

This Time, I Will Get My Divorce, Mr Chapter 101

“What else is there? Cynthia has been angling to get acquitted, which is why she’s so insistent on lodging an appeal in the first place. That being said, the appeal wouldn’t make a difference, and the sentences would still run anyway. Her mom probably rushed over here to convince you to drop the charges,” Charles said as he leaned close to Sonia’s ear.

He spoke softly, but Carmen heard it nonetheless, and she winced in embarrassment as she interjected, “Well, Miss Reed, Mr. Lane is right. I am indeed here to convince you to drop the charges.”

“See? Told you so,” Charles mused, shrugging dismissively.

Sonia rolled her eyes at him in mild exasperation before addressing Carmen with a distant smile. “I’m sorry, Mrs. Stone, but I won’t be dropping the charges.”

Carmen stiffened when she heard her words and grew a little uneasy; she had not expected such an outright rejection from the other woman. However, she was quick to regain her composure as she pleaded, “Please, Miss Reed. I know Cynthia has completely crossed the line this time, but she’s been repentant ever since. Could you please—”

“No!” Sonia was expressionless as she cut Carmen off mid-sentence. “Mrs. Stone, you said she’s been repentant ever since, so why is it that she has yet to apologize to me? More to the point, why didn’t you apologize to me on her part? Don’t you think that’s the least you could do as a parent after realizing your daughter’s in the wrong?”

“That’s right,” Charles chimed. He put his hands on the back of his head as he added insouciantly, “It seems rather insincere on your part to show up—without gifts, might I add—and ask my darling for a favor now that the ruling is about to be given and Cynthia is going to be pronounced guilty. It’s almost like a bad joke.”

Carmen tightened her grip on her purse, growing flustered after the two persons in front of her had put her down without much decorum. The humiliation left her speechless. She thought she might be able to persuade Sonia to relent on the charges. I didn't know how cold-hearted these two could be, she thought grimly.

Not wanting to be pestered by Carmen any longer, Sonia glanced at Charles meaningfully and declared, "Well then, we should make a move."

Just as the both of them turned to leave, Carmen stepped forward and grabbed Sonia by the hand abruptly. "I'm begging you, Miss Reed. Please go easy on my daughter and give her a second chance."

Sonia frowned when she heard this and tried to pull away from the older woman's grasp, but the latter's vise-like grip prevented this from happening. "Won't you please just drop the charges for my sake, Miss Reed? If you do, I'll personally bring Cynthia over and give you a formal apology. Please, Miss Reed."

"Mrs. Stone, I'm sure I've made myself very clear just now that I will not drop the charges, so begging me won't do you any good at all. Could you please let go of me now?" Sonia bit out impatiently.

However, her words fell upon deaf ears as Carmen gazed at her peevishly. "How could you be so heartless, Miss Reed?"

"Did you just say my darling is heartless? Come on, even you have to admit that Cynthia deserves what she got," Charles pointed out in dark amusement as he scoffed, only to be ignored by Carmen.

Instead, Carmen put her attention on Sonia as she went on to say, "Should I get down on my knees before you then, Miss Reed?" With that, she promptly let go of Sonia and dropped to her knees in front of the latter.

Sonia and Charles were shocked by her action, and when they finally registered the situation, they quickly hauled her to her feet.

“Don’t do this, Mrs. Stone!” Sonia sighed tiredly, rubbing her temples in frustration.

Charles, too, was displeased by this turn of events. “This is emotional blackmail, Mrs. Stone.”

He could hardly believe that Carmen would resort to begging on her knees after Sonia’s outright rejection. This was virtually no different from running away from responsibilities. Besides, this was far more than just emotional blackmailing; it was as good as duress.

Evidently, Carmen’s outlook on things was just as twisted as Cynthia’s. It was no wonder that the latter turned out the way she did.

Carmen ignored Charles. Upon seeing Sonia’s expression soften, she gazed at her hopefully and seized the chance to ask, “Does this mean you’ve agreed to drop the charges, Miss Reed?”

Sonia started to say, “I’m sorry, Mrs. Stone, but I—”

Before she could get her words out, Carmen broke away from Charles and attempted to drop to her knees once more. This time, however, someone stopped her. It was neither Charles nor Sonia who kept her from kneeling, but Tina.

Presently, Tina pointed an accusing finger at Sonia as she snapped in aggravation, “How could you let someone older get down on their knees before you, Miss Reed? You’re taking things a little too far, don’t you think?”

