

This Time, I Will Get My Divorce, Mr

Chapter 501

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Chapter 501 Toby's Evening Gown

Despite saying so, Vincent's tone of voice was filled with uncertainty, and he couldn't conceal it at all. It was evident that Vincent was worried—he believed that Toby would eventually investigate and find out about their plan. Vincent was merely trying to comfort and fool himself with his reassuring words.

At that moment, the maid ran over to Vincent and Lily. "President McRae, Fuller Group's president's assistant, Mr. Brown, is here to see you," she uttered.

Vincent's heart sank when he heard the words 'Fuller Group', and the muscles on his rugged face trembled as he spoke. "What did you say? Who's here?"

"Daddy!" Lily grabbed onto Vincent's hand in fear.

"President Fuller's assistant, Mr. Brown," the maid repeated. Vincent's expression turned grim once he made sure that he hadn't heard the wrong name earlier. All of a sudden, he got to his feet and paced back and forth beside the couch. "What's he doing here? Why is he here?" Vincent balled his fists as he muttered.

"Mr. Brown said that he's here to seek justice on behalf of President Fuller." The maid looked up and gave Vincent a careful gaze. "He said that you and Lily were plotting against President Fuller..."

Bang! Before the maid finished her sentence, Vincent collapsed back onto the couch. "He knows about it, Dad. He knows!" Lily was so terrified that her entire being was shaking. As Vincent parted his lips to speak, anger began seeping out of his being. "I heard what the maid said!" he growled as he glared at Lily with his bloodshot eyes.

"Would you like to see Mr. Brown now, President McRae? He's just behind the door," the maid uttered.

Vincent's fists were still tightly clenched. "Why would I want to see him? Tell him that I'm not interested in meeting anyone. I don't know anything about plotting against President Fuller—"

"I'm afraid I won't be able to go along with your orders since I'm already here, President McRae. I guess you have no choice but to see me." Tom walked in with a grin on his face, a security guard and lawyer following behind him. The friendly smile on Tom's face looked like the devil's grin to both Vincent and Lily. Both of them were too stunned to do anything.

Vincent hadn't planned to meet Tom—he wanted to avoid Tom to keep him and his daughter safe. However, he hadn't expected Tom to invite himself into the room. Gone were his hopes of being able to escape! After that, Tom had a conversation with both father and daughter. Both the McRaes looked as if their souls had escaped their bodies—they sat on the couch and stayed still for a long while after Tom left.

Tom, on the other hand, took a glance at the signed papers in his hands as he smiled and pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. He looked like a fox who had just caught his meal of the day. About an hour later, Tom arrived at Toby's condominium.

"I've settled things with the McRaes, President Fuller. Vincent agreed to sign the documents, and someone will short sell all of his company's stocks soon. Then, the McRaes will disappear from Seafield." Tom handed the documents over for Toby to take a look.

Toby took it over, but he didn't read it at all. "I got it," he uttered as he tossed the documents onto the coffee table. Typically, the McRaes' tiny act of plotting against Toby wouldn't have resulted in such a huge punishment for them. However, when Tom was doing his research on the rumors, he found out that the McRaes traded Paradigm Co.'s shares during the company's lowest point.

Six years ago, Vincent gathered some funds and attempted to short sell the last of Paradigm Co.'s stocks when he realized how unsteady the company was. He figured that he would suck up the last bit of Paradigm Co.'s funds. However, Vincent's capital wasn't big enough, so Paradigm Co. managed to survive, albeit barely. Yet, Henry was still burdened by debt, and he still killed himself in the end. I don't understand why Henry killed himself over unpaid debts, but I'm sure that Vincent played an indirect role in Henry's death.

This time, Tom decided to destroy the McRae Group, partially also because he wanted to avenge the death of Sonia's father. Otherwise, Sonia might never know that she had enemies other than the Gray Family. "There's something else, President Fuller." Tom didn't seem to mind that Toby hadn't even glanced at the documents. The papers weren't going to disappear, so Toby could see them anytime.

"What is it?" Toby massaged the space between his eyebrows before he turned around to pour himself a glass of water. Tom, who was standing beside him, responded in a polite tone, "Old Mrs. Fuller's 80th birthday party is happening in two days, and the evening gown you bought for Sonia has arrived. It's at the customs now. Should I send it over to Miss Reed?"

Upon hearing Tom's words, Toby paused halfway while sipping his water. He looked up at his assistant and recalled that he had indeed purchased an evening gown for Sonia. With his brows knitted, Toby thought, I would have definitely used someone else's name to send the dress over to Sonia before today. But now that I don't want to die, and now that I want to be with her... I don't want to send her gifts using someone else's name.

