beamed with pride. To glorify his family, Mr. Shen had been proudly announcing his

son's scholarship.

So everyone, including Charles, felt that the matter merited a closer look, and Mr. Shen suddenly realized this.

"I find the matter irrelevant to this stockholders' meeting!" the man quickly exclaimed. Mr. Shen felt threatened by Charles' strong character, but he would never admit to it. He knew that great care was necessary when dealing with the young Mr. Lu.

"And neither is my private affair relevant!" Charles snapped. Seething inside, Charles kept his composure.

The stockholder looked at Charles with contempt and proceeded to argue. "Your case is different! You are the chairman of Sun Company and Shining Company. These two companies have images to protect. But a scandal such as your having a love child damages that good image!"

Anger colored the man's face.

Charles tapped his fingers on the table. "Mr. Shen, here's a rumor that needs an explanation."

He sneered and looked at the other stockholders before continuing. "I was told that the night before the

admission test, your son was in a bar with a woman. He was later detained by the police after the woman filed attempted rape charges against him. Fortunately, because of your influence and power, he escaped prosecution. However, he did bribe someone to take his place for the admission test."

With an eyebrow raised, he looked at Mr. Shen straight in the eye.

"Stop this nonsense!" the man shouted. He felt beads of perspiration forming on his forehead. Charles' revelation was shocking. It aroused the curiosity of everyone in the room, who began talking about the matter.

Mr. Shen could not believe how Charles found out about the scandal involving his son, considering he had given strict orders to handle everything discreetly.

But at that very moment, the enigmatic Charles was challenging him in front of other shareholders, and he was not happy about it.

"I think we should begin our meeting now," Charles declared. He then cast an arrogant glance at those present, particularly Mr. Shen. Charles made a good leader because he was bold and brave and never backed down from people who were hostile towards him.

Now that he had the upper hand on Mr. Shen, he pressed his advantage.

Before making an official statement, he brought out documents relevant to the issue. "We have been informed that BM Corporation has been actively doing business in Y City. They are heavily advertising the launching of their spring and summer fashion event. And this is cutting into our market share for this field of enterprise. Therefore, we must come up with a plan on how to transform our company into a profitable competitor," Charles reported.

Meanwhile, Alice was assigned to watch over Charlie while the stockholders' meeting was going on.

Since the meeting had dragged on, there was little the boy could do inside Charles' office. Alice offered him juice, and he politely thanked her. The child was surprisingly well-behaved and quiet. Because they were alone, it gave her the opportunity to study the child up close.

She couldn't help but admire Leila for having kept this boy a secret for four years, and wondered whether Leila would be their boss's next wife.

The boy finally ran out of patience and dropped the book he was reading. He asked Alice, "May I look around here?"

"Of course!" Alice replied with a smile. She offered, "I can show you around if you like."

"No, thank you," the boy smiled back at her. "I'm only going to stay in this office."

While he was reading, his eyes wandered around the office and became curious about its layout.

From his position, he had an entire view of the spacious room with huge French windows, where he

could see the constant stream of people below. Charlie stood up and wandered over to the shelves

filled with documents, which did not appeal to him. Walking towards Charles' desk, he began inspecting

it.

It was a large desk, perfect for Charles. The boy poked around the desk until he saw a framed

photograph that got his attention.

Charlie was surprised to recognize the smiling woman standing beside Charles. It was Sheryl, his new

friend.

He became curious why Sheryl would be in the same photograph with his father.

"Charlie, put the photo down," Alice ordered him. She panicked when the boy picked up the frame to

look at it more closely, so she raised her voice.

Alice was responsible for cleaning Charles' office, but she was forbidden to touch that particular framed

photo.

Then there was the sound of crashing glass. Alice's outburst startled Charlie, so he dropped the frame and its glass cover shattered. This made Alice aghast. She knew Charles would likely blame her for what happened.

Deep inside, Alice knew she was partly responsible for the broken photo frame.

And she was starting to regret agreeing to watch over the little boy.

The child was shocked over the accident and quickly took the photo out of the frame before brushing off the broken glass.

But he remained curious. With childlike innocence, he asked Alice, "Who is this woman in the photo?"