Sonia’s lips twitched; she clearly exasperated by the accusation. Meanwhile, Charles rolled his eyes in the most jaded manner he could. “Oh, for God’s sake, are you blind? When did my darling ever ask Mrs. Stone to get down on her knees? The woman did that out of her own volition!”

Tina was skeptical. “Right. As if.”

Carmen, on the other hand, merely patted the back of Tina’s hand as she explained, “No, Tina, Mr. Lane is right. I got on my knees voluntarily.”

“But why, Mrs. Stone?” Tina stared at Carmen in disbelief.

Carmen looked aggrieved. “I’m doing this for Cynthia. She will be freed as soon as Miss Reed drops the charges, so I...”

“So you’re begging on your knees for it?”

“Yes.” Carmen nodded once, then after casting a brief glance at Sonia, she dabbed at her tears. “Unfortunately, Miss Reed has yet to agree to this.”

“I understand.” Tina pursed her lips, then glowered at Sonia unhappily. “Miss Reed, it’s rather cruel of you to reject Mrs. Stone after she has gotten down on her knees in front of you, don’t you think?”

“I’m the one that’s cruel?” Sonia raised a hand and lazily tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, looking graceful as she did so. “Cynthia was pretty ruthless when she spread all those vicious rumors about me, but suddenly, I’m the cruel one for holding her accountable.”

“I—” Stumped, Tina grimaced.

Meanwhile, Charles scoffed. “You should figure out where you stand before you point fingers at my darling, Tina.”

A look of shame flashed in Tina’s eyes, but it disappeared just as quickly. She bit down on her lower lip as she argued, “Look, even if Cynthia was in the wrong, it can’t be denied that she’s paying the price for it now. Isn’t it bad enough that she’s facing intense backlash on the internet? Besides, Mrs. Stone has gotten down on her knees to plead her case, so I don’t see why you can’t forgive Cynthia for this one slip-up.”

“No way!” Sonia was fuming as she spat her words out. “Cynthia means nothing to me, after all, so why should I forgive her?”

“Precisely! Why should she be allowed to get away with hurting my darling? Why don’t the both of you force an apology out of that girl instead of wasting your time asking for my darling’s forgiveness? It’s good enough that my darling hasn’t returned that wicked girl’s spite sevenfold,” Charles jested darkly as he wrapped an arm around Sonia’s shoulders in a show of support.

“Right, I nearly forgot about this.” Sonia regarded Tina indifferently as she said, “Miss Gray, lest you forget, Cynthia ended up in her current predicament because of you. I think it’s only appropriate that you play the hero now.”

Having said that, she turned her icy gaze toward Carmen. “You know, Mrs. Stone, it would do you better to plead your case with Miss Gray over here. Surely she would be kind and generous enough to help you out.”

“Bye-bye,” Charles sang, offering a flamboyant wave as he led Sonia into the courthouse.

Tina watched the two retreating figures while averting Carmen’s eyes. “I know Cynthia only did this for me, Mrs. Stone, but I—”

“You don’t have to explain yourself,” Carmen cut her off gently as she wiped her tears away. “I know Cynthia came to you for help, but there isn’t anything you could do for her.”

Tina had only just brightened up at this when she heard Carmen continue, “But I hope that you’d stay away from Cynthia in the future. She really isn’t meant to be your friend.”

“Wait, what are you trying to say, Mrs. Stone?” Tina blanched, and her voice quivered as she urged, “Are you blaming me for this?”

Carmen heaved a sigh. “Yes, I am. If you hadn’t stopped me earlier, perhaps Sonia would have caved in if I just got on my knees a couple more times. It’s precisely because you interfered that everything is ruined, and now there’s no way Cynthia could be acquitted. You would do well to remember what you have done today.”

With that, she brushed past Tina without so much as a second glance and walked away.

As a result, Tina’s gentle features were twisted into a menacing grimace. She could scarcely believe that Carmen blamed her for stopping her desperate attempts to plead for Sonia’s favor. How dare a lowly housewife such as herself blame me for what has happened?

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Tina chewed on her bottom lip as panic filled her. No longer in the mood to stay for Cynthia's appeal, she turned and left.

Half an hour later, she found herself at Fuller Group.

"Toby..." Tina couldn't care less if there were others in the presidential office as she strode over to Toby's desk. With her eyes red and glistening with tears, she sat down on his lap and wrapped her arms around his neck, thereafter nuzzling into his chest as she began to sob quietly.

Toby stiffened at her unanticipated behavior, but when he regained his composure, he frowned at the woman in his arms.

If it weren't for the fact that she was crying, he thought he might very well push her away.