After thinking for a while more, Toby realized that Sonia might not take the gift if he sent it over with his own name. I was too harsh with my words previously. I didn't just say that she was bad at taking care of me; I even told her never to show up in front of me ever again. Toby massaged his temples as he felt a surge of regret in his chest. I shouldn't have given up on looking for a heart donor so soon, and I shouldn't have tried to cut things off with Sonia. If I knew that I would eventually change my mind and decide not to accept my fate of death, I wouldn't have made things so hard for myself.

Tom's glasses glinted as he looked at Toby, who looked like there was a dark cloud hovering above his head. It didn't take long for Tom to figure out what was going on in Toby's mind, and Tom cleared his throat as he muttered a few words under his breath. "You deserve it!" Previously, Tom had already told Toby not to give up so easily. Tom's advice had been to give the situation a little more thought before deciding, but Toby didn't listen to him at all—that was why Toby was regretting his actions right now! Tom let out an exasperated sigh before he spoke. "Why don't you just send the evening gown over, President Fuller?"

"What?" Toby turned to look at Tom as he wanted to know Tom's rationale for saying so.

Tom shrugged. "Since you've decided not to allow fate to dictate your life, and since you've decided that you want to find a heart donor and continue living, then I'm sure you don't want to grow any further apart from Miss Reed, right? You should be thinking of ways to get close to her, and to turn your relationship back to how it was like when you were admitted into the hospital. You know what you should be doing, but you don't know how to achieve it, right?"

Toby narrowed his gaze without saying much.

Tom knew that his guess had been right, so he continued speaking. "Well, your evening gown is the perfect way to go about this! Why don't you send the evening gown over just to test Sonia's current perception of the situation?"

Upon hearing these words, Toby raised his head and nodded a few times. "What you said makes a lot of sense. Let's do that."

"Okay. I'll get someone to deliver it over from the customs," Tom offered. "Go ahead," Toby uttered with a nod. Tom nodded in return before he headed out of the office.

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Sonia parked her car in Lane Corporation before she walked into the lobby. She rarely visited Charles' office—it was Charles who often went to Paradigm Co. instead. Therefore, most of the staff members didn't recognize her. While Charles usually headed straight to Sonia's office when he visited Paradigm Co., Sonia had to register herself at the front desk.

"Hello, I'm here to see President Lane," Sonia said to the admin at the front desk.

The admin pulled out a registration name list. "Hello, Miss. Please tell me your name, and I'll schedule an appointment for you."

"My name's Sonia." Sonia gave the admin her first name. Upon hearing Sonia's name, the admin froze for a moment before she looked up to stare at Sonia. The admin looked as if she were trying to confirm her suspicions. After a few seconds, the admin put the registration name list away before she gave Sonia a warm smile. "You're Miss Reed!" she uttered.

"Do you know me?" Sonia was somewhat taken aback.

The admin nodded. "President Lane ordered us to remember your name and face. We're supposed to let you up to his office without having to inform him if you ever visit. Unfortunately, President Lane isn't in his office now, Miss Reed."

"He's not?" Sonia frowned. "Where is he, then?"

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"I'm not sure about that," the admin said while shaking her head. "Perhaps you can give him a call."

"Alright. Thank you so much for your help!" Sonia beamed at the staff before turning to head out of the building. While walking back to her car, she pulled her phone out to dial Charles' number. However, once the call went through, Sonia was greeted by the flat, robotic tone of a female instead of Charles' voice. "Hello. The number you've dialed is unavailable. Please try again later..."

Sonia frowned as she pulled the phone away from her ear. That's odd. Did Charles turn his phone off? What's up with him? Sonia bit her bottom lip as she stuck a finger out to tap on her phone screen. She made another call—this time, she contacted Grace.

Grace's phone wasn't turned off, and she picked up the phone after it rang for a while. "What a surprise, Sonia! Why are you calling?" Grace's gentle and warm voice filled Sonia's ear once the call went through.

Sonia smiled. "I'm calling because I miss you, of course! Apart from that, I also have something to ask you."

"What is it?" Grace sat down on the couch and elegantly sipped on her coffee.

Sonia leaned against her car seat as she explained herself. "Well, I was wondering... Do you know if Charles is home now?"

"Charles?" Grace shook her head. "He's not home. He should be in the office at this hour."

"He's not here," Sonia uttered as she rubbed her temples. Grace put her coffee cup down when she heard this. "He's not in the office, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Hmm... Perhaps he's out to meet a client. Otherwise, he might have gone to supervise one of the factories. Why don't you just call him if you're looking for him, Sonia?" Grace asked.

"I called him a while ago, but he had his phone turned off." Sonia rested her forehead against her palm as she spoke in an exasperated tone.

Grace shrugged upon hearing this. "Well, I can't do anything to help, then. He can be really stubborn sometimes, and no one ever manages to find him when he decides to hide. I'm surprised that he's hiding from you, Sonia. Did you guys get into an argument?"

"No. We didn't argue about anything," Sonia uttered with a glazed look in her eyes. "He called me earlier, and we had a decent chat. However, he sounded rather emotional toward the end of the call, and he disappeared after that. I'm not sure what to do with him either."

"What were you guys talking about? Can you tell me about it? Perhaps I can put the pieces together," Grace offered. Sonia nodded as she gave Grace a summary of her conversation with Charles earlier. After Grace listened to Sonia's explanation, she remained silent for a long while.

Sonia felt her heart sinking when she realized this. "Why are you being so quiet, Mrs. Lane? Did I do something to make Charles mad?"

"No," Grace replied with a smile. "You didn't offend him in any way. This has to do with his own issues." There was a hint of frustration in Grace's voice.

"His own issues...? Sonia tilted her head sideways—she felt more confused than ever. "Have you figured out what's wrong with Charles, Mrs. Lane?" she asked directly.

"I think so, yeah. That brat knows that he missed his chance again," Grace uttered with a sigh. "I've told him about this a long time ago. I told him to gather his courage and to stop hiding his emotions, yet he never took my advice. Well, look at how things turned out now! He lost all hope again. In my opinion, he deserves all of this," Grace grumbled.

“Mrs. Lane...” When Sonia heard what Grace said, she had a vague idea of what was going on. However, she wasn’t too sure if her guess was right.

“Alright, Sonia. You should just ignore that guy. Just let him disappear for a while, and he’ll come back when the time is right. I have to go now. I’m meeting a few other ladies for our facial appointment, and I should be heading out soon,” Grace said.

“Okay,” Sonia said with a nod. Once the call was over, Sonia threw her phone aside and pinched the bridge of her nose. Did she just ask me to ignore Charles? How could I do that? We’ve been friends for more than 20 years now. We grew up together! Furthermore, it seems like his sudden change in demeanor has something to do with me, so I’d feel bad if I just left him alone. Our 20-year-friendship means too much for me to do such a thing.

Sonia decided that she would have to figure out a way to get to Charles. With a finger tapping against her right temple, Sonia made a mental list of all the possible places that Charles might visit. After thinking about it for a while, Sonia widened her eyes as she jolted upright in her seat. I got it! I know where he might be! Perhaps he went to the park that we used to go to all the time.

Sonia recalled an incident that occurred when she was eight years old. Back then, Sandra slapped Sonia on the face, and Sonia ran out of her house while bawling her eyes out. Coincidentally, Charles had shown up on her front doorstep to ask her to play. When Charles found out that Sonia had been slapped, he gave Sandra a harsh scolding. Sandra was furious, so she lifted a broom to attack Charles. However, Charles didn’t hesitate to grab onto Sonia’s arm, and they sprinted out of the house to a park nearby.

The park was an abandoned spot, and it was also Charles’ secret hideout. When they were there, Sonia could laugh and joke all she wished to—Sandra wouldn’t be there to complain about how noisy Sonia was. When Sonia was there, she didn’t have to deal with Sandra’s hateful glares. After spending some time there, the abandoned park eventually turned into Sonia’s secret hideout as well.

Whenever Charles called her out to play, they would meet at their secret hideout. That spot practically held all of the happiest memories that Sonia and Charles had shared throughout their childhood and adolescent years. When did I stop visiting our secret hideout? I think it has been about six years now. I stopped going to that spot after I got married to Toby. If Charles didn’t disappear today, I might not even have thought of this spot that we used to go to.

Sonia felt a pang of guilt in her chest as she took a deep breath. Finally, she started the engine and made a move. It took about 40 minutes for her to arrive at an old, abandoned park.

Sonia stepped out of her car and looked up to see the dangling signboard that had the park’s name on it. The metal pieces were coated with rust, but Sonia smiled when she saw the familiar sight of the rundown place. Her gaze softened as she realized how much she had missed the place. It’s been six years. I’m finally back at this place that’s filled with joy and laughter.

As she tore her eyes away from the signboard, Sonia parted her legs to walk into the park. She observed the park's surroundings to see if anything had changed since she last came here. Soon enough, she arrived at one of the old swings in the middle of the park. There, she found the person she had been looking for.

Charles had his back facing her, and his head was hung low as he held the metal chains that the swing hung from. He used his feet to tap the floor beneath him so that the swing would sway back and forth.

Click, click. Sonia walked over in her heels, and Charles immediately heard the sound of someone getting closer to him. He stopped swinging himself, and the swing came to a gradual halt. After letting go of the metal chains, he sat upright and turned around to look at the person behind him.

He had assumed that it was some random stranger approaching him out of curiosity. However, he hadn't expected to see Sonia standing in front of him. A mixture of shock and surprise spread across his face as he leaped out of the swing and stared at Sonia. "What are you doing here, darling?"

"Are you surprised?" Sonia responded to his question with another question.

Charles nodded. "Of course. You haven't been here in years. I assumed that you had forgotten about this place. What made you decide to come here?" he asked.

Sonia opened and closed her mouth a few times before she gave him an answer. "I couldn't find you anywhere, so I started thinking about the possible places that you might visit. I came here because I recalled that we used to come here a lot. I can't believe you're actually here," she uttered.

"So... Did you come all the way here just to find me?" Charles cried excitedly.

"Yeah." Sonia nodded. "Your mood changed so abruptly, and you ended the call without telling me what was going on. I was worried, so I went over to your office. However, your admin told me that you weren't in and that she had no idea where you went. I called your phone, but it was turned off. I called Mrs. Lane to ask if you were home, but she said that you weren't. After all that, I finally ended up visiting this place."

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Guilt crept into Charles' heart when he realized that Sonia had visited so many places and made so many calls just to get to him. He lowered his head and pouted for a while before he spoke. "I'm sorry, darling. I..."

“Well, tell me—what’s going on?” Sonia raised her hand to stop him as she didn’t want to hear an apology. Charles’ gaze flickered for a moment before he sat back down on the swing and hooked his arms around the metal chains. “It’s nothing much,” he uttered in a dejected tone. “I just think that I’m a really useless person. I’m a grown man now, but I don’t think I’m acting like one. I just wanted to take a stroll because I was troubled by these thoughts.”

“Is that all?” Sonia narrowed her gaze. It was evident that she didn’t trust his words. Her suspicions made complete sense—Charles had only told her part of the truth, after all. Sonia wanted to understand his abrupt change of emotions, yet he didn’t manage to provide her with a direct answer. He merely brushed her question off by saying that he was a useless man.

But... He’s not telling me why he feels like a useless man, Sonia thought. This is giving me a headache, but I know that he’s not doing it on purpose. He probably has his reasons for talking in circles.

Indeed, Charles avoided her gaze as he let out a casual yawn. “Of course that’s all...” His voice grew softer toward the end of his sentence, and he eventually lowered his head and pressed his lips together.

Sonia let out a sigh before she sat down on the swing beside him. She had checked to ensure that the swings were clean, so she wasn’t worried about dirtying her clothes. Once she sat down, she held the metal chains and kicked her feet against the floor to send her swing backward. With her head leaning against the metal chain, she said softly, “This place hasn’t changed at all. It’s just the way it used to be.”

Charles smiled. “Of course. I’ve spent the last six years taking care of this spot just to ensure that it stays exactly the same. I’m sure some of the facilities here would have been ruined if I hadn’t been taking care of it.”

“Why did you take such good care of this spot?” Sonia looked at the man beside her.

“Because... This is our secret hideout, and it’s a special and meaningful place to us. That’s why I felt the need to protect it,” Charles let go of the metal chains as he explained himself.

A guilty smile formed on Sonia’s lips after she heard what Charles said. “You’re right. Well, I don’t think I have the right to say that it’s special to me. I nearly forgot about this place until today.”

Charles looked up at the sky. “I know. You stopped coming here after you got married to Toby, and I’ve never heard you talk about this place after that. Eventually, I assumed that you had forgotten about this park entirely. It’s completely fine—this was our secret hideout when we were kids, but we aren’t kids anymore now, are we? We don’t need a secret hideout anymore. Anyway, you managed to recall this spot in the end, right?” After finishing his words, he shifted his gaze to look at Sonia.

She giggled. "How often have you been coming here in the past six years? Do you come here a lot?"

"I think so." Charles nodded. "I come here when I'm tired or if I miss someone."

"If you miss someone? Who's that someone?" Sonia asked in an inquisitive tone.

He simply looked at her without saying anything. "Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked puzzledly.

"It's nothing." Charles scoffed at himself before he turned away from her. Charles, Charles... You know how slow Sonia can be when it comes to romantic relationships. If you don't give her a direct explanation, she will never know that you're in love with her—she would never even consider that possibility! If you think that she'll understand your feelings when you look deep into her eyes, then you must be dreaming! he thought to himself.

Charles was well aware of the situation he was in, and he knew that he was supposed to express his feelings to Sonia in a straightforward manner. However, the words never seem to be able to leave the tip of his tongue. All the fear and anxiety within him stopped him from taking action, and it turned him into a loser. He was destined to lose to Toby.

Both of them lingered around the park for nearly 30 minutes. They had a few brief conversations in between periods of silence, but an awkward atmosphere hung in the air the whole time. Their interactions differed from their usual manner of interacting, and Sonia felt both exasperated and helpless when she realized that she couldn't do anything to change it.

Eventually, the skies turned dark. "It's getting late. Let's go home, Charles," Sonia uttered as she stood up.

Charles took a glance at the skies. "Okay. Let's go." Both of them stepped out of the park to the spot where Sonia had parked her car. When she arrived at her car, she realized that Charles' car was nowhere to be seen. "Where's your ride?" she asked.

"I got my assistant to send me over, and I told him to leave after that, so I don't have a ride," he uttered while shrugging.

The corner of Sonia's lips twitched as she shot him a glare. "Well, get in, then. I'll drive home, and then you can take my car back to your place."

"Let me drive you back." Charles reached out for her keys. Sonia didn't protest and tossed her keys over to him, and he unlocked the car. Beep! Both of them got in, and Charles began to drive toward Bayside Residence. There was some traffic on the way back, so it took nearly two hours for them to arrive at Sonia's place. It was 9.00PM by the time they got there.

Charles stopped the car by the side of the road, and Sonia walked toward her condominium after she got out and waved goodbye. As Charles stared at her

figure, he tightened his grip on the steering wheel. He seemed as if he was trying to get his emotions under control. After a few seconds, he loosened his grip and took a deep breath before he flung the car door open and ran toward the woman.

He sprinted over to Sonia, so it only took him a few steps to reach her. Sonia could sense someone coming close to her, and she was just about to turn around when she felt someone grabbing her arm. Right after that, she felt her wrist being tugged hard. Her body was forced to turn in the direction of the tug, and she tripped on her own feet before falling into a soft and warm embrace.

It's Charles! Sonia couldn't comprehend the meaning of Charles' actions, but she stayed still and allowed him to wrap his arms tightly around her. He had hugged her a little too tightly, so Sonia's arms began to ache after a while. She finally returned to her senses before pushing him away gently. "Can you let go of me now, Charles?"

It seemed as if Charles hadn't heard her voice at all—he continued to hug her without loosening his grip. Right then, Sonia noticed that his body was shaking. She stopped trying to wriggle out of his arms, and she lifted a hand to pat his back instead. "What is it, Charles?" Charles remained silent as he buried his head into her shoulder.

Meanwhile, Toby lowered the window of his Mercedes-Benz to fix his cold glare on the man and woman who were tangled up in a tight hug. A dark shadow loomed over his face as he tightened his grip on the delicate gift box that he had prepared. The gift box was made of cardboard, but its original shape was no longer visible under Toby's powerful grip—the distorted box was a reflection of the uneasiness and rage in Toby's heart.

Tom was seated in the driver's seat, and he could see Toby's sour expression in the rearview mirror. A bitter smile spread across Tom's face when he sensed the threatening aura that surrounded Toby's figure. Gosh. I hadn't expected President Fuller and me to witness such an awful scene. President Fuller spent his whole afternoon trying to make a decision, and he finally decided that he would come here to meet Miss Reed and fix things with her. We've waited for nearly four hours just for her to come home. I can't believe she showed up with Charles! It's fine if Charles just happened to be with her, but I can't believe they're hugging each other. This looks like more than just a friendly hug. Both of them are hugging each other so tightly, and they've been hugging for a while now. She's patting his back, and he's burying his head into her shoulder. This looks like the sort of hug that couples would give each other! Did the both of them get together? Tom immediately spun around to look at his boss once that question popped into his head.

Toby lowered his gaze to conceal the blistering storm of rage in his eyes. He rolled the window up and threw the gift box on the empty seat beside him before he shut his eyes. "Drive."

"Where should I go, President Fuller?" Tom asked.

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"Home," Toby said icily. Tom raised an eyebrow upon hearing his boss. "Home? Aren't you going to pass Miss Reed the evening gown?"

"Does she look like she needs an evening gown right now?" Half of Toby's face was covered by a shadow as he glanced out the window. Tom didn't have anything to say in response. He's right. Miss Reed is busy being intimate with Charles right now—it'd be odd for President Fuller and me to go to her. In the end, Tom started driving without saying anything else.

Toby remained silent throughout the ride. There was a gloomy aura surrounding his figure, and it seemed to spread out across the entire vehicle. Tom couldn't handle the heavy atmosphere in the car, and he loosened his necktie as he cleared his throat. "Were you really affected by Miss Reed and Mr. Lane's actions earlier, President Fuller?" he asked.

Toby narrowed his eyes. Of course I'm affected by their actions. Would anyone enjoy seeing their lover in another person's arms? When Tom realized that Toby hadn't responded to his question, he fixed his glasses before he continued talking. "Well, then... What are you planning to do if Miss Reed and Mr. Lane get together?"

A look of confusion flashed across Toby's face as he thought about Tom's question. What would I do if they got together? I've never considered this question. If this had happened before today, I would have come to terms with the truth. I would have accepted their relationship even if I knew that I would suffer for the rest of my life. All of this would've been possible if I didn't have the desire to continue living. If I'm gone, I'd want Sonia to live a happy life—she's going to be around a much longer time, after all.

But now that I've found the will to live, I can no longer have Sonia dating another man. Yet, if she does end up with another man, I can't stop them or ruin their relationship. She'd hate me if I did that to her. Tom's right—I really don't know what to do now. I can't allow her to be with someone else, yet I can't ruin her relationship with another guy. I'm stuck in limbo—I can't let go of her, but I can't do anything to change her mind. This is so agonizing!

Tom let out a huge sigh when Toby didn't respond to him. After working with Toby for 12 years as his assistant, Tom was the one person—apart from Rose—who knew Toby the best. After taking a glance at Toby's expression, Tom quickly figured out what Toby was thinking about. It looks like I should start investigating Miss Reed and Charles' relationship. If they're really together, then I'm afraid President Fuller might lose his will to live once more. It'd be great news if they weren't actually dating.

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Meanwhile, on the ground floor of Bayside Residence, Charles continued hugging Sonia for a long while. A few passersby stole glances at them, and some passersby naturally assumed that they were a couple. "How sweet!" someone exclaimed. "They seem like a really loving couple," another one commented. Sonia's ears were burning with embarrassment when she heard such words.

She was worried that the misunderstanding would get out of hand, so she eventually pushed Charles away. The sudden force took him aback, and he stumbled backward before steadying himself. A mixture of emotions filled his gaze as he looked at the woman in front of him.

"What's the matter, Charles?" Sonia tilted her head sideways.

Charles parted his lips as if he were about to speak, but no words came out of his mouth in the end. He merely shook his head before giving her a bitter smile. "It's nothing. It's late now. You should go home and get some rest."

"Are you really fine?" Sonia clearly didn't believe him. Charles had been acting weird the entire day, and Sonia was worried about him.

He gave her a reassuring nod. "I'm fine. Hurry up and go home." He waved goodbye.

Sonia let out a helpless sigh—she knew that Charles wasn't going to tell her the truth. "Okay. I'll go home now. You should head home too. Tell me when you're back, okay?"

"Okay." Charles nodded. Then, Sonia clutched her bag and turned around to walk toward the entrance of her condominium. Charles stood in his spot and watched as her figure gradually disappeared in the dark. He remained standing even after she was long gone, and he eventually reached into his pocket to pull out a box of cigarettes. After lighting a cigarette, he took a long drag before spitting the thick, white smoke out into the dark sky. The clumps of smoke covered his face, making it hard for anyone to read his expression.

Initially, Charles planned to confess to her tonight. He wanted to come clean with her before she realized that she was in love with Toby again. Perhaps she would agree to date me since we've been friends for so many years, he had thought. That was what made him run out of the car to hug her.

However, he was defeated by his own fears in the end. He simply didn't dare to confess to her. I'm afraid. What if she rejects me and tells me that she doesn't like me? Does that mean that we won't even be friends anymore? The moment I confess to her, our relationship will never be the same again. We'll never have the pure friendship that we have now—she'll feel guilty for rejecting me, and she might even avoid me in the future. If that goes on, then our friendship will gradually fade off... I don't want us to end up like that, so I'd rather keep quiet than tell her the truth.

Charles flicked his cigarette onto the ground as he let out a scoff. I think I'm the most useless man in this world. I'm afraid of everything, and I overthink every single scenario. That's why I'm such a failure! That night, all three of them—Toby, Charles, and Sonia—couldn't seem to sleep well. Each of them had their own worries.

The next morning, Sonia arrived at Paradigm Co. feeling more exhausted than ever. She felt like her soul had been sucked out of her body, and she couldn't stop yawning as she sat in her office. When Daphne entered to collect some documents, she quickly realized the eyebags under Sonia's eyes. "Did you not get enough rest last night, President Reed?" Daphne asked in a concerned tone.

Sonia lifted her coffee cup as she gave Daphne a faint smile. "I guess," Sonia muttered.

"Do you want to get some rest in the lounge area? There isn't much to do in the office today," Daphne uttered.

Sonia shook her head. "It's fine. I have some errands to run—I need to buy an evening gown at the mall."

"An evening gown?" Daphne raised her eyebrow. "Are you attending a party, President Reed?"

"Yeah. It's Grandma's 80th birthday," Sonia replied with a nod. Upon hearing Sonia's words, Daphne recalled that Rose's birthday was coming up.

"You can cancel all of my schedules for today afternoon—none of them are important, anyway. If you have any documents that you need me to sign, you can leave them in the office. You can deal with the rest of the paperwork." Sonia lowered her coffee cup as she handed out her orders.

"Okay, President Reed. I'll excuse myself now," Daphne said as she gave Sonia a polite nod.

"Sure," Sonia replied. Daphne leaned over to carry all the documents that she had to handle before she turned and left the room.

After Sonia had lunch, she stepped out of Paradigm Co. and headed to the mall nearby. She wanted to purchase an evening gown that would go well with the accessories that Rose had gifted her. While Sonia was browsing through evening gowns in front of a rack, she heard the clicking sound of high heels approaching her. She assumed that it was another customer, so she didn't turn to look at all.

However, the sound got closer and closer to her, and a large figure eventually stopped right beside her. The figure reached an arm out to touch some of the evening gowns that hung on the rack in front of Sonia.

"It's been a while, Sonia." The figure initiated a conversation with Sonia, and she even knew Sonia's name. This caught Sonia by surprise. What a familiar voice! I feel like I've heard this voice somewhere, but I can't recall where. Sonia

immediately let go of the evening gown that she had been holding before she turned to look at the person beside her.

Shock flashed in Sonia's gaze when her eyes landed on the familiar face of a person that she had some history with. However, Sonia quickly concealed the emotions on her face as she responded with a polite greeting. "Hello, Miss Stryder."

Melody lowered the evening gown she had been holding and turned to face Sonia. "You must be surprised to see me here, huh?"

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Chapter 505 Declan's Whereabouts

"I am a little surprised," Sonia said with a nod. "Shouldn't you be in Norfolk, Miss Stryder? What are you doing here in Seafield?"

The woman standing before Sonia was none other than Melody, the young lady of the Stryder Family who had a close relationship with Tina. A few months ago, when Tina had been kidnapped by Carl's men, both Melody and the Gray Family had assumed that Sonia was involved in the matter. Melody had used the Stryders' connections with the government to control the banks, and the banks had forced Sonia to clear all her debts within a short period, all so because Melody could avenge Tina. Paradigm Co.'s business nearly collapsed because of this matter.

Fortunately, Sonia managed to use Toby's suggestion to resolve this matter. After that, strict investigations had been run on the Stryders because of their involvement in municipal affairs. In the end, Melody was identified as the main culprit, and the Stryders dragged her back to Norfolk. No one heard of her after that incident.

Sonia assumed that Melody would never be allowed out of Norfolk after that incident, but her assumptions had just been proven wrong. "My husband stays in Seafield. Is there anything wrong with me showing up here?" Melody uttered with a rather unpleasant look on her face.

"My apologies, Miss Stryder." Sonia lifted her right brow. "I forgot that you were married to Peter from the Southfield Family." Sonia wasn't the only one who forgot about this—Peter and Melody never had a good relationship, after all. Peter had never fancied Melody, and he would make sure to leave for another city whenever Melody was in Seafield. If he had a choice, he would stay away from Melody for the rest of his life.

In fact, he had even sent out orders to stop others from referring to him and Melody as husband and wife, and he threatened to punish anyone who did such a thing. Eventually, the public ceased to discuss this matter, and the majority of the people forgot about the fact that they were a married couple. Sonia was a perfect example!

When Melody heard what Sonia said, she frowned. Melody wasn't exactly a feminine-looking woman, and she was relatively tall for a girl. She had the typical look of a strong and independent woman when she cut her hair short and dressed up in a suit. However, Melody knew that Peter preferred hot and sexy-looking girls, so she often dressed herself up to suit his taste. She never appeared in public without flaming red lipstick smeared all over her huge lips. Her facial features didn't go well with her makeup, but she insisted on dolling herself up in a way that would attract Peter.

However, her heavy makeup only enhanced her facial expressions, and it made her especially ugly when she wore a frown. One could easily imagine how terrifying it was to look at her whenever she scowled. "Peter and I have gotten a divorce thanks to you." Melody clenched her fists as she spoke in a sinister tone.

"Thanks to me? I'm not sure I understand what you mean, Miss Stryder. What have you and Mr. Southfield's divorce got to do with me?" Sonia eyed her curiously. She wasn't surprised to hear that they had gotten a divorce since Peter was talking about it all the time. They would have gotten a divorce eventually anyway. However, Sonia didn't understand why Melody was blaming her for their divorce. Does she think that I urged Peter to get a divorce with her? What a joke!

But that was precisely what Melody thought. Melody fixed her cold glare on Sonia as she explained herself. "It definitely has something to do with you. Peter and I wouldn't have gotten a divorce if I continued to insist on staying married. However, Toby ended up offering help to Peter, and that was how my marriage with Peter came to an end. After Toby and Tina called their engagement off, he has been going after you with hopes of getting back with you—everyone knows about this. Toby only decided to help Peter because he wanted to ruin my marriage, and he only did it because he knows that I attacked you in the past. He was taking revenge on behalf of you!"

Sonia froze. So... That was how it all happened! I can't believe Toby is involved in this! But... Sonia took a deep breath to calm her racing heart. "Do you have any proof that Toby did all of this for me?" she uttered in her calmest voice.

"Do you need proof for something like that?" Melody sneered. "If you don't believe what I say, you can just ask Toby about it."

"I'll certainly do that," Sonia uttered before pursing her lips.

"Why are you asking me about it, then?" Melody glared at Sonia with rage-filled eyes. "One way or another, both of you ruined my marriage and my love life. I'll never forgive you guys for this!" When the time is right, I'll make sure that you guys suffer the way I did! Melody thought.

Sonia frowned when she saw the hateful look on Melody's face. Sonia was about to say something when Melody calmed herself down to continue speaking. "But there is one thing that I'd like to thank you for," she said.

"What are you talking about?" Sonia narrowed her eyes.

The other woman curled her lips into a satisfied smile. "I'm talking about Tina. I hadn't expected you to defeat her." The Stryder Family had to undergo an investigation from the higher-ups because of what Melody did to help Tina. After this incident, their family went from being the most well-respected family to ranking fifth place in Norfolk. Everyone at home hated Melody for this, and they all saw her as a curse that had ruined the family. The rest of the Stryders treated Melody as if she was invisible, and no one showed her any respect back home.

All of the sorrow and suffering that Melody felt were transformed into anger and hatred for Tina. My life wouldn't be such a disaster if it weren't for Tina. I used to be the beloved daughter of a wealthy family, but now, I'm just an outcast who's not welcomed at home! After Melody got divorced, she wasn't even allowed to live in the main building of the Stryder Residence, so she had no choice but to find her own place.

At first, Melody intended to visit Seafield in order to deal with Tina. After all, she had to release her anger somewhere! However, she was a little too late to the game as Sonia had already dealt with Tina while Melody wasn't around. I guess it's a good thing since I don't have to waste my effort on dealing with this. Later, I'll just visit Tina at the hospital where she's serving her sentence. Once I'm done mocking her, I can place all of my focus on dealing with Sonia.

Sonia was surprised to hear Melody's explanation. I can't believe she's glad that I defeated Tina. "Aren't you guys friends? Why would you thank me for treating your friend that way?" A hint of disdain flashed in Sonia's gaze. I thought their friendship was deeper than that. Hah!

"We aren't friends!" Melody growled with an ugly expression on her face. "I don't have a friend like her." Melody had always thought of herself as a decent friend to Tina—she had done a lot for Tina. However, she hadn't expected to risk her whole family's reputation for the sake of a friend. While Melody was locked up in her house, she had a lot of time to think about the situation. During that period, she realized that Tina had never treated her as a friend, and she was nothing more but a useful tool to Tina.

Whenever Tina cried or pouted, Melody and Cynthia would stand up for Tina without any hesitation. It was almost as if they had fallen under Tina's spell. I bet Tina's secretly laughing at Cynthia and I behind our backs. I bet she thinks we're idiots because of all that we've done for her. Yet, Melody had never seen Tina as such a manipulative and experienced woman in the past. That explained why Melody hated Tina so much after the whole incident.

Sonia merely shrugged when she saw the rage pouring out of Melody's glare. "I don't care if you and Tina are friends. I was just asking a question for the sake of it. Alright, Miss Stryder, I'm done picking my outfit. I'll excuse myself now," she uttered. After taking a black, one-shoulder mermaid dress off the rack, Sonia

walked over to the cashier. Jade green accessories went the best with black fabric because they contrasted against each other, making it a perfect match.

Sparks danced in Melody's eyes as she stared thoughtfully at Sonia's figure. Melody didn't stop Sonia as Sonia walked off.

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Meanwhile, Toby was editing some documents in Fuller Group. Tom knocked on the door before he walked into the office. "President Fuller, the man who has an eye on Carl gave us an update. It seems like Carl has managed to hunt down Declan's whereabouts."

"What?" Toby's ball-point pen halted in mid-air as he looked up. "Where's Declan?"

"He's at the largest harbor in Sundale. Carl sent his men over there, so we're guessing that Declan might have sneaked in from there," Tom replied.

Toby's eyes glinted when he heard Tom's words. "Carl's hacking skills are impressive. He wouldn't have managed to find Declan otherwise." Refugees who entered another country wouldn't use their own documents but fake IDs, and some didn't even have IDs. Most of them would change their appearances, and they would stay away from electronic devices to avoid getting tracked by hackers.

Toby was certain that Declan knew the rules as a refugee, but Carl still managed to get his hands on Declan. That showed how scary of a man Carl was.