What also caught Charlie's interest when he saw the picture was Charles' expression while posing.

In the time he had spent with Charles, Charlie noticed his father rarely smiled. If he did, it was as if he carried a burden. So it was a pleasant surprise to see him looking very happy in the photograph.

And his curiosity about the connection between Charles and Sheryl grew.

"This woman..." he pointed to Autumn. Alice was in a dilemma. Considering he was Leila's son, should she tell Charlie the truth or make something up about Autumn's identity?

"Please, tell me, and I promise to keep it a secret," he begged. Charlie was intent on learning the truth.

And he was skillful enough to use words that would make Alice give in and reveal what she knew.

Alice was also astonished about how convincing the child was.

Finally, she said, "That woman in the photo is Autumn. She was your Dad's previous wife."

Alice paused to look at the boy. Sadly, she related, "She went missing three years ago. But in your

Dad's mind, she will come back. This picture is Mr. Lu's treasure. And I have to deal with him when he

discovers what happened to it."

Chapter 548 Charlie's Friend

Despite Charlie being Leila's son, Alice had a strong urge to protect him. After all, she knew he was still

a child.

From the looks of him, the boy didn't think or care if his father might throw a tantrum because of what

happened to the picture frame. His full attention was on the woman in the photo. "Does my father like

her very much?" he asked Alice. "Does he still want to marry her?" he added.

"Of course, he does!" Alice blurted out. Alice felt deeply sorry for Charlie after what she said. 'He's only

a child. Like other kids, he's probably hoping his parents will stay together. It must feel awful to find out

there is a woman that stands between his father and mother, ' she thought.

Feeling guilty, she hurriedly moved to comfort the boy and said, "Your father used to like that girl very much. But now that he's found you, he will treat you and your mother well."

Little did she know that Charlie was aware that his father would never accept Leila.

Of that he was sure.

'Adults always lie to me. They think I'm too young to understand things. But I do get it, ' he thought to himself.

The boy knew Charles had no feelings for his mother, and marrying her was out of the question. It was his mom who kept pestering him.

Then he got to thinking, 'If Charles like Sheryl so much, should I help him win her back?' He then thought about his father and his friend.

Charlie wanted to see Charles smiling brightly just like in the picture. In his eyes, his father became very charming and dashing when he smiled sincerely.

Suddenly, the door swung open. Alice turned to look and saw her boss about to enter. As David held the door open, she quickly stood up and lowered her head. "I'm very sorry, Mr. Lu. I broke your

cherished photo accidentally. It's all my fault, and I'm willing to accept whatever punishment," she apologized, her voice trembling with fear.

She was preparing for the scolding that was sure to follow. "You should have been more careful," David berated Alice in a low voice, standing behind Charles with his eyebrows knitted.

"I didn't do it on purpose," Alice defended herself. She looked miserable as she avoided Charlie's eyes.

Suddenly, a new voice filled the room. "Dad!"

The boy called out, walking up to Alice.

'It was me, not her. I will not let Alice take responsibility for my mistake, ' the boy resolved.

"She's lying," he spoke up. "I did it. She has nothing to do with what happened," the child confessed, his expression serious and his voice clear. Alice was taken aback by Charlie's admission.

Quickly, she said, "Charlie, stop talking nonsense!"

She turned to look at Charles and explained, "Mr. Lu, don't listen to him. It was my fault. I'm the one to blame."

But Charlie interrupted, "She is not telling the truth, Dad."

He took a deep breath before explaining, "I only wanted to look at the sister in the photo. I wasn't

holding it tightly, and it fell. If you're angry, punish me, not her."

"Did you?" Charles looked at him straight in the eye with no angry expression. He checked if the photo was damaged. Seeing that it wasn't, he spoke to his son, "Tell me, why did you want to see this picture?"

"Because she is very pretty," Charlie replied frankly. David hurriedly dragged Alice out of the office to give father and son privacy. "Dad, do you honestly like that girl in the picture?" Charlie asked, looking at his father with soulful eyes.

The man replied bluntly, "Yes, I do."