"Leave the documents here, and I'll get back to the both of you after I've reviewed them. Go back to your own desks for now," Toby announced to the man and woman standing in front of his desk. He put down the documents in his hand and rubbed his temple tiredly.

The man and woman standing in his office nodded. "Yes, President Fuller."

After that, they left his office.

It was only after the door closed behind them that the woman whispered disapprovingly, "Isn't she President Fuller's fiancée? She ought to know better than to barge into the office without knocking first. It's so rude of her to interrupt while we're in the midst of a work discussion, not to mention sit down in President Fuller's lap at first instance. The company is no place for her to throw her girly tantrums."

The man next to her simply shrugged. "President Fuller always lets her have her way."

The woman was obviously displeased. "Okay, well, he needs to draw the line somewhere!"

"Alright, that's enough now. We're the ones who would get in trouble if we keep talking about this."

The woman pouted but said nothing more.

Meanwhile, in the office, Toby carefully pried Tina away as he said, "There, there, Tina. Why don't you get down for a bit?"

"No!" Tina whined, burrowing back into his arms.

He sighed and did not try to push her away again. Indulging her whims, he asked, "Go on, then. Tell me what happened."

She lifted her head like a wounded kitten as she stared at him with red-rimmed eyes. "Why are they all accusing me, Toby?"

"Who?" He narrowed his eyes slightly.

She sniffed. "Miss Read and Mrs. Stone. I was on my way to Cynthia's appeal when I saw Mrs. Stone on her knees, begging Miss Reed to forgive Cynthia. Miss Reed refused to do so, and I spoke up for Mrs. Stone—"

He put up a hand and cut her off momentarily. "Wait. You spoke up for Mrs. Stone? As in, you were trying to persuade Sonia to forgive Cynthia?"

Tina hummed in response as she nodded. "I mean, Mrs. Stone was already on her knees, and I had to—"

"Tina, you were in the wrong. You shouldn't have done that," Toby interjected as he regarded her with a dark gaze.

Unable to take such a rebuff, Tina grew sullen as she protested, "I don't think I did anything wrong at all!"

"Yes, you were entirely at fault! Cynthia was the one who caused this mess in the first place, and Sonia was the victim, which means she gets to decide if she wants to forgive the former. You have no right as a third party to interfere and plead Cynthia's case, do you understand?" Toby said in a low voice.

She bit down on her lip and tried to argue, "But—"

"That's enough. You were probably going to say that it was harsh for Sonia to not forgive Cynthia even though Mrs. Stone had gotten down on her knees in front of her, but did you ever stop to think that this was less of a begging situation than it was coercion?"

"A coercion?" she repeated, sounding stunned.

He nodded gravely. "That's right. Mrs. Stone could easily plead with Sonia in private, but she decided to get down on her knees right there in a public space. She was likely trying to pressure Sonia into forgiving Cynthia."

"I see," she mumbled, lowering her head as she feigned sadness. "It was no wonder that Mrs. Stone would blame me for helping her get on her feet. I ruined her plan."

"Well, there's nothing to be done now. Just make sure you think before you help somebody the next time." He gently smoothed her hair and added, "Besides, the Stones aren't particularly known for good breeding. You should stay away from them if you know what's good for you."

"Okay." She forced out a smile, and as a sudden thought seized her, she quickly glanced at him with an expectant look. "Toby, should we go have some fun this weekend?"

"This weekend?"

"Yes."

He gave her a bland smile. "Why the spontaneity?"

"Because I'm bored," she answered. "And you've been so busy lately that we barely have meals together anymore. I'm always alone, and it's only a matter of time before I perish in boredom at

home. Just humor me, Toby.” She swayed his arm as she tried to persuade him.

Toby caved in and nodded. After all, he had nothing going on over the weekend. “Very well, then. We shall have some fun this weekend, but we can’t make a long trip over the course of two days, so we’d have to traipse around Seafield. Where do you want to go?”

Tina broke into a dazzling smile when she heard that he had acceded. “I don’t know where I want to go, either. I’ve only just gotten here not too long ago, so I wouldn’t know any fun places in Seafield. I’ll go along with whatever you decide, Toby.”

He did not turn down this suggestion, and he lowered his gaze in thought. Finally, as a sudden thought came over him, the smile on his face deepened.

“I recall from your letters that you like horseback riding and hiking, and you claim to be quite the equestrian. President Cunningham just so happens to own an equestrian facility in the mountains. We could go horseback riding and then hiking after. What do you think?” Toby looked at her, awaiting a response.

Tina’s face stiffened when she heard this.

She couldn’t believe that he had suggested horseback riding and hiking. While she was perfectly fine with trekking through the mountains, she was completely hapless when it came to horseback riding.

What made matters worse was that she had an innate phobia for large animals.

“Do you not want to go horseback riding and hiking?” He retracted his warm smile when he saw her reluctance.

Afraid that he might grow doubtful of her, she quickly shook her head and said, “Oh, no. I’ve been wanting to do these for a while now. I’m just so happy and surprised that you remember at all.”

“I told you that I remember every single hobby of yours,” he offered indulgently.

She flashed him a dry smile and humored him as she quipped, "Right. Of course."

However, he failed to notice the flat tone of her voice. "So that's settled—I'll give President Cunningham a call in a bit and let him know of our plans."

She absentmindedly nodded as she hummed in response.

It looks like I'll be stuck at the equestrian facility, but I guess I could come up with a way to get myself out of it. The thought of this comforted Tina, and she no longer felt as worried as she had been mere moments ago.

While this was happening, the appeal at the courthouse had come to an end. Cynthia had cracked following the incessant line of questioning from both the judge and Sonia's attorney and lowered her head as she admitted to posting the particular status, thereby confessing to intentionally injuring Sonia's reputation.

While the act was despicable, the law was vague when it came to cyber-bullying, and in the end, Cynthia got away with fifteen days of detention and a 30,000 fine.

"Well, she got away easy," Charles said pointedly, pouting as he sauntered out of the courtroom. He would much rather if Cynthia was imprisoned instead of detained.

Sonia, on the other hand, could only smile ruefully in response. "There isn't anything we could do about it. The law is the law. Besides, Cynthia has gotten her fair share of punishment, so we should just celebrate justice, however unsatisfactory it may be."

"You're right. Should we celebrate properly, then? I hear that there's a new seafood place at Bay Street that we could try out," he suggested with a cheeky grin.

Sonia thought about the last time she had had seafood, and when she realized that it had been quite a while ago, her eyes lit up earnestly as she nodded. "Okay. Let's go."

"Yes, ma'am!" He fished out his car keys, but just as he was about to unlock the car, his phone rang.

“Give me a second. I have to take this,” he said with a bitter chuckle. Of all the times to give me a call, he thought grimly. Upon pulling out his phone and glancing at the caller ID, he raised a brow. “It’s my mom.”

“Well then, hurry up and answer the phone!” Sonia urged.

He slid his finger across the screen to answer and pressed the phone to his ear.

On the other end of the line, a middle-aged woman’s gentle voice spoke up. “Charles, has the appeal ended?”

“Yeah, it has,” Charles answered. Then, he asked, “Is there something I can help you with, Mom?”

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“It’s not you I’m looking for; I want to speak to Sonia. Is she there with you?” Grace asked on the other line, prompting Charles to glance over at Sonia.

“She’s here,” he answered.

“Pass the phone to her.”

Having made a noise of agreement, Charles handed Sonia his phone while saying, “Here, it’s my mom.”

Sonia took the phone over and greeted pleasantly, “Mrs. Lane.”

“Sonia! I’ve missed you so much.” Grace beamed as soon as she heard Sonia’s voice on the other end of the call.

Sonia, on the other hand, smiled as well. “I’ve missed you, too, Mrs. Lane.”

“You could always drop by to see me, you know,” Grace pointed out, feigning dejection.

“Sorry, Mrs. Lane. I’ve been tied up with tons of stuff recently. I barely have time to breathe,” Sonia winced and said apologetically.

“Well, you could come over for a meal right now if you have the time. I’ll bust out a few of my best recipes for you,” Grace cajoled kindly.

Sonia was just about to say something when Charles—who had been eavesdropping—spoke up instead. “Mom, I’m bringing my darling for seafood.”

Grace, however, was insistent as she countered, “You know how restaurants never run a quality check on their seafood supplies, and it’s not as if they could do better than me when it comes to cooking.”

Sonia interjected, “Thank you for the offer, Mrs. Lane. We’ll go over to your place in a bit!”

“Oh, please, no need for the formalities. See you soon!” Grace chortled happily, elated that the younger girl had agreed to drop by for a meal.

When the call ended, Charles put his phone away and gave Sonia a resigned look. “Well, it looks like we’re going to have to give the seafood restaurant a miss.”

“It’s fine; there’s always next time, anyway. Now, we should probably go and pick out gifts for your parents.” With that, she linked arms with him and led him toward the car.

After they made their rounds through the boutiques in the mall, they finally picked out an elegant cloak for Grace and a tasteful necktie for Curtis. Then, they made their way to the Lane Residence.

The Lanes had always had close ties with the Reeds, and their relationship was more family than anything else. In particular,

Grace had been best friends with Sonia's mother. As far as Sonia was concerned, Grace was like a second mother to her, having taken care of her ever since her mother's passing.

It wasn't long before Charles and Sonia pulled up in front of the Lane residence.

This was the first time Sonia had dropped by in six years, though she noted that the house looked the same as it had before. As such, she did not feel out of place at all and rather felt a warm sense of familiarity.

"Sonia!" Grace practically ran out of the house to greet her guest when she heard the sound of the car pulling up. Her eyes lit up at the sight of Sonia, and she approached the latter with her arms spread wide open.

"Mrs. Lane," Sonia greeted with a bright smile.

As both women embraced, Charles stood by the side and drawled sarcastically, "Don't mind me, Mom. I'm just your biological son, is all."

Grace rolled her eyes as she said pointedly, "I see you every day, and believe me when I say I'm getting tired of it. My attention is on Sonia now. Come here, Sonia, let me take a good look at you!" She clasped Sonia's hands in hers and slowly spun her around, then concluded plaintively, "You've lost weight."

Sonia was somewhat amused by the remark. "No, I haven't, Mrs. Lane."

"You have," Grace insisted. "Your face is all cheekbones now."

"That's because I've lost all my baby fat, so now I appear a little more slender than usual," Sonia placated. "Alright, that's enough fretting, Mrs. Lane. Shall we head into the house?"

"Oh, of course. Come along, then." Grace took her by the hand and led her into the family home.

Upon entering the villa, Sonia noted that there was no one else at home but them, and she couldn't help but ask, "Is Mr. Lane not home?"

“He’s still golfing with his buddies. No matter. Sonia, why don’t you tell me how you’ve been for the past six years.” Ever since Grace watched the press conference, she had been wanting to know all that had happened to Sonia.

“Okay,” Sonia answered easily with a nod and began to detail the life she had had with the Fullers, though she kept it brief to save Grace the heartache.

However, Grace was still furious when she heard the last of the story. She slapped the edge of the coffee table in a physical show of frustration and snapped, “I knew those Fullers were rotten! You should have told us how badly they were treating you, Sonia. If you had told us, then we would have stood up for you and gotten them to back down.”

Charles agreed as he bit into an apple. “That’s what I told her, too.”

The fact that she had kept mum about her abusive marriage wounded him, and the rage he felt never went away. That being said, he was less angry with her than he was pitiful of her.

At the sight of Charles and Grace’s outward concern, Sonia felt warmth course through her. Tears pricked her eyes as she said, “I didn’t want to make you worry over me.”

After all, she had lost both her parents, and the closest thing she had to a family was Grace and the rest of the Lanes. She might have been able to get them to stand up for her throughout her marriage to Toby, but they couldn’t come to her defense all the time. Besides, they weren’t actually related to her, which meant her troubles would only grow to become an unnecessary burden for them. She would rather give them a peace of mind than have them resent her in the long run.

“What am I going to do with you?” Grace gently prodded the younger girl’s forehead and heaved a sigh.

Sonia knew that Grace was frustrated, but she smiled good-naturedly as she wrapped the latter’s arm like an affectionate child.

Grace softened at this gesture and smoothed Sonia's hair with motherly fondness.

Just then, Charles frowned as he sniffed the air curiously. "Mom, what do you have on the stove? I think it's burning."

Upon hearing this, Grace snapped out of her thoughts, and her eyes lit up with panic. She rose to her feet in a flurry and exclaimed, "Oh, no! My seafood chowder!"

Without a second longer, she rushed toward the kitchen to salvage the chowder simmering in the pot, and thankfully, she made it in time to keep the chowder from burning.

Now that the chowder was saved, she brought two tall glasses of juice over to Sonia and said, "Here you go, Sonia. Have some juice while you watch a bit of television; I'll be in the kitchen whipping up a couple more dishes, and we can dig in after!"

"Okay, Mrs. Lane." Sonia nodded with a warm smile.

Grace shot Charles a look. "Come and help me out in the kitchen."

"Help you out?" Charles blinked. He could hardly believe what he had just heard as he pointed at his nose. "Are you serious, Mom? What could I possibly help—"

"Are you coming or not?" Grace's face was dark as she demanded coldly.

He bristled at this and did not dare reject