

This Time, I Will Get My Divorce, Mr

Chapter 541

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Chapter 541 The Real Reason

“What do you mean?” Toby narrowed his eyes. What did my father go through back in the day? What did she mean by that?

It was as if life drained out of Jean as soon as she brought up Homer. There was sadness in her eyes as she held onto the armrest of the sofa and sat down. She looked hollow, no longer as frigid as she always had been, and if it weren't for the trace of guilt that highlighted her expression, one might think she was at peace with the world.

“When your father and I got married over ten years ago, we didn't receive your run-of-the-mill blessings, and what we got instead were merciless teasing and snide remarks, but I won't go into that. All you need to know is that I was not welcome in the circle, and your father became the butt of the joke because he married me, a woman who was neither of good breeding or culture. I was basically good at nothing.”

As Jean said this, she worried at the band on her ring finger like it would give her comfort. The ring was made of white gold, but it was dull and unpolished. It looked ancient, and at first glance, one could tell that she had not taken it off for years, not even to get it cleaned at the jeweler's.

The band also looked a little tight on her ring finger, which swelled up around the band like it was constricted instead of decorated.

Even so, she didn't appear to have taken the band off over the years, and it was obvious that the band meant a lot to her.

Presently, she gazed down at the wedding band on her ring finger—the very one Homer had given to her when they exchanged their vows—and mused sorrowfully, “Your father was once the greatest man in the circle, the very same circle that shunned him and cast him out when he married me. They thought your father was a fool for bringing me into the upper-class society, claiming that my lowly status would hurt the image of the elite. So they mocked him for it, and they set me up to fail on many occasions in order to humiliate your father.”

Having said all this, Jean clenched her plump fist, and her smooth expression began to twist into a grimace. Her eyes grew red as she went on to say, “But those weren't the worst of it. The nightmare came when those vicious women in the circle took advantage of my being a philistine and decided to gang up on me. They sweet-talked me into giving them several important contracts that Fuller Group was working on so that they could let their husbands take a look and collaborate with the company afterward. They told me it was a way to let Fuller Group expand its horizons.”

"And you did what they asked you to?" Toby asked, raising his brows.

She nodded numbly. "Of course I did. I knew nothing back then, but I only wanted to help your father and become one of those corporate wives who helped their husbands with their business. Little did I know that I would end up jeopardizing instead of helping your father and Fuller Group; your father lost important contracts, and the company went through unimaginable turmoil that year."

"I've heard about this," Tom interjected as he adjusted his spectacles. "Fuller Group took a heavy blow that year, and if Old Mrs. Fuller hadn't stepped in and lent her aid, then that could have been the end of the business. I heard that Old Mrs. Fuller even fired Mr. Fuller from his position as the president."

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Toby parted his lips and added, "Father lost those important contracts and caused the company to go into turmoil. Grandma had to fire him, or she'd have a hard time dealing with the shareholders."

Riddled with self-blame, Jean said mournfully, "That's right, so for a long time, your father spiraled into depression. He started to get into drinking, and eventually, even your grandmother couldn't stand it any longer and suggested that your father go on a business trip abroad. She said something about negotiating for a deal with some international tycoon, which, if the deal was concluded, would make the shareholders change their minds about your father. That way, she could reinstate him as the president of the company again. But..."

She buried her face in her hands, finally losing her composure as she broke down sobbing.

At the sight of this, Toby clenched his fists and said hoarsely, "But no one expected Father to die at the hotel he was staying at while abroad."

Unable to form coherent words, Jean could only sob and nod to confirm what Toby had said.

Signaling Tom to wheel him closer to the coffee table, Toby then took out a few tissues and handed them to Jean, saying, "I understand now why you think Sonia isn't meant to be part of our family. The Reed Family has fallen from grace and, by extension, out of rank with the other elite families. You think that Sonia would only drag me and Fuller Group down, that she wouldn't be able to offer any real help; you're afraid that I would end up like Father and become the laughingstock of the industry."

"Yes," Jean mumbled in a wobbling voice as she looked up to meet his gaze. "That's exactly what I meant to tell you. I practically walked your father into his death, Toby, and I don't want you to go down the same path he did."

That was the real reason why she had not treated Tina with the same hostility as she had Sonia. Unlike the Reed Family, the Gray Family was still within the elite circle, and with Titus backing Tina up, she would make a much better contender than Sonia.

More importantly, Tina had been the only daughter in the Gray Family, which meant she stood to inherit every penny of the family fortune once Titus passed on. When that happened, Toby would have access to the same fortune, and Fuller Group could once again expand its growth. Jean had seen this as the only way to ease her own guilt and for her to shake off her past.

However, Jean hadn't expected Tina to turn out to be more trouble than she was worth.

"Mom, thank you for worrying about me and being so considerate of me," Toby said now, his expression gentle as he shoved tissues into her hand.

Regardless of all that had happened, Jean's enmity toward Sonia and her objections against Toby and Sonia's relationship had all been for his best interests.

He could not deny her good intentions, but that didn't mean he could accept her stance, either. As such, he gazed upon her steadily and said with utmost seriousness, "But I will still choose to be together with Sonia."

"What?" Jean's eyes widened as she demanded, "How could you say that even after all that I've told you?" She had given him insight on all her reasons, and she even brought up the devastating past she had kept hidden for so long in hopes that she might change his mind about Sonia. Alas, she failed in persuading him to give up on the idea of remarrying Sonia and only seemed to have spurred him on. Did I tell him all that for nothing?

"Yes," Toby answered firmly now. "Sonia and I will never go through what you and Father did because Sonia is different from you."

"How is she any different from me?" Jean sputtered cynically. Admittedly, Sonia was born into a much better family than hers, but the Reed Family was no longer part of the elite circle, even though Paradigm Co. still stood as proof of their glory days.

That being said, even Jean could tell that Paradigm Co. was not profiting, and she didn't need a business degree to know that at the end of the day, Sonia was as good as broke.

That just means that Sonia is no more different from I was in the past!

"She's entirely different." Toby shoved his hand into his pocket and felt for the Ocean's Heart, then elaborated, "Sonia might not have anything now, but she is ambitious and talented in running a business. With her in charge, Paradigm Co. will eventually find success, so it'll only be a matter of time before the Reed Family rejoins the elite. Also—"

He paused, and a small smile played on his lips as he thought of something. "If others dare to even say a single snide remark to her face or mock her, she would fight back instead of taking the abuse in silence. She has always known how to stand up for herself, and on that point alone, she's much stronger than you were,

Mom. If you had defended yourself back in the day, then maybe you and Father wouldn't have ended up in such a sorry state. Moreover, I'd like to think I've done a superb job in expanding Fuller Group, and it's a much more powerful company than when Father ran it. As things stand, our family doesn't need an arranged marriage to strengthen our alliances or our standing in the industry. My prowess is the reason why Fuller Group has its success and glory now."

"Doesn't need..." she mumbled in confusion. Why wouldn't we need an arranged marriage? Throughout these years, all she knew was that blue-blood families relied on arranged marriages to strengthen their ties and social standing.

He kept his gaze on her and explained, "Yes, our family doesn't need an arranged marriage to maintain a certain social standing. Something like that is only done by those who aren't strong enough in the first place. Mom, our family isn't how it used to be. I want you to think about it, and I hope you'll really change your mind about Sonia. I don't want to have to choose between you and her, but if I'm forced to, then you should know that I definitely won't give her up."

Upon hearing this, Jean stiffened. She felt as if someone had thrown a bucket of ice water over her. If he won't give Sonia up, then that means I'll be the one he leaves behind in the end!

At that moment, she froze in her seat, and all the color drained out of her face.

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Jean had never imagined Toby would favor Sonia over her. She couldn't believe that if it came down to it, she would lose to Sonia.

The revelation struck her like a bolt of lightning. In a daze, she plopped down on the couch with a hollow look in her glistening eyes.

Toby's gaze darkened at the sight of this. He waved his hand mutely to have Tom wheel him upstairs, and the latter hurried to do as told.

It didn't take long for the both of them to arrive in the upstairs hallway. Tom opened Toby's bedroom door and wheeled him in, saying, "Aren't you worried that you might have hurt Madam White's feelings with what you told her?"

Toby parted his lips and pointed out impassively, "Some things just can't be avoided. It's for the best if I let her know how much Sonia means to me; otherwise, she would never dial back on her unjust hostility and continue to mess with Sonia."

"That's true," Tom agreed, nodding.

Presently, Toby took out the Ocean's Heart from his pocket. "I'm going to need some cleansing solution." The necklace had been worn by Jean, and he hated to give it back to Sonia without first cleaning it thoroughly.

"Right away," Tom said solemnly, instantly catching on to what Toby intended to do. As such, he headed out the door to get the cleansing solution ready.

Owing to Jean's vast jewelry collection, the staff at the Fuller Residence practically stock-piled bottles of jewelry-specific cleansing solutions. Tom needed to only ask one of the servants to get a large cup of it, which he immediately brought up to Toby's room.

Toby had him place the cleansing solution on the desk, and when that was done, he dunked the Ocean's Heart into the liquid. It took only seconds for the solution to turn murky, and Toby used a long glass rod to gently stir the Ocean's Heart while it soaked in the solution, giving it a thorough cleansing.

Tom, on the other hand, stood to one side with a towel in hand as he watched the cleaning process.