Suddenly, thoughts of Autumn filled his mind. 'It was three years ago when she disappeared. There are times I nearly forget what she looks like, ' he thought, 'I dream about her every night, and in my dream, I would open my eyes to catch a glimpse of her. But I never see her face. So, I look at this photo to remind myself never to forget her, and her face.'

"Did you refuse her because of this girl?" Charlie couldn't help but ask after seeing how sad his father was. While there was no mention of a name, Charles understood his son was referring to Leila.

"No, this isn't about her. Even without her, your mother and I..." he said, shaking his head. "Never mind. This is complicated for you."

With a deep sigh, he stated, "Anyway, I will never accept your mother. I won't ever be with her."

"So, is this girl still alive?" Charlie asked reluctantly. At the question, Charles looked at his son. "I don't know. Maybe. Perhaps, she's still alive. Or..." he broke off and stared blankly.

This made Charlie break into his thoughts. "Well, dad..." He had decided to help his father pursue Sheryl.

The boy couldn't bear seeing his father suffering this way. "I have an appointment with a pretty young sister. Would you like to go with me?" Charlie shared.

"Young sister?" Charles asked, raising an eyebrow. "And who is she?"

He gave the boy a puzzled look, wondering when his son had made friends with an adult.

"She looks exactly like that girl in your photo," Charlie disclosed. He pointed to Autumn.

Charles was stunned, overwhelmed by the information. Afraid that he misheard what the boy said, he clutched Charlie's arms. "What did you just say? Can you say that again?" he asked urgently.

"I know a pretty young girl who looks exactly the one in this photo. But, she has a different name,"

Charlie said slowly. Suddenly, he was confused and scratched his head. "Dad, have you ever met two persons who looked exactly alike?"

Suddenly excited, Charles ignored the boy's question. "Charlie, tell me, where is this friend of yours?"

he asked. His son's words gave him a ray of hope. He had suffered a lot these last few years. Each

time he found clues leading to his wife's whereabouts, he would get excited only to end up

disappointment. Sometimes, he would mistake a person for Autumn walking down the street. He would

run after her only to find out he was wrong. He had been mistaken for a mad man many times.

Gradually, he lost hope and even began to doubt if Autumn was still alive.

But hearing his son describe his friend rekindled the hope inside him. He was not giving up however

slim the chance that it was Autumn.

Somehow, he didn't seem to mind if he would be disappointed again.

When Charlie told him where Sheryl was staying, he was surprised. 'She's in Eric's hotel. Maybe I've

run into her without knowing it, ' he thought.

Overjoyed, Charles hugged his son tightly and kissed him several times. "If that woman turns out to be

Autumn, then he is my lucky star, ' he said to himself.

"Dad, my face is wet all over!" Charlie complained because of the kissing. But while he grumbled, the boy was also ecstatic.

The man wasted no time and lifted his son, carrying him to the car. He practically ran out of the office.

On the drive to the hotel, Charlie sent Sheryl a text message without his father knowing. His friend had just come out of the shower and read the message.

When she learned Charlie was coming, she grabbed a towel and quickly dried her hair. She got dressed and told Sue, who was inside the bathroom, that she was leaving.

"Where are you going?" Sue called out. "Have you forgotten we have a meeting tonight?"

It had been a while since all the models arrived in Y City. With everyone busy with rehearsals and so many other activities, there was no time for them to sit down and get to know each other. With the show

date fast approaching, George arranged a party for them, hoping they could relax and catch up.

Sheryl replied loudly, "I'm going to pass on this. Tell them I don't have time!"

She ran out of the room, worried that Charlie would arrive early and have to wait alone. She stood

outside the hotel waiting for the boy, whom she had come to adore in such a short time.

Chapter 549 An Odd Reunion

Although excited, Sheryl was also fidgety as she was waiting for Charlie in the parking lot of a restaurant. She was worried that he might get entangled in the middle of the same horrendous road traffic she had experienced the last time. She knew that with that kind of chaos, the possibility that Charlie would lose direction while on his way to meet her was huge. Little did she know that Charles accompanied and drove Charlie to their rendezvous.

Charles carefully drove toward the entrance of the restaurant's parking lot. As soon as he entered, he quickly spotted an open slot. He reverse-parked his SUV and pushed the 'Engine Off' button on the car's dash board. An hour before they headed to the meeting place, Charlie already showed him from his cell phone the photo of the woman they would meet. He was stunned to see that the woman that Charlie named Sheryl was his wife, Autumn. He was so intrigued by the coincidence that he was more anxious than Charlie to meet her.

Nervousness and extreme eagerness enveloped Charles. He tightly held the car's steering wheel for support. He was just seconds from finally seeing his wife. Ironically, his ever burning desire to be with Autumn again somehow eluded him.

Charlie scanned the parking lot with his eyes looking for Sheryl. It wasn't long until he caught a glimpse of her. Charlie excitedly got off from the rear seat of the SUV and rushed toward Sheryl who was patiently waiting for him. Charlie greeted heartily, "Sheryl, nice to meet you again."

Ecstatic, Sheryl lovingly hugged Charlie and chuckled, "Nice to meet you too, kiddo!" Sheryl and Charlie were not able to contain their happiness upon seeing each other. The pleasant exchanges of actions and words of affection were comparable to a mother and son who didn't see each other for a very long time. Charles who remained sitting in the driver's seat finally laid his eyes on the woman. At that moment and with a bit of a distance from both Charlie and Sheryl, Charles was greeted with a very familiar face: simple, refreshing and unforgettable.

'She is Autumn. Her face... her body... her voice. I can't believe it. She is my wife!' Charles wondered in his mind.

Charles was extremely jubilant at the uncanny reunion with Autumn.

But, he could not also deny that such an unusual reunion was not easy. It brought back a lot of memories about Autumn. The good and bad times they both shared filled his heart with melancholy.

In a pit of happiness, Sheryl briefly lifted Charlie up after the blissful greetings. She spoke to Charlie in a blaming tone, "Charlie, I really hope that you have informed your mom of your whereabouts lest she be very worried."

"Sheryl, I've found my dad," Charlie quickly responded in an effort to placate Sheryl. Charlie seemed pouring his childish affection to Sheryl. He held her hands, looked at her eyes and gleefully uttered, "Sheryl, you have nothing to worry about. It was my dad who drove me here."

"Really?" Sheryl was somewhat stunned and inquired, "Where is your dad?"

"There he is." Charlie, in an assured voice, pointed at the direction of Charles's car. He then dragged Sheryl to the parked vehicle to show her his dad. At that moment, Charles saw them as they approached. He then lifted himself from the driver's seat to straighten his suit. His hands trembled as he was seized with severe nervousness.

Charles decided to meet Charlie and Sheryl half-way. He opened the car door, and got out hesitatingly only to see Sheryl already standing in front of him. Her well-poised manner and elegant look splattered on a face of a perfect stranger like him. Sheryl disinterestedly gazed at him and nonchalantly waited for him to speak.

In Charles mind and heart, he wondered, 'How could my dear Autumn treat me like this? She treats me like someone quite irrelevant and insignificant?'

Charles awkwardly avoided being close to Sheryl. Charlie who was holding Sheryl's right hand quickly sensed his father's uneasiness, He decided to do the introduction for the two of them. "Sheryl, he is my dad, Charles Lu.

Dad, this is Sheryl Xia, my dear friend." Then, Charlie with a big smile on his face jokingly added, " May both of you please dance?"

Sheryl burst into laughter at Charlie's humorous introduction. Actually, Sheryl and Charlie considered each other as best friends despite their age disparity.

"It's nice to meet you, Mr. Lu." Sheryl braced up to shake hands with Charles. "My name is Sheryl Xia, Charlie's friend."

"It's my pleasure to meet you too Miss Xia" Charles coyly stretched out his right hand to meet Sheryl's.

The familiarly tender feel of Sheryl's soft hand brought Charlie back to his hallucination. He secretly vowed, 'I will not lose you again, my beloved Autumn.

My persistent efforts and undying commitment to you will soon be paid off.'

Charles was too lost in his reveries that he forgot to draw back his hand for a long time. He maintained holding Sheryl's hand. Sheryl already felt uncomfortable by the long hand shake. She candidly sensed an ulterior motive from Charles.

Sheryl surmised that Charles, for that moment, was treating her like a prey.

Charles suddenly read the discomfort on Sheryl's face. He was taken aback and instantly let go of Sheryl's hand and apologized. In a fleeting moment, he recovered and then smilingly questioned, "Miss Xia, are you a native of Y City?"

At Charles seemingly probing question, Sheryl's eyes twitched and her face visibly showed a growing suspicion. Sensing Sheryl's uneasiness, Charles immediately explained his good intention, "Please don't get me wrong, Miss Xia. I asked because you are Charlie's friend. I just want us to talk more and know each other better."

Sheryl nodded gently. "I perfectly understand it, Mr. Lu."

In her mind, she thought 'I would also be suspicious and interrogate anyone posing as Shirley's friend.

Particularly if he or she is a stranger.

A natural response by parents to protect the interest and safety of their children.'

Sheryl looked Charles in the eyes and then answered,"I have been living in America for years now. I just returned to Y City for a couple of business opportunities."

Consecutively, Charles threw questions at Sheryl. His ardent desire was for her to stay as long as possible in Y city. "So how long do you plan to stay in Y City?

A week more?" Sheryl smiled and said,"I will leave the city upon the completion of my business agenda here."

She gave an indefinite answer because she was hesitant to part ways with Charlie.

Charles was determined to detain Sheryl with every possible means. So, he again inquired,"Why not settle down in Y City, Miss Xia?"

"Probably not. America is my home now," Sheryl replied with a gentle smile. She had to honor the promise she made to Anthony not to visit Y City again once she returned to America.

Ironically, Sheryl's thought about keeping that promise felt much less. She shrank at the thought of meeting Shirley's biological Dad.

Charles frowned and wondered what had happened to her in the past three years and why she became Sheryl Xia. But since he met her again, he would never give up on her.

Charles held his thought but was confident that Sheryl was being partially dishonest to him about something, and he intended to figure that out.

As they promenaded at a nearby park with Charlie in the middle, the three definitely looked like a happy and complete family. Charles checked his watch and then offered, "It is time for supper. Why don't you join us? It is my treat!"

After reflecting for a moment, Sheryl managed to give her consent, "That sounds good." She sighed and thought, 'Sue, anyway, will be out to attend a ball. I'll just stay and spend more time with Charlie tonight. I'll be leaving soon. I might as well take advantage of this moment, as I won't be seeing him in person again for... possibly forever.'

However, Sheryl found it quite embarrassing to stay along with Charles.

Charles selected a posh Japanese restaurant opposite the park. The fine dining restaurant was elegantly nestled on top of a carved, well landscaped hill. Inside, he booked the best corner with a full view of the entire park and the city. Charles finally regained his composure. He began to create a

scheme on how to win Sheryl's attention. After ordering their food, his well-trained tongue started to weave interesting topics.

Even though Sheryl was seized with memory loss, she indeed found Charles so attractive, as she indulged in his flowing speech.

Totally absorbed in listening to Charles' prolific way of story telling, she gazed at him and gradually developed an uncertain affinity with the handsome man. As she was tossed in reveries about nothing, her expressive eyes were fixed on Charles.

"Miss Xia, a penny for your thoughts? Are you still with us? Am I boring you?" Charles awakened

Sheryl from her seemingly state of soliloquy. She immediately made an apology, "Oh, I'm so sorry,

please never mind." Charles replied with a smile. Charles' constant references to fictional short stories

were intended to please Charlie. But it also unexpectedly drew Sheryl's full attention.

Charles' face showed a very naughty grin, and in an apologetic tone he told Sheryl, "Miss Xia, I'm so

sorry. I think, I bored you with my stories."

"No... not really! I... I was actually hooked by the way you interpreted those fictional stories. It was

definitely entertaining and rather... very engaging!" Sheryl replied with a smile as she tried to regain her composure.

The dinner food that they ordered took a little longer than usual to prepare. But Charles, who was usually known for being impatient, didn't complain about it. If not for Charlie's sleepiness, Charles would have sustained their lively conversation.

While Charles was carefully arranging his thoughts on a pretext of dating Sheryl again, Charlie blurted out, "Hey Sheryl, are you available tomorrow? My dad promised to take me to the amusement park tomorrow. I'd really love it if you could join us?"

Charlie's childish and very naughty request was hard to decline.

Sheryl was torn by indecision. She remembered a very important appointment she already finalized with Sue concerning a big client. With a pain in her heart, she tried to politely rebuff Charlie's request, "Charlie, You.. you know, I... I'd love to... but... I do have to attend to a business presentation rehearsal with Sue the whole day tomorrow..."

Chapter 550 Be My Stepmother

Charles smiled at Sheryl as he bid her good bye. Charlie was still holding her hands. Sheryl felt so much peaceful inside after having spent some time with Charles and Charlie. As for Charles, he did not

want the moment to pass. "How about I pick you up at 7:00 tomorrow night?" Charles asked

courteously. He had waited for his wife for the last three years. He could wait even longer only if it meant that he would be able to get her back in his life once again.

"Sher..." Charlie spoke with a sweet voice as he held her hand and kept swinging it in an indulgent manner.

The innocent smile and the earnest expectation in the boy's eyes melted Sheryl's heart. She nodded her head and agreed to meet them the next day.

Her reply brought a wide smile on the face of both father and son. They waved her as they got into the car. Charlie kept waving her with a smiling face for as long as he could see her. As for Sheryl, even she could not move from the place and kept waving him back. She could not understand why she felt so much at home and comfortable with them.

As Sheryl walked back to her room, she just could not get Charles's face off her mind. 'Where have I seen him before? Such a familiar face!' she thought to herself. His face kept flashing in her mind till the time she scolded herself to get over it. "Sheryl, what are you thinking about? He has his son, and you

have a boyfriend and a daughter. You and him! Don't even think about it," said her practical mind.

But how could she negate the warmth she felt in their company? It was as if she had a very strong bond with both of them.

Charles and Charlie were unusually happy as they drove back to Leila's apartment. As he parked outside Leila's apartment and tried to get down, Charlie said, "Dad, I think you should rather avoid meeting her. Otherwise, she will think that you're willing to accept her."

"Did you... arrange for me to meet her deliberately?" Charles was rather taken aback by his son's statement. He could not help marvel at the intelligence and sensitivity of the three years old.

'Moreover, now that he is advising me not to meet his mother, I think he is supportive of me and Sheryl being together, ' he thought to himself.

"Do you mean Sheryl?" Charlie asked. With the very mention of Sheryl, a pleasant smile graced his face. Charlie did not mince his words as he spoke, "I like her. If she has no problem, I don't mind her being my stepmother."

Charles stroked his son's hair affectionately. What more could he ask for? 'Charlie is happy to accept Sheryl. But how about her? Will she accept him with an open heart?' he wondered.

His mind went back to the time they spent together. It actually felt like they were one close knit family.

Sheryl seemed to be fond of Charlie. But would she treat him in the same manner even after getting married to him?

Then suddenly a disturbing thought stung his heart. His heart ached to think how his wife has forgotten everything about her past. And he didn't know why and how she lost her memory. 'Will she blame me for what happened in the past once she gets her memory back?' he thought to himself.

As he watched Charlie climb up the stairs, thousands of thoughts came to his mind. Finally when he saw the lights in his son's room on, Charles started the engine and drove away.

His jaws stiffened as he turned the steering wheel. He had a score to settle before going back to home.

After searching four night clubs, he finally found Eric in the fifth one. As usual, he was in a private room having a good time. "What are you doing here? I thought you didn't like these places," Eric gushed cheekily as Charles barged into his room.

"I'm here for you," Charles replied in a stern voice and furious eyes ready to gobble Eric down.

His grave voice and red eyes scared the hell out of Eric.

"Me? Why..." Before he could even finish, Charles' fist landed on his cheek.

The semi clad girls in Eric's room literally freaked out. Eric's companions came forward trying to stop

Charles. But Charles growled, "Get out of here, now!" He casted a glaring hideous glance on all of them

and motioned them to move out of the room immediately.

"What's wrong with you, Charles?" Eric asked nursing his bruised face. He then turned to his

companions and said in a cold voice, "Leave us alone now. It's between the two of us."

Eric had never won a fight with Charles even as kids.

Now, it was the first time that they had been challenging each other as grown ups. Moreover Eric didn't

even know the reason behind Charles's uncontrollable fury.

Moments later than they were left alone, both of them got into a fierce fight until both of them laid on

the ground with both their faces beaten black and blue.

After catching his breath for a while, Eric asked, "Can you tell why did you strike me?"

"Sheryl!" A word escaped from Charles's lips while he still laid face down. Charles's answer left Eric

flabbergasted. He empathized with him as he understood the real reason behind his anger.

"So... It looks like you found her," Eric giggled awkwardly. "I intended to tell you in a couple of days. I

didn't expect you to find her so soon."

"If I hadn't met her myself, when were you going to tell me about her?" Charles questioned, fuming with anger. "Nothing is hidden from you Eric. You know how I have been searching for her all these years.

How could you do this to me? Why didn't you tell me that you found her?"

'Three years! I have spent three years searching for Autumn!' Charles became uncontrollable as he remembered the time he spent in despair. And now when his friend found her back, he didn't even bother to inform him. 'What kind of a friend he is?' Charles thought to himself.

"I ran into her in the hotel," Eric replied. Eric had become calm. He knew how much painful it was for Charles after his wife went missing. He realized that he should have informed him the first thing after he saw Autumn in Y City.

"Why didn't you tell me immediately?" Charles was still fuming in rage. He felt betrayed at the thought that Eric kept him in the dark.

Eric lowered his head and spoke in a calm voice, "I found that she had forgotten me. I was waiting to get the complete information about what happened to her. I was going to give you the good news very

soon."

"So what did you get to know?" Charles asked with a frown. Charles helped himself get up from the floor, picked up a wine bottle, filled two glasses and then handed one to Eric. "Tell me now," he urged.

He could not wait to know what Autumn went through three years back and why she had forgotten everything about herself. Besides, he was also worried about his children. What might have happened to them?

"I used a lot of sources to find out about her. Her new name is Sheryl Xia. She is a model BM Corporation has invited for their show. She lives abroad with her daughter. She also has a boyfriend and they share good relationship. But I failed to get any more information," Eric replied frowning. 'All the information I have got about this girl spans just about three years of time. Her whereabouts before that is still a mystery, ' he thought to himself.

The news about Sheryl having a boyfriend was certainly not music to Charles's ears. He frowned as Eric broke the news to him. Then he made up his mind with renewed determination and said to himself, 'It doesn't matter. Even if she got married, I will steal her from her current husband.

She is mine and only mine. No one can take her away from me in this lifetime.'

"Why did she forget everything?" Charles asked. That was what he cared about the most. Half the mystery would be solved if he got the answer to it.

Eric shook his head and answered, "I don't know."

"What about her daughter?" Charles asked.

"I could not find any information on her," Eric answered.

Eric seemed to get into a deep thought after this. 'Why am I not being able to get into the root of the matter? I don't know it for sure, but I have a strong intuition that someone does not want me to find out the complete truth, ' he mused.

Charles narrowed his eyes wistfully and echoed the same thought as Eric. 'Someone must be coming in the way of getting the complete picture of what happened three years back. But anyway, I will help her to get her memories back, ' he resolved to himself.

When Charles got home, he found Gary sitting on the couch in the living room. After meeting Leila and Charlie at home the night before, Gary was waiting to speak to his grandson and figure out his thoughts about them.

Fortunately, today, just before he was about to go to bed, he saw Charles.

"You're back," Gary greeted in surprise. Charles wore a smile that had gone missing ever since Autumn got lost in a mysterious way three years back. Gary stared at his face to behold that smile and cherish the moment. Then he broke into a smile as well. 'How incredible it feels to see Charles to be happy again!' he thought to himself.

"It's so late, grandpa. Why aren't you in bed as yet?" Charles asked as he walked cheerful towards Gary.