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It was only after the solution had turned clear once more that he walked up to Toby with the towel. "Here you go, President Fuller."

Toby took the towel and placed it on the desk; then, using a pair of tongs, he retrieved the Ocean's Heart from the cup of solution and laid it on the towel.

Now that the Ocean's Heart was clean, it sparkled like it was new. In particular, the diamond that formed the centerpiece dazzled under the lights, emitting breathtaking rainbow hues.

Toby took the towel and gently wiped the remaining solution off the Ocean's Heart, then patted it completely dry. As he did so, he said to Tom, "Go into my wardrobe and bring me a jewelry box."

Following this, Tom went into the wardrobe and soon returned with an intricate jewelry box.

Having painstakingly dabbed every last droplet of the solution off the Ocean's Heart, Toby carefully placed it into the box. "You're dismissed."

"Yes, sir," Tom replied, then nodded once respectfully before walking out the door.

Now that Toby was alone in the room, he picked up his phone and gave Sonia a call. It took only seconds for her to answer, and she asked on the other line, "Is there a reason why you're calling me at this late hour?"

“Did I catch you at a bad time?” He pressed the phone to his ear and asked lightly, not answering her question.

Sonia was working away on her laptop, but when she heard what he said, she stretched her neck to loosen the stiffness that was setting in and gave a short laugh. “No, you didn’t. I’m not asleep yet, so I don’t think it’s a bad time.”

“Good,” Toby said slowly, toying with the jewelry box in his hand. Then, he asked, “You know you didn’t have to give the Ocean’s Heart back to me.”

She froze at this, then frowned and pointed out, “Are you bringing this up because you just got to know about it?”

He hummed in response. “Yeah.”

“No way,” she mumbled, her brows drawing closer together. “I passed the Ocean’s Heart to Jean after you were hospitalized so that she could return it to you on my behalf. How did you—” At the mention of this, she broke off and was suddenly reminded of how greedy Jean could be. Looking sullen, she asked, “Did Jean take the Ocean’s Heart for herself instead of handing it over to you?”

“Yes,” he confirmed with a nod, making no effort to deny Jean’s wrong. “I came back to the Fuller Residence this evening and saw her wearing the Ocean’s Heart, which was how I found out that you returned it.”

“My goodness, so she did take it for herself! The nerve—” Sonia pursed her lips, catching herself before she called Jean names in front of Toby; he was her son, after all, and such disparaging remarks on Sonia’s part would seem rude. With that in mind, she swallowed her words.

However, even as she stayed silent, Toby could still wager a guess at what Sonia had been about to say. He wasn’t angry, given how Jean truly had been in the wrong when she took the Ocean’s Heart for her own intentions.

“If it makes you feel better, I’ve already taken the Ocean’s Heart back from her,” he informed softly, caressing the top of the jewelry box.

Sonia let out a breath of relief. “Oh, that’s good to know.”

“But what I really want to know is why you gave it back to me in the first place,” he said, narrowing his eyes as a grim look passed over his face. He was starting to wonder if she was cutting him off after she returned everything he had ever given to her.

Hearing how unhappy he sounded, Sonia let go of the mouse and explained forthrightly, “I thought about it for a really long time, and I only gave the Ocean’s Heart back to you because I owe you too much. After you jumped off the cliff to save me, I realized just how much you have risked and given up for me, so much so that I can’t ever dream of repaying you. I can’t carry around the accumulated weight of your favors because it will only suffocate me, so returning the Ocean’s

Heart just so happened to be my first step in repaying you. There'll be more to come until I'm finally liberated."

Oh, so that's why. Having heard her reasons, he felt the frown on his face begin to ease. If anything, he empathized with her. There was nothing special tying them together, no sentiments that would justify all that he had done for her. Instead, he was burdening her, and eventually, she would crack her mind just so she could find a way to repay his efforts.

He should have known that she would be this way. She had never been the type to take things for granted, and she would find ways to return the favor or the guilt would crush her.

"I understand. In that case, I'll keep the Ocean's Heart," he said with an air of finality as he placed the box on the desk. If she so desperately wants to repay my deeds, then so be it. I'll keep the Ocean's Heart if it makes her feel better.

He figured he could wait until they were back together again before he stopped her from avidly trying to repay him for what he had done in the past, because by then, his love would no longer burden her.

On the other line, Sonia was oblivious to his thoughts and merely broke into a relieved smile at his words. "I'm glad you could see my point."

Some of the weight lifted off her shoulders now that he had agreed to take back the Ocean's Heart. That's one favor down. I'm slow, but at least I'm making progress in returning his favors one by one. Over time, the guilt I feel would lessen for sure, and then I'll be free.

As for the rest of his deeds, she had every intention of repaying them in time.

Just then, she thought of something and straightened up. "By the way, I, uh, talked to Charles about the whole nickname thing."

"So soon?" Toby raised a brow as a trace of astonishment glimmered in his eyes. He had assumed that she would take things slow and work up to the conversation with Charles; in fact, he had been prepared to listen to Charles addressing her as 'baby' for a while before she put a stop to it.

Little did he know that she would act on his suggestion so quickly and ask Charles to drop the nickname. At the thought of this, Toby smiled, and his spirits were obviously restored. If she acted so quickly, then it means she does care about me and my feelings.

"I mean, it wasn't that soon," she countered feebly now, her eyes watery as she looked down at her lap. "I just happened to be with Charles earlier this evening, and I decided to bring it up to him on a whim."

"And did he agree to drop the nickname?" Toby prompted gently.

She nodded. "Yeah, he did, but..."

"But what?"

"Nothing." She shook her head, withholding the consequence of her talk with Charles. Glancing at the time displayed on the bottom right corner of her computer screen, she said, "Right, President Fuller. It's getting late and I'm going to call it a day."

"Okay." While his curiosity was urging him to probe for details, he quelled it when he heard that she was going to bed; he didn't want to wear her out with his questions.

"Get some rest then. Goodnight," he said now, the words coming out in a pleasant drawl that put emphasis on the bass of his voice.

Sonia felt her skin prickled at his voice, as if someone was tickling her with a feather. She shuddered and bent to rub her ear against her shoulder as she mumbled softly, "Goodnight."

When the call was ended, Toby put his phone down and took up the box, then maneuvered his wheelchair toward his walk-in wardrobe.

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Chapter 543 The One Who Bought the Rings

Upon entering his wardrobe, Toby headed straight for the display case where he kept his watches, ties, and other designer accessories. Then, he placed the jewelry box into one of the empty compartments.

Having done so, he withdrew his hand and made to leave but stopped when he thought of something. The next second, he opened one of the drawers and took out a black velvet box.

The box was small and fit in his palm. He opened it with one hand to reveal the two rings nestled within. One of the rings was slightly larger than the other; they were matching wedding bands—specifically made for him and Sonia all those years ago.

He stared at the rings, his gaze darkening as he picked up one of them and began to turn it, inspecting the Fuller Family crest engraved beneath the band. The barest hint of a smile curled on his lips.

Sonia had always believed that she paid for their wedding bands, but in actuality, Toby had been the one who bought them while she was kept in the dark, hence the Fuller Family crest on the inside of the bands.

Six years ago, following his agreement to their marriage, Sonia dropped by the Fuller Residence to go over wedding details and the matter of wedding bands. However, Toby had been hypnotized back then, and all he could think about was Tina. He had felt unadulterated spite for Sonia, believing that she was holding him hostage through marriage. Consequently, he couldn't care less about what she wanted for wedding decorations, and he had no interest in the wedding band designs; he had told her to make arrangements on her own and left home after that.

He hadn't wanted to even be in the same room as her. However, he hadn't expected to run into her at the mall that same day.

She had been standing at the counter of a jewelry store, single-handedly picking out their wedding bands, which turned out to be the same ones he was currently holding.

Back then, she had probably been so overwhelmed by the joy of her upcoming wedding that she never bothered looking into the price of the rings before asking the retail assistant to bag them up.

The rings had been valued at two million, but given how the Reed Family were on the brink of bankruptcy, there was no way Sonia could have forked out the money. Buying the rings would have inevitably crippled her and the rest of the family.

Realizing this, Toby intervened and showed up in the lounge behind the jewelry store. He paid more than a million in secret, then ordered that the Fuller Family crest be engraved on the inside of the wedding bands.

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At that point in time, he had been bewildered by his own behavior. He had considered the possibility that he might be insane because there seemed to be no other explanation as to why he would pay for a woman he hated so much.

It was only after he had snapped out of the hypnotism and fallen in love with Sonia again that he understood one thing: she had haunted the back of his mind even while he was hypnotized, but he never realized it.

In the end, Sonia only had to fork out a third of the initial price to buy the rings, and she never found out that he had paid for them too.

Recalling all this, Toby picked up the wedding band that was meant for him and slowly slipped it onto his left ring finger. As soon as he did, his gaze fell upon the ring that would have belonged to Sonia had they actually stayed married and whispered, "Just wait a little while longer. Before you know it, you'll be reunited with your rightful owner."

After that, he closed the lid of the box and placed it back onto the display case, then wheeled himself out of the wardrobe.

...

The next day, Sonia arrived at Paradigm Co. and came upon Daphne, who was standing at her usual spot at Sonia's office doorway as she greeted, "Good morning, President Reed."

"Is everyone ready for the meeting?" Sonia asked as she opened the door.

Daphne nodded. "Most of them."

"And what about Charles?" Sonia asked, opening the floodgates.

Hesitantly, Daphne replied, "President Lane is here as well, but..."

"But what?"

Daphne adjusted her glasses, behind which her eyes lit up with worry. "But something seems off about him. He looks kind of upset."

Upon hearing this, Sonia stopped in her tracks.

Daphne noticed the shift in her demeanor and parted her lips to ask, "President Reed, do you know the reason why President Lane is upset?"

Sonia lowered her gaze pensively. "I guess you could say that." She didn't think Charles would still hold it against her after she broke the conversation last night, but she supposed it was only fair that he did. After all, sentiments would be worth nothing if they dissipated so quickly, let alone those to do with love.

"What happened to him, President Reed?" Daphne pressed out of concern, clenching her fists as she eyed Sonia pleadingly and waited for an answer.

Sonia knew about Daphne's feelings for Charles, and she did not keep the girl in suspense as she explained, "Charles and I got into a disagreement."

"Oh, I see," Daphne replied numbly, with an unreadable look in her eyes. That makes sense. Given President Lane's sharp sense of humor and rapier wit, it's rare to see him upset, and there are less than a handful of people who could bring his spirits down, other than President Reed, of course. She's the only one who could affect him in any way at all.

She should have known that Sonia had something to do with Charles' sour mood this morning.

Presently, Sonia clapped a hand on Daphne's shoulder and said comfortingly, "Come on, there's no use dwelling on this. Let's go for the meeting, and as for

Charles, I'll talk to him. If I can't get through to him, then I'll have to let you take a shot at cheering him up."

Taken aback, Daphne stammered, "M-Me?"

"Yes," Sonia confirmed with a gentle nod.

"No, I can't do it." Daphne began to shake her head vehemently, flapping her hands to dismiss Sonia's suggestion.

Sonia burst into laughter. "Give yourself more credit. I'm sure you'll make for the perfect shoulder to cry on if you believe in yourself. Maybe the romance you've always dreamed of will happen if you just take a leap of faith."

When she heard the last part of Sonia's encouragement, Daphne blanched and stared at her with wide eyes. "President Reed, do you—" Do you know about my feelings for Charles?

As if reading her mind, Sonia grinned and said good-naturedly, "Give it your best shot!"

So she does know. Daphne gaped at Sonia, and it took a while for her to recover from her shock as she asked slowly, "Aren't you angry, President Reed?"

"Why would I be?" Sonia countered, somewhat confused.

Wringing the hem of her shirt nervously, Daphne swallowed and elaborated, "Well, because I... have feelings for President Lane."

A light chuckle escaped Sonia. "Why would I be angry about that? If you like Charles, or anyone else, that's your business. I don't get a say in who you choose to have feelings for, and in this context, Charles and I are just friends, so no, I'm not angry."

Daphne relaxed after hearing this, and the anxiousness that had overcome her started to wane. She was grateful that Sonia was open-minded, because she had had experiences with women who hated seeing their male best friend—whom they had no intention of dating—getting attention from other women.

As of now, Sonia said seriously, "Bottom line is, you won't get what you want without trying. Just know that if you and Charles ever start dating, you have my full support. You're pretty compatible with him, in case you don't know that."

She truly wished Daphne and Charles could end up together. Sonia couldn't reciprocate Charles' feelings for her, and if the sentiments had been allowed to continue, then they would both end up getting hurt in the long run.

All the reasons added up was why she was elated to know that someone was romantically interested in Charles. If the right person came along and managed

to catch Charles' attention, then he would no longer have anything more than platonic feelings for me.

If that came to pass, Sonia would be free from such unwanted pursuits, and Charles would find his own happiness as well. From how she looked at it, this was a win-win situation.

She was aware of how selfish she was being, and admittedly, she was taking advantage of Daphne. However, seeing as Daphne already had feelings for Charles, all Sonia would be doing was helping the girl achieve her dreams.

That being said, she would make sure to compensate Daphne for this.

Compatible with him. These words reverberated in Daphne's mind, and she blushed crimson as she said weakly, "You've got to be kidding, President Reed."

"I'm certainly not! I'm telling the truth. Look, you can always sleep on this and make a decision in your own time, but right now, we have a meeting to get to," Sonia prompted with a smile as she took up the documents on her desk and sauntered out the door.

Daphne snapped out of her daze and hurried to catch up.

Having arrived at the conference room, Sonia saw that the attendance was nearly full, but she could not escape Asher's snide attack as she walked over to her seat. "My, my, our dear Vice President Reed has finally made her grand entrance. Being so fashionably late even after the rest of us showed up on time. You certainly know how to keep us old men on our toes, don't you? What, do you think you're too good for us?"

Sonia put down her documents and took her seat at the table, after which she shot Asher a withering look as she retorted, "Well, what can I say? I am the largest shareholder of Paradigm Co., and I think that gives me the privilege to be fashionably late, don't you think? It's not my fault that none of you have enough shares to lord over my head in the first place."

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Chapter 544 Breaking the Ice

"You—"

Asher and his supporters grew so incensed at her words that their faces turned the color of beetroot, but they couldn't retort against her. She was right; she might be the vice president now, but the fact remained that she was the largest shareholder of the company, and that meant she enjoyed privileges they did not.

As unhappy as they were, they had neither the means nor standing to retaliate against her.

At the sight of the scowls on their faces, Sonia smirked and refrained from snorting in contempt. I can't believe they're still trying to pick a bone with me at this point. How petty. Stoically, she withdrew her gaze and glanced in the direction of Charles' seat.

He had his head down, so she couldn't quite see the look on his face, but she felt how distant he was all the same. She sighed quietly as she settled into her chair and announced, "Alright, let's start the meeting."

"Yes, ma'am," the whole table chorused as everyone opened up the folder in front of them.

The meeting went on for two hours before it came to a conclusion. Asher and his supporters were the first to leave the room, but Sonia stayed unmoving in her seat. She didn't keep her things or seem like she was about to rise to her feet and walk out of the room any time soon.

Instead, she leaned into her seat and rested her head against the back of her chair, staring at Charles.

Presently, Charles was keeping his things, and when he was done, he stood up to leave.

Seeing this, Sonia quickly called out, "Charles, wait."

He stopped in his tracks and turned to look at her, his expression devoid of the warmth and humor she was used to seeing. He looked almost impassive as he asked flatly, "What is it?"

Sure enough, he was sticking to his promise and had dropped the term of endearment. In the past, he would have added 'baby' to that statement.

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Sonia was composed as she rose from her seat and eyed him steadily. "How about you and I have a talk?"

"About what?" he asked, his gaze on her indifferent and distant.

She didn't answer him immediately. She was watching the others who had yet to file out of the conference room; they were all ears, trying to pick up on gossip.

As though sensing her gaze, they looked down at their shoes guiltily and hurried out the doors. Soon, the large conference room was empty, save for Sonia and Charles.

She kept her eyes on him and said matter-of-factly, "About how you're still holding a grudge against me after our conversation last night."

Charles parted his lips, but he offered no retort because he really was still holding a grudge against her for their dispute last night.

The resentment he felt was not only due to the fact that he knew she would never choose him as a romantic partner, but also the way she had gone about things.

Even if they would never work out as a couple, they still had over twenty years of friendship between them, but all it had taken was Toby's unhappy remark for Sonia to come up to Charles and ask him to drop the nickname he had been calling her all this while.

How am I supposed to just let that go, Sonia?

Upon seeing the sullen look on Charles' face, Sonia sighed wearily and said, "I'm sorry, Charles. I know I should have been more considerate of your feelings instead of springing the conversation up on you like that, but I don't think I was wrong to do that. You like me, don't you, Charles?"

His eyes widened in disbelief as he gaped at her. "How... How did you know?" He had been in love with her for more than a decade, and she was the one thing on his mind ever since he learned the ways of the world. He had wanted to confess his feelings for her on countless occasions, but his lack of courage kept him from doing so.

Alas, she found out anyway, much to his surprise.

She lowered her gaze and explained, "I didn't know it at first, but after what you said last night, I figured it out. Why else would you have reacted the way you did? This brings me back to why I said I did the right thing, because I don't like you the same way, and I can't ever reciprocate your feelings for me. What I've done, at best, was to make you give up hope that we might ever stand a chance; think of it as a wake-up call, Charles, because if your feelings for me deepen over the years, then you'd only end up getting hurt, and I'd be riddled with guilt."

"No, I won't—"

"Yes, you will!" Sonia cut him off, pleading for him to see her point. "I don't know when you started having feelings for me, but I reckon it's been a long time. That just goes to show that you're sentimental enough to hold on to the idea of us, and if that were to go on, then you'd fall too deep to save yourself from inevitable heartbreak. I don't want to see you end up that way, Charles. You're my best friend, and the last thing I want to do is to hurt you, so please just let go of your feelings for me, even if it means changing the way you address me."

She was setting boundaries when she asked him to stop calling her 'baby', and her stance was clear: the both of them would never work out as a couple. She

hoped she had put that point out emphatically enough to make him understand how important it was for him to let go of a relationship that never could be.

Naturally, Charles heard the underlying meaning of her words. As his eyes grew red with anger, he clenched his fists and accused her angrily, "So you're warning me to drop all those affectionate nicknames for you and to stop being all chummy with you, and you want me to completely stop deluding myself that we might stand a chance. Is that it?"

She shook her head. "No, I'm not warning you. I wouldn't do that to you. I'm merely trying to make you see my point here. I don't love you more than just a friend, so romance is definitely off the table for us, which is why I need to make things clear. I need you to understand that we aren't going to work out, so you won't keep pining over me."

Sonia knew she was being harsh, but it was the only way he would snap out of his fantasy and let things go. She didn't have a choice but to be blunt with her words.

Charles, on the other hand, finally understood how death by a thousand cuts felt like. Her words stabbed through his heart mercilessly; they took all the air from his lungs and left him bleeding. He bit out woundedly, "So you're cutting me off?"

"That's not what I meant. I just like us better when we're friends without all these other underlying sentiments," Sonia replied.

He looked down and chuckled bitterly. "I get it now. You just want us to be friends and nothing more, so you're asking me to let go of my feelings for you."

"Yes," she confirmed solemnly, nodding once.

He dug his nails into his palms. "Okay, fine. I'll just keep these feelings aside, and I won't ask for anything more. As for the whole being-friends thing, I'm sorry, but I don't think I can be just your friend until I've completely let you go."

With that, he turned to leave with a self-deprecating, hollow smile on his face. How pathetic. I've loved a girl for over ten years, and I got rejected before I could even confess my feelings for her. The love story he had hoped for was written off before he even got to the prologue.

Meanwhile, Sonia was rooted in the same spot as she stared after Charles' retreating figure. She parted her lips to call out for him but caught herself and watched him leave. What's the point of calling out for him? He might just take it the wrong way and start having false hopes again.

She refused to let that happen. She could never reciprocate his feelings for her, and this hurt that she was causing him now would only be temporary. He would get over it eventually and come to see that she was doing this with his best interests at heart.

If she had been afraid of hurting him and decided to string him along, then the damage that might come from this would be insurmountable.

That being said, she had to agree with him on the last part of his statement. They would never truly be friends until he had let go of her entirely. If they were to carry on as though nothing had happened, then they would simply be turning a blind eye to the cracks in their friendship; they would no longer be as close, and worst of all, they might even become awkward around each other.

She would be better off waiting until he had let go of her entirely, and once he did, they could start afresh.

At the thought of this, Sonia closed her eyes and let out a long sigh.

Just then, Daphne hurried into the conference room, sounding unmistakably anxious as she asked, "President Reed, what happened to President Lane? I ran into him just now, and his eyes were red, like he's been crying, and he—"

"Go look for him," Sonia cut her off gently, forcing out a smile.

Daphne froze. "Look for him?"

"Yes. We had a long talk just now, and he's probably really upset now. I'm worried about him. Do you think you could keep an eye on him and make sure he doesn't do anything rash? It would also help if you could try to cheer him up a bit," Sonia elaborated, pinching the space between her brows tiredly.

"But—"

"No more buts. Just go, or you won't catch up to him. I wouldn't want him to drive and get into trouble just because he was upset," Sonia urged, interrupting the girl once more and dismissing her secretary with a wave of her hand.

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Chapter 545 Faultless

At the thought that Charles might get into trouble, Daphne felt her stomach twist, and without another word, she rushed out of the conference room to chase after him.

When she had left, Sonia resumed her seat and patted her cheeks tiredly, then took out her phone to text Toby. 'Do you think I'm the one at fault here?'

Meanwhile, Toby had been busy going through documents when he heard his phone buzz with a new message. He put down his pen and grabbed his phone to take a look.

A gentle smile broke out over his impassive face when he saw that it was a message from Sonia. He clicked into it, only to be a little confused when he saw that there was no context to her message. At last, he decided to call her instead of making guesses.

Sonia, on the other hand, was waiting for Toby's reply, and she jumped when her phone rang instead. She scrambled to hold onto her phone, almost dropping it in the process. Having recomposed herself, she answered the incoming call and pressed the phone to her ear, greeting, "Hello?"

Toby sounded concerned as he asked, "Hey, did something happen?"

She bit her lip and said slowly, "Not exactly. It's just Charles." She told Toby about the conversation she had had with Charles earlier, then asked with a hollow look in her eyes, "So, do you think I'm the one at fault here?"

Amusement flashed across Toby's features when he heard the whole story, and his warm smile was like springtime after all the ice melted. "You did the right thing. If you can't reciprocate his feelings, then putting a stop to this now would be better than letting him fall deeper. He'd only end up getting hurt in the end."

"That's what I thought," Sonia said, relieved to hear that he agreed with her. It was as if his words had led her out of her daze.

"I'm really happy," Toby said.

She tipped her head to one side and asked, "What are you happy about?"

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"I'm really happy that you came to me to clear your doubts," he pointed out, chuckling lightly.

A flustered look flashed in her eyes as she retorted, "Hey, I only came to you because I don't know who else to talk to. You're just a substitute at best."

"Still, I'm really happy about it," he countered easily. Besides, I can tell whether or not you see me as a substitute.

"Okay, let's just talk about something else. How's your ankle?" Sonia asked out of concern, straightening up in her seat.

Toby glanced down at his injured ankle and answered, "It's not as painful as it was yesterday, but I still can't walk."

"Don't worry. You'll be back up on your feet in a couple more days," she placated, sighing quietly in relief after hearing that his pain had subsided.

He let out a good-humored laugh. "Yeah. I'm going to the hospital to get the dressings changed."

"What time? I'll go over, too," she offered hurriedly.

"Seriously?"

Sonia nodded and hummed in response. "You only got hurt because of me, so it would be almost immoral of me to leave you alone while the doctor tends to your injuries. I'll go with you."

Toby was so moved by this that his eyes glistened with overwhelming sentiments. "Okay. I'll pick you up in the afternoon."

"That's fine. I can—"

"So it's settled then. I'll call you when I reach your building. Right, I have to go; I have a couple of things to attend to. See you later." With that, he ended the call and set his phone aside before looking at Tom, who had just come into the office with documents in hand.

Tom placed the documents on the desk in front of Toby and reported grimly, "President Fuller, we've looked into it and found that neither the Gray nor the Stone Family helped Tina get away, which means someone else helped her escape."

"Someone else?" Toby took up the documents, the frown on his face so deep that it seemed imprinted. "Did you find out who it was?"

Tom shook his head. "No, but one thing we're sure of is that her accomplices aren't from Seafield. I looked into it, and there's been no activity in Seafield that might be connected to Tina and her escape."

"Does that mean there are forces from other cities and countries that are helping her?" Toby guessed with a grimace.

Adjusting his glasses, Tom answered gravely, "Yes, but if that were to be the case, then we'd have a hard time finding the persons who helped her."

After all, theirs was only one of the many cities in the country, and with all the other countries in the world, there was no telling which forces had allied themselves with Tina. If the territory had been within Seafield perimeters, investigations would be a lot easier going forward.

Presently, Toby narrowed his eyes and ordered, "Send someone over to Miles' location."

"President Fuller, do you think Miles helped Tina escape?"

"He was the one who helped Tina keep me under mind control, so I wouldn't put it past him to help her now."

Tom nodded. "That makes sense. Very well, then. I'll send a team over after this."

With a somber hum, Toby said, "By the way, have you looked into Quentin's death?"

Tom sighed tiredly as he replied, "We haven't made much progress, seeing how it's been years since the accident. Moreover, there were no cameras at the location of the car crash, so it's nearly impossible to track down the reckless driver who killed him."

Toby's lips were pressed into a grim line. "I see. Continue the investigation."

Toby had to do all that he could to find out the truth behind Quentin's death. He hoped that the man really did die from an accident, but if he hadn't, then Toby naturally took it upon himself to uncover the details of his death. He wanted to avenge Quentin, or he would have died and given up his heart to Toby in vain.

"Yes, President Fuller." Tom acknowledged his superior's demand but suddenly thought of something and added, "Also, we ran into problems trying to pinpoint Declan's exact whereabouts."

"What do you mean?" Toby demanded, frowning.

Looking uneasy, Tom elaborated, "Initially, we kept a close eye on Carl and his activity and successfully confirmed that Declan smuggled abroad, so we sent men over to the location before Carl could beat us to catching Declan. However, Carl seemed to have caught on to our plans and intervened to cover up Declan's tracks, so now we lost him."

"He doesn't want us to find Declan?" Toby asked, growing sullen.

Carl had a score to settle with Declan, so it was unlikely that he would help the latter cover his tracks. I bet this means the only reasonable explanation for his intervention is that he's trying to stop me!

Tom nodded. "Most likely so. Carl may have his own plans for Declan, and he doesn't want us to intervene."

A cold smirk played on Toby's lips as he drawled, "Well, what a coincidence. I have my own plans for Declan as well. Go and hire one of the top hackers in the world; I refuse to believe that Carl is the best hacker there is."

"Yes, sir," Tom said with a firm nod, then turned to leave the office.

Toby placed his right hand on his desk and tapped his fingers lightly against the surface, his eyes gleaming ominously.

...

That afternoon, Sonia wrapped up her work and summoned her assistant. "Here, hand out these documents accordingly."

The assistant nodded. "Yes, President Reed." She marched forward and carried the documents in her arms, then made to leave.

Just then, Sonia stopped her. "Wait a minute."

Halting in her tracks, the assistant asked politely, "Is there anything else I can help you with, President Reed?"

Sonia flicked her wrist to loosen the strain she had put on it from hours of work. "Is Daphne not back yet?"

With a shake of her head, the assistant replied, "No."

Sonia's brows furrowed. It's been hours. She should be back by now. I can't even get through her phone... Snapping out of her thoughts, she flashed the assistant a quick smile and dismissed her, saying, "Alright, then. You may go back to your desk."

The assistant excused herself out of courtesy and began to make her way out the door.

At that moment, Sonia's phone screen lit up with a new message. She glanced down to see that it was a text from Toby, which read, 'I'm outside your company.'

Outside? She blinked at this. He actually came? She rose from her seat and hurried to the balcony, then looked down at the scene below the building.

True enough, as she looked down from the height of her balcony, she could pick out Toby's gleaming, luxurious Maybach from among the cars idling by the curb. He was currently parked across the street from the company building entrance.

For some reason, at the sight of his car, Sonia suddenly felt as if she was a wife whose husband was waiting to pick her up after work.

Blushing furiously at this, she hurriedly shook off such nonsensical thoughts and texted Toby, 'I'm coming down now!'

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Chapter 546 Daphne Is Sick

Toby's reply was quick. 'Alright. I'll wait for you.'

The smile on Sonia's face deepened when she read his text. Placing her phone back in her chest pocket, she quickly went back to her office to pack up her stuff before going downstairs.

In no time, Sonia reached Toby's car. However, right when she wanted to knock on his car window, it rolled down before his handsome face was revealed as he grinned at her. "Get in."

"Alright." Sonia nodded before she walked to the other side of the car and entered.

After Sonia settled down in her seat, Tom started the car engine and drove away. In the meantime, she was staring at Toby's leg. I wonder if his leg is better now.

Still, she couldn't see anything, as his leg was covered by his pants.

I guess I'll only find out when we reach the hospital.

At the thought of that, Sonia straightened her posture.

At this moment, Toby started telling her about Tina. Upon knowing that Tina was backed by others, Sonia frowned. "Looks like we still don't know Tina well enough."

If they understood Tina fairly well, they would have known who was backing her.

Toby didn't say anything regarding Sonia's comment. "Don't worry. I'll definitely lure her out."

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"I know." Sonia nodded, not questioning Toby's determination to capture Tina, considering how Tina wanted him dead as well. Reasonably, he wouldn't let Tina go unpunished,

After all, Toby and Tina were nemeses now. Even if he didn't manage to catch her, he surely wouldn't let him off the hook as well.

"I heard that you visited a few security firms during these two days?" Toby suddenly asked.

Right then, an odd glint flashed past Sonia's eyes. "How do you know that?"

"There's a security firm under Fuller Group, and most of the bodyguards in the firm are retired special forces, so most of the security firms in Seafield would often hire bodyguards from us to be their trainers. When you visited that security firm yesterday, one of the bodyguards in my firm saw and recognized you, so he told me about it," Toby explained while Sonia nodded in realization. "I see. Well, it's true. I visited a few security firms recently."

"Are you looking to hire bodyguards?" Toby stared at Sonia before she made a sound of acknowledgment. "Yeah. Since Tina escaped and hid somewhere, I'm worried that she might appear out of nowhere while I'm not prepared to give me a fatal blow. I'm thinking of hiring two bodyguards so that I can at least feel safer. Still, I can't find anyone suitable for the role, even though I've already gone through a few firms."

"Why didn't you come to me?" Toby pursed his lips.

At the same time, Sonia lowered her head. "I've already caused too much trouble for you, so I don't feel comfortable asking for help from you again."

Besides, she thought that it was impossible for her and Toby to end up being together, so why should she ask him for help?

Immediately, Toby's expression darkened, and it was obvious that he wasn't satisfied with Sonia's answer. "What do you mean? You're never a burden to me!"

Sonia's eyes widened a little as a hint of warmth flowed through her body. "You—"

However, she was cut off by her phone's ringtone before she could say anything.

Right then, Toby frowned while Sonia gave him an apologetic smile and took her phone out. "Let me get this call."

"Alright." Toby nodded, despite being annoyed by the caller. How distasteful.

After getting Toby's approval, Sonia swiped across the green button before placing her phone next to her ear. "Hello?"

It was a call from Daphne.

At this moment, Daphne's weak voice rang out. "President Reed, I'm sorry, but I haven't gone to the office after noon today."

"It's fine." Sonia smiled. "I was the one who made you leave, so you don't have to be sorry for it."

"Thank you, President Reed, but can I get a leave for tomorrow?" Daphne asked.

Upon noticing that something sounded wrong from Daphne's voice, Sonia had a worried look on her face. "Of course. However, you'll have to tell me what's wrong. You sound tired. Are you sick?"

On the other end of the call, Daphne's gaze wavered a little before she replied, "A little. I ran under the rain during the afternoon just now, and I might have caught the flu."

"Is it serious?" Sonia asked before Daphne coughed a little. "It's not that bad, but I'm feeling a little lightheaded, so I would like to take a day off to rest."

"Alright. If that's so, you should rest well. If your flu doesn't get better tomorrow, you can rest for a few more days too," she said in a worried tone.

Daphne forced a smile. "Alright. Thank you, President Reed. I'll hang up now."

"Alright." Sonia nodded.

"Who was it?" Toby turned around and asked in a slightly jealous manner when he saw Sonia placing her phone down.

Why does she sound so worried for the person on the phone? That's not Charles, is it?

Noticing the uncomfortable look on Toby's face, Sonia couldn't help but feel like laughing. "It's my secretary. She caught the flu, so she contacted me to take a day off tomorrow."

"The woman in glasses?" Toby asked unsurely before Sonia hummed in acknowledgment. "That's her."

After making sure that Sonia's secretary was a girl, Toby's jealousy finally went away as he returned to his good mood.

It's fine if it's a girl.

"Oh, right!" Suddenly, Sonia slapped her thigh.

"What's wrong?" Toby quickly urged.

Seeing how worried he looked, Sonia opened her mouth a little before answering him, "Uhm... I think I should buy Daphne something as her boss since she's sick."

Toby's lips twitched a little. He thought that something bad had happened after seeing how startled she was, but that was just it.

"Just buy her whatever you want to," Toby placed his hand against the car door and commented with a disinterested tone.

At the same time, Sonia had her chin propped on her hand. "Since she's sick, it's best for me to get her a fruit hamper."

At the thought of that, she lowered her head and started scrolling through her phone to select expensive fruits for Daphne.

After she was done choosing, she made an online transaction through her phone and typed Daphne's address in to deliver the fruits.

Finally, she placed her phone down after setting a delivery time with the fruit shop.

Not long after, they reached the hospital. After Tom parked the car, he got off before knocking at the window of the passenger seat.

In no time, Sonia rolled the car window down. Staring at her, Tom said, "Miss Reed, I'll need your help to get President Fuller out of the car. I'll go get his wheelchair from the car trunk now."

"Sure. I'll help you out." Sonia smiled and nodded.

Upon Sonia's agreement, Tom was relieved as he went to the car trunk.

At the same time, Sonia got out of the car, walked to the other end of the passenger seat, and opened the car door before offering her hand to Toby. "Let me give you a hand."

Staring at Sonia's soft and slender arm, Toby felt a dark glint radiate in his eyes before he placed his hand on hers.

With that, Sonia helped Toby to get down from the car.

However, the moment Toby got down, he lost his footing as his body started falling backward.

When Sonia saw that, she quickly grabbed his hand and pulled him toward her.

Nonetheless, Toby fell into her arms after she pulled him back and prevented him from falling to the ground.

Sonia was speechless when she turned around and saw Toby's right hand on her waist.

If we ended up in this position not because of him falling for real, I'd have thought he faked his fall just to hug me.

"President Fuller, can you let me go now?" Sonia reached out to poke the man's waist.

Upon feeling a ticklish sensation on his waist, the man loosened his arm and let go of her.

If Toby didn't do so, Sonia was probably going to think that he was trying to take advantage of her.

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Chapter 547 Tim's Trail](#)

In reality, Toby might indeed have an interior motive in his fall. Despite almost falling just now, the thought of hugging Sonia suddenly flashed past his mind when he saw her reaching out to grab him.

Therefore, he took the opportunity to hug her when she grabbed him, allowing him to be physically closer to her.

If I can get closer and closer to her day by day, maybe she'll get used to it and accept me being physically close to her.

After Sonia pulled back from Toby's hug and straightened her clothes, she turned toward Toby and asked in a worried tone, "President Fuller, are you alright?"

Toby shook his head lightly. "I'm fine. Aren't you here with me? I believe you won't let anything happen to me, just like how I would do the same."

Hearing Toby, Sonia nodded her head without hesitation. "Of course I won't let anything bad happen to you. I'll do my best to protect you."

After everything Toby had done for Sonia to save her from troubles, it was only courteous for her to repay him. At this moment, the corner of Toby's lips lifted a little. "I'm happy to hear that."

"President Fuller, the wheelchair is here." Right then, Tom walked over with the wheelchair.

Immediately, Toby's facial expression darkened.

Can't he see that we are in the midst of a conversation? How dare he interrupt us like that! I'm definitely deducting his bonus later!

While contemplating to himself, Toby gave Tom a disdainful glance, baffling his poor assistant out of nowhere.

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What is happening? Have I done something wrong? Why is President Fuller staring at me like that?

While observing those two's interactions, Sonia couldn't help but feel like laughing because she knew why Toby was glaring at Tom.

He was obviously annoyed that Tom had interrupted their conversation.

Chuckling, Sonia walked toward them. "Allow me, Tom."

"Sure. I'll leave it to you, Miss Reed." Since Sonia volunteered to get closer to Toby, it was only natural for Tom to agree along with her.

Besides, Toby might even get angry at him if he didn't allow Sonia to help with the wheelchair. Upon seeing that Tom scooted away, Toby had his originally upset expression replaced with a more pleasant one.

This assistant of mine might have learned his lesson, but I'm definitely not going to return the bonus that I've deducted just now. After all, we can't get that magical moment back because of his interruption.

"Let's go." With Tom's help, Toby managed to get on the wheelchair smoothly while Sonia grabbed the handle of the wheelchair and wheeled him forward.

With nothing to do, Tom trailed behind Sonia and Toby and acted as if he was their bodyguard.

Tim was in the hospital's lobby when the three of them entered the hospital. He was discussing something with a doctor in a lab coat, but he instantly wrapped up the conversation as soon as he spotted the trio's arrival from the corner of his eyes. While adjusting his glasses like usual, he headed toward Sonia and the others.

"Why are you here with him?" Tim's gaze landed on Sonia's face. "Are you guys together now?"

Toby raised his eyebrows when he noticed Tim pointing at him. In the meantime, Sonia's face went red as her gaze wavered. "Quit joking. Of course not."

"If that's not the case, why have you been going out with him so much recently?" Tim crossed his arms and stared at Toby while Toby met his gaze with his own cold ones. "Do you have anything against that?"

"Not really. I'm fine with whatever she does, but I'm just curious about your relationship status." Tim shrugged.

Pursing her lips, Sonia forced a smile on her face. "Well... I've been hanging out with him a lot because the injuries that he had sustained because of me have yet to recover, so I'll have to be responsible for him."

"Is that so?" A glint of light reflected from Tim's spectacle.

Why do I feel like that's not the case?

"Of course it is." Sonia nodded rather energetically as she made her point known. However, her wavering gaze revealed what she was really thinking about.

Raising his eyebrows, Tim gave Sonia a knowing look before he chuckled. "Sure. Whatever you say. Let's get back to the main issue here. Why are you in a wheelchair again?"

He turned toward Toby while Toby lowered his gaze to stare at his leg. "I sprained my ankle."

Upon hearing that, Tim laughed disdainfully. "How useless can you be to sprain your ankle?"

"That's not what happened." Sonia felt uncomfortable almost immediately after hearing Tim's ridicule. She frowned and explained, "He sprained his leg because of me."

"Because of you?" Tim's expression quickly turned serious. "What happened?"

Right then, Toby pursed his lips. "Tina came back, and she tried to run us over with a car."

"What?!" Tim's facial expression changed before a murderous glint flashed past his eyes. "Where is she now? Did you guys manage to catch her?"

"No. She escaped." Sonia shook her head. "President Fuller said that she was backed by someone else."

"Weren't you Tina's protector previously? If so, you should know her well. Can't you think of who's backing her up?" Toby narrowed his eyes at Tim.

Tim shrugged. "You're wrong. I was never her protector. I mistook her as my angel back then, but I only meet up with her occasionally. I spent most of my time studying during other times, and she went into a coma for six years after that. It's obvious that I don't know her well."

Upon hearing that, Sonia and Toby, especially Toby, fell into silence.

Although he suspected Miles to be Tina's backing, he knew that the chances of it being Miles weren't high.

The last time Miles helped Toby get out of the hypnosis, he had already told Toby that he wouldn't be helping Tina anymore.

Moreover, the person who Miles really helped was Quentin instead of Tina, so it was impossible for Tina to convince Miles to help her. Still, no one could be sure of the entire situation.

"If we can't find who's helping Tina, it would be even harder for us to locate her now." Sonia sighed.

Suddenly, Tim chimed in, "That's not impossible, though."

“What do you mean?” Sonia and Toby turned toward Tim.

“Do you know anything else?” Toby asked with a low voice while Tim pushed his glasses up. “I drugged Tina previously, using a drug that was highly concentrated with an element that can be derived from sago palms. Once an individual overdose on the element, their bodies will start to become rigid, and this phenomenon is known as Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS. Even though I only drugged Tina twice, the drug was really concentrated, and Tina’s body...”

At this moment, the corner of Tim’s mouth curled up into a smirk before he continued, “She’s definitely showing early symptoms of ALS, so you guys can try looking for her through all the renowned hospitals, since she would surely look for a doctor if something is wrong with her body, won’t she? Even if she doesn’t go to the hospital, you guys can check for people who have frequently been hiring doctors that do research about ALS. Since there’s only a handful of doctors that are still researching ALS, it’ll probably be easy to track Tina.”

After hearing him, Sonia was rendered speechless as her lips twitched a little.

How trustful of us is Tim to reveal that he had been drugging people illegally with no hesitation? Isn’t he afraid of me contacting the police? Still, it’s not like I’ll actually make a police report.

Despite being someone with morals, Sonia would never send a bright doctor like Tim to jail because of Tina.

Moreover, the hospital was working on their side now. Due to this, Sonia had no choice but to cover for Tim.

On the other hand, Toby wasn’t worried about Tim trying to murder another person, as all he cared about was the lead that Tim gave them. It was undeniable that Tim’s clue was very useful.

“Have you heard what he said?” Toby turned about before staring at Tom and asked.

Then, Tom nodded. “Yes, President Fuller. I’ll arrange for some men to start searching according to the pointers given just now.”

Toby nodded lightly.

In the meantime, Sonia turned toward Tim. “By the way, why did you decide to drug Tina?”

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Chapter 548 Toby's Terrible Acting

Toby was staring at Tim as well. Right then, Tim took a sharp scalpel out from his lab coat's pocket before he twirled it between his fingers and said in an icy voice, "She'll have to pay for lying to me!"

Sonia frowned. Did he really try to get Tina to suffer till death due to an incurable illness just because she lied to him? I really didn't peg him as such a vengeful man.

Despite thinking like that, she had no plans to share her thoughts. Even though Tim wasn't a good person, Tina wasn't too much better than him, so they were both the same.

Moreover, since Tim was against Tina, he was actually helping them out in some sense. As Sonia knew Tim wouldn't hurt them or any other ordinary people, she wouldn't make any comments about how he decided to deal with Tina.

"Good job!" On the other hand, Toby praised Tim for what he had done without any hesitation as he shared the same hate for that woman.

If Tina hadn't impersonated Sonia, he would have had Sonia as his loving wife, and their child would be in kindergarten by now.

However, Tina ruined everything, so Toby despised her enough to want her dead.

At this moment, Tim adjusted his spectacles. "It's a waste. I should have drugged her up more back then so that she would get ALS right away. By then, she wouldn't have been able to cause so much more trouble after that."

When he had the idea to drug Tina to get her to be an ALS patient and die in pain, he had already prepared enough drugs to achieve that.

Unfortunately, he only managed to drug Tina twice as Tina was either in custody or grounded at the Gray Residence because of all her wrongdoings, not allowing him to have chances to drug her further. That was the reason Tina's body didn't stiffen up and could still move away as she liked.

Still, Tim was comforted by the idea that Tina was facing the consequences of her body hardening.

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"Alright. Let's stop talking about this. You should go for your body checkup now," Tim stopped twirling his scalpel and said to Toby while Toby nodded a little. "Let's go."

With a hum of acknowledgment, Sonia started wheeling Toby toward the surgical department. By then, Tom had stopped following them and went to make a call with his cellphone.

When Sonia and Toby got to the surgical department, the doctor started checking Toby's leg before giving him another batch of medication.

At the same time, Tim was standing next to them as he stared at Toby's arm and commented, "It's been some time since you got your hand cast. I think it's time for you to remove it."

"If we remove the cast, would it affect his arm? His bone fracture hadn't completely healed after all," Sonia asked in a worried tone as she stared at Toby's arm as well.

Tim adjusted his spectacles. "It won't affect anything. In fact, it can also relax his arm and neck. Just be careful not to run into anything."

"That's good to know." Sonia felt relieved before she gave Toby a look. "What do you think?"

"Just remove it." Toby's gaze landed on the cast on his left arm with a disgusted look on his face. "Wearing this thing is a hassle anyway."

"Remove it, then," Sonia told Tim.

Then, Tim stopped leaning on the wall and took his hands out of his lab coat pockets before he headed toward them.

When he reached Toby, he paused. "Alright. Let me check if it's safe to remove your cast. Sonia, please go to the counter to get the paperwork done."

Tim turned toward Sonia, and she nodded. "Sure. I'll go now."

After that, Sonia went out of the room to help Toby with the necessary procedures.

In the meantime, Tim took a special hammer to hit Toby's cast on his left hand. "How is it? Do you feel anything?"

Toby nodded a little. "It hurts a little."

"Bear with the pain." Tim placed the hammer down before he started taking out tools to remove Tim's cast.

During the entire period, Toby's arm was in pain, but he remained emotionless without even frowning and watched as Tim removed the cast on his arm as if it wasn't even his.

Right at this moment, Sonia returned.

Upon hearing the sound of Sonia's heels clacking, Toby put on a pained expression, losing his emotionless facade from before. It was as if he was in great pain.

When Sonia noticed Toby's expression, she quickly placed the registration form down and walked over to him. "Are you alright?"

"It hurts!" Toby replied hoarsely in a painful manner as he stared at his left arm.

Sonia panicked when she heard Toby crying out in pain as she bit her lip and asked, "Dr. Lancaster, can you be gentler?"

Huh?

Tim was confused right then.

Gentler? I'm already doing it at my most gentle. How much softer do I have to be?

Nonetheless, Tim, who was a doctor, knew that even though Toby would suffer from pain during the process of cast removal, he would only suffer mild pain, and it was impossible for him to be in so much pain that his entire expression would change.

Right then, he really couldn't help but guess that Toby was just acting.

At the thought of that, Tim heard Toby's weak-sounding tone.

"Can you hug me for a while? I'm afraid that I might not be able to control myself and trash around before hurting my arm again."

Tim was rendered speechless.

Trash around in pain? Are you sure that you'll be in that much pain when you've endured more painful situations? Alright, I'm now completely sure that this is just an act to get Sonia's pity and care.

Tim lowered his gaze before giving Toby a disdainful look. He never expected the leader of the Fuller Family, as well as the director of Fuller Group, to be this shameless.

Should I expose his act?

Tim narrowed his eyes and stared at Sonia while she nodded anxiously. "Alright. Don't move. I'll hug you now!"

Then, she discarded the bag that was on her shoulder at a side before hugging Toby's shoulders.

At the same time, Toby took advantage of that and rested his head on Sonia before his lips curled up into a smile.

Upon seeing that, Tim fell into silence before he dropped the idea of exposing Toby.

Why should I expose him? Anyone can tell that Toby has horrible acting skills, and Sonia would obviously know as well. Still, she acted as if she didn't know anyone and went along with his wish anyway. What does this mean? It means that she's obviously willing to do so. Wouldn't it be despicable for me to expose them?

While pondering to himself, Tim lowered his head and continued removing Toby's cast while acting as if he didn't know anything at all.

Meanwhile, Sonia was still hugging Toby's shoulders. "Just hang on. It'll be over in no time."

"I know. I won't trash around with you here," Toby replied before he snaked his right arm around Sonia's waist.

Immediately, Sonia tensed up. Right then, her first reaction was to get Toby to let go of her.

However, she couldn't say anything when she saw the deep frown on Toby's face as her mouth opened slightly.

Whatever, He can do anything he wants since he's the patient after all. I can deal with this.

While convincing herself that it was fine, Sonia slowly relaxed again. Upon feeling Sonia's body relaxing, Toby continued hugging her in relief as he didn't need to worry about the idea of her moving away from him anymore.

In a blink of an eye, the cast was removed. Staring at his left arm that was a shade lighter than his right arm, Toby couldn't help but frown a little.

"Can you move your arm?" Tim placed his tools down before asking. "You don't have to completely raise your arm up. Just a little will do."

"Try it," Sonia urged.

She was the one who wished that Toby's arm would be fine the most, and she couldn't wait to hear the news that Toby's arm had healed.

Under Sonia's excited gaze, Toby adjusted his left arm before lifting it up a little. However, he stopped moving when he felt pain.

Pinching Toby's arm a little, Tim nodded. "You being able to raise your arm means your bones are healing well. You don't have to use a cast any longer. However, you'll still have to wear the cast support."

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Chapter 549 Daphne Is Acting Weirdly

When Toby heard that he still needed to wear the cast support, he frowned. Despite being unwilling to do so, he didn't comment about it.

"I'll go and get some water for you to clean your arm then." Sonia stared at Toby's left arm before saying those words while Toby, who was unable to stand the cast on his arm, mumbled an acknowledgement. "Sure."

Then, she let go of him before she went to the bathroom.

The moment she left, his expression was devoid of emotions as his pained look earlier disappeared.

At that moment, Tim stared at Toby's arm before he questioned with a ghost of a smile, "How is it? Are you not going to maintain your act?"

However, Toby's only response was to give Tim a nonchalant look without being bothered.

Nonetheless, Tim wasn't planning to let Toby off the hook as he adjusted his spectacles again. "I'm really surprised by your act to fake being in pain."

"That's the only way for me to be closer to her without her pushing me away," Toby explained nonchalantly as he pursed his lips.

Despite that, Tim chuckled. "It's weird to see the leader of the Fuller Family being humble for love."

Toby lowered his gaze. "I don't mind doing it to make up for all the things that I did back then."

Moreover, he would only be humble toward Sonia and he didn't think making himself humble to the one he loved was an embarrassing thing to admit.

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Instead, being able to humble himself also proved that he had really loved her.

"Here's your water." Sonia came out of the washroom with a bowl of warm water while Tim moved aside to inform her, "You should help him to clean his arm. Do it gently, though."

"Alright. I understand." She nodded before she placed the bowl aside and twisted the towel in the bowl dry. Then, she placed the warm towel on Toby's arm before gently removing the cast and the remaining medicine on his arm.

At this moment, Sonia was completely focused on cleaning his arm and Toby stared at her without blinking.

It was as if he was afraid that he would lose the opportunity to see her if he blinked his eyes.

At the same time, Tim, who was twirling his scalpel while standing aside, suddenly felt that he was intruding on their moment.

Still, he wouldn't leave no matter what since this was his place after all.

On the other hand, Sonia could sense Toby staring at her, so she stopped cleaning his arm and turned toward him. "What's wrong?"

However, he shook his head. "Nothing's wrong."

She couldn't help but tilt her head while giving a ridiculous look. Nothing's wrong? How can it be nothing when he keeps staring at me?

Still, Sonia didn't force Toby to say anything since he was unwilling to do so and she merely turned around to continue with cleaning his arm.

Once she was done cleaning Toby's arm, Tim reapplied the medicine on Toby's arm before bandaging it.

Despite not having to wear a cast anymore, Toby still needed to wear the cast support on his neck. Even though it was inconvenient, he nevertheless wore it since it wasn't as heavy as before.

When they returned to the car, Tom reported, "President Fuller, I've already asked the investigators to check every doctor and medical team who are involved in the research of ALS and I believe that we will be able to collect information from them within these two days."

Toby nodded. "Get our men to trail the medical personnels who are involved once we are done collecting the information."

"Yes," Tom replied with a nod whereas Sonia remained silent during the men's entire exchange as she had nothing to say.

She wasn't as powerful as Toby, who was able to instruct hundreds of men to carry out his commands with just a word, so she really couldn't assist them in locating Tina and could only rely on Toby to do so.

Hence, she had never asked or tried to interrupt Toby's way of searching for Tina.

About half an hour later, they finally arrived at the Bayside Residence.

Right as Sonia yanked her bag over her shoulder and wanted to leave the car, Toby suddenly grabbed her hand. "Wait. I forgot to tell you something."

"What is it?" Sonia, who already had one leg out of the car, returned inside the car and turned to meet Toby's gaze while he released her hand. "You don't have to hide bodyguards from other security firms anymore. I've already arranged two bodyguards to protect you 24/7."

"You have arranged bodyguards around me?" She was shocked when she heard his words and quickly looked out the window to try to locate the bodyguards that were hidden from her view.

Nevertheless, she wasn't able to figure out where those two bodyguards were after searching as everyone around them didn't resemble her bodyguards at all.

"When did you arrange bodyguards for me?" Sonia shifted her gaze to meet Toby's eyes before Toby answered, "From the day Tina reappeared."

"That early?!" She was stunned because she thought that he had only arranged bodyguards for her after asking her about her trips to security firms. Never once had she expected him to have already arranged bodyguards for her prior to what happened that time.

"It's just what I should have done anyway. If something really happened to you, it would be too late for me to regret not doing so." Toby reached out to caress her cheek.

This time, Sonia didn't flinch and she allowed his hand to rest on her face.

She felt the man's thumb gently grazing and lingering on her cheek and as a result, she couldn't help but turn a little to rub her cheek against his palm.

Sonia's action not only stunned Toby, but it also gave herself a shock as her eyes widened in surprise. What am I even doing?! Did I just rub my cheek against his hand when I should have slapped his hand away? Am I going insane?!

When she came back to her senses, she moved away from his hand and quickly left the car. "President Fuller, thanks for the bodyguards, but you should let me pay for their fees since they are technically working to protect me."

"Sure, but let's settle the fees only after I have caught Tina so that it'll be much easier to calculate the fees." Unexpectedly, Toby actually agreed to Sonia's suggestion.

After contemplating for a while, she figured that his counter proposal sounded better, so she nodded in agreement. "Of course. We can settle the fees by then."

At this moment, Toby smirked as he knew that he would be able to search for an excuse to refute Sonia's suggestion after that.

He would never allow Sonia to try to escape from him even if she wanted to.

Unbeknownst to her, they were both fated to be with each other for the rest of their lives.

At the thought of that, Toby's gaze wavered slightly before he recomposed himself and waved at her. "Rest well when you arrive home."

"Of course. Goodbye." She nodded while his lips moved slightly to respond, "Goodbye."

She closed the car door with a soft thud before waving at him from outside the car. Then, Sonia walked away and headed for her condominium while Toby watched as she headed off. He waited until she entered the lobby before asking Tom to drive.

The moment that the men drove away, Sonia, who was supposed to be in the elevator, suddenly emerged from the lobby and jogged to the side of the road to look at the direction where Toby's car had driven off.

She stared at the road for a long time while many cars drove past her during that entire time before she finally turned around and went back to her condominium.

...

Two days later, while Sonia was busy working in her office, someone suddenly knocked at her office door, causing her to look up and glance at the door. "Come in."

Upon hearing her voice, the person outside the door stopped knocking and pushed the door open.

Immediately, Daphne, who was holding a stack of documents, came into view. "President Reed, these are all the urgent documents from all the departments that need your signature."

"Alright. Just leave them here. I'll go through it as soon as I can." Sonia used her ballpen to point at her office desk and Daphne quickly walked over to place the documents down.

It was at that moment when Sonia glanced at her to ask, "Is your flu getting better?"

While lowering her gaze to hide the odd look in her eyes, Daphne nodded. "Thanks for asking, President Reed. I'm alright now."

"Are you really alright? It seems like your flu was really bad as you weren't in the office for two consecutive days." Even though Sonia still looked worried, Daphne smiled and insisted, "I'm really alright."

After ensuring that Daphne was alright, a relieved Sonia nodded. "That's good to know. By the way, what's wrong with your neck? I saw that you left a plaster on your neck earlier. Are you injured?"

Upon hearing Sonia's question, Daphne immediately panicked as she quickly raised her hand to cover the plaster on her neck before forcing a smile. Then, she tried her best to act calm before answering, "I was scratched by the zip on my jacket when I wanted to wear it in the morning, so I figured that it would be better if I cover it since it looks inappropriate."

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Chapter 550 Taylor's Cooperation

"I see." Sonia nodded before she smiled. "Alright, then. I won't take up any more of your time from work."

"Okay," Daphne quickly replied before she headed out of the door.

As she stared at Daphne's retreating figure, Sonia couldn't tell whether she was hallucinating or if there was indeed something odd with Daphne's walking. Nevertheless, she figured that it was probably because Daphne wore a new pair of high heels and wasn't used to it, so she didn't ponder much about it and continued working.

On the other hand, Daphne couldn't calm down at all even though she had just left Sonia's office. After she closed the door to Sonia's office, she leaned against the door and slowly slid down into a squat before placing her head in between her knees. Such a position had rendered Daphne looking really helpless then.

Up until this moment, she still felt that what happened two days ago was like a dream. All Daphne had done was follow Sonia's order to keep an eye on Charles, so how did Daphne end up doing that kind of thing with him? She felt her heart being filled with a mixture of emotions when the thought of what had happened the other day made her happy and hurt at the same time.

Daphne was happy that she finally had the man whom she loved and even managed to do the most intimate thing that a couple could ever do with him. As a result, it even allowed her to be as physically close to him as possible.

However, she was hurt when he sobered up and coldly warned her to forget about what had occurred between them and acted as if nothing ever happened. Most importantly, she wasn't even allowed to inform Sonia about it.

When Daphne recalled Charles' cold gaze, she was experiencing shortness of breath. She felt like someone was slicing her heart and her face paled as if she was in deep pain.

At this moment, another assistant who was about to enter Sonia's office noticed Daphne crouching down in front of Sonia's office and asked in a stunned manner, "Miss Daphne, why are you squatting here?"

It was enough to cause Daphne's gaze to immediately waver before she looked up and forced a smile. "I don't feel well; that's why I decided to squat for a little while."

"You're not feeling well?" The assistant stared at Daphne's face and noticed that she was completely pale before he offered in a worried tone, "Let me bring you to the infirmary."

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Then, the assistant reached out to help Daphne up.

However, Daphne rejected the offer as she used the wall as leverage to rise to her feet. "It's fine. I'm much better now, so I don't think that I'll need to go to the infirmary. Didn't you say that you wanted to see President Reed? Go on, then. You don't have to worry about me. I'll return to my office now." Then, she straightened her clothes before heading back to the secretary department while walking in an odd manner.

While watching Daphne leave, the assistant couldn't help but feel that Daphne's behavior was extremely peculiar. Still, he didn't think much about it and shrugged before entering Sonia's office.

"President Reed, I'm here to collect the documents from you." He walked toward Sonia and greeted while Sonia opened her drawer and produced a document. Then, she said, "Here. Remember to archive it once you have finished using it."

"Of course, President Reed," the assistant replied with a smile.

It was right after that when Sonia's red lips opened a little. However, her phone suddenly rang when she wanted to say something. Upon seeing the caller ID, she grinned before dismissing the assistant. "You may leave now."

"Alright." He nodded before leaving.

Then, Sonia answered the call and placed the phone next to her ear. "Hey, Mrs. Lane."

"Hey, Sonny. I hope I'm not disturbing you from your work." Grace's gentle voice rang out from the other end of the call while Sonia grinned and shook her head. "Of course not."

"That's good." Grace sighed in relief.

At this moment, a curious Sonia asked, "Mrs. Lane, is there a reason why you're calling me at this hour?"

It was at that moment when Mrs. Lane, who was on the other end of the call, looked at the room upstairs and sighed. "Something has happened. Can you come out for a while, Sonny? I have something to discuss with you."

"Sure, but may I know what you would like to talk about?"

Grace chuckled. "You'll know when the time comes."

"I see. Sure." Sonia nodded in agreement and wasn't upset that she didn't receive an answer from Grace.

"Let's meet at Prince Cafe in an hour," Grace responded before sending Sonia the address to the cafe.

Sonia agreed with a smile. "Sure, Mrs. Lane."

After the call ended, she kept her phone aside as her finger tapped on her desk before her smile was replaced with a conflicted look. Despite Grace evading her question, Sonia could already guess what the woman wanted to talk about. It was probably about Charles.

Since they had to discuss this sooner or later, Sonia had no choice but to agree to meet up with Grace. Then, she massaged her temples before getting up from her seat to grab her purse and leave.

Half an hour later, Sonia arrived at the cafe that Grace told her about. Since Sonia had arrived half an hour earlier than their agreed time, Grace wasn't here yet. Under the guidance of the waitress, Sonia was led to a seat near the window before she ordered two cups of coffee and waited for Grace's arrival while sipping on her own coffee. After waiting for a while, she suddenly heard a familiar voice from her back.

It was Taylor!

Sonia placed her coffee down before she turned. She saw at a booth about three tables away from her, Taylor was seated with her back facing Sonia while speaking to another person on her phone.

"What are you talking about, Mom? You want to check whether your kidney is compatible with Dad's?" Taylor's volume suddenly increased.

Upon hearing that, Sonia couldn't help but raise her eyebrows. Julia Ramsay actually wants to check whether her kidney is compatible with Titus Gray? What a loving couple, I suppose.

"Mom, do I have to do it as well?" An anxious Taylor bit her lips before asking.

After hearing Julia's answer on the other end of the call, relief appeared on her face. "Is that so? Alright, I'll come back in a bit... Yes... Goodbye!"

While eavesdropping on Taylor's conversation, Sonia sipped her coffee before a sneer appeared on her face. From the conversation alone, it was clear that Taylor didn't want to be an organ donor for Titus. If it weren't so, she wouldn't have asked Julia about it in such an anxious manner.

After that, Julia probably told Taylor that she didn't have to do so, which resulted in Taylor sighing in relief. From this action of hers, it was obvious that Taylor didn't want to sacrifice herself and donate her kidney to Titus.

Even though there was nothing wrong with her decision, the Gray couple was probably disappointed by it. No child would be patient enough to take care of their sick parents for a long time. However, if Titus really reached the point of undergoing a kidney transplant, he might really ask Taylor to go for the procedure for his sake. By then, if she was unwilling to do so, chaos would really occur within the Gray Family.

While Sonia pondered to herself, there was suddenly a new figure next to her. Taylor's gaze met Sonia's lowered head before shock appeared on the former's face. "Miss Reed?"

Oh no! She has noticed me! Sonia placed her cup of coffee down on the table before she looked up with a nonchalant look. "Miss Gray."

"What a coincidence for me to run into you at this cafe as well." Taylor crossed her arms before she took the seat in front of Sonia.

Sonia was displeased upon saying that. "It's really lovely to be able to meet here, Miss Gray."

Taylor could sense Sonia's obvious displeasure. However, instead of being exasperated, Taylor smiled. "I just wanted to talk to you for a while before I leave. I hope that I'm not stopping you from enjoying your coffee."

"What is it that you want to talk about?" Sonia leaned backward and stared at Taylor before asking coldly.

Nonetheless, Taylor pushed her beautifully styled hair before answering, "I just wanted to say that I'm sure you are aware that Tina isn't dead, right, Miss Reed?"

Sonia nodded. "Yeah, what about it?"

"My parents are also aware of it." Taylor's expression twisted in an ugly manner. "My father has reacted well to it, but my mother really wants Tina back and I'll never allow Tina to ever return again. So, how about this, Miss Reed? Why don't we work together?"

"Work together with you?" Sonia narrowed her eyes.

Then, Taylor nodded. "That's right. Let's work together to locate Tina. I'm sure you hate Tina too, don't you, Miss Reed? After all, she has tried to murder you on so many occasions before. Why don't we look for her together and subdue her forever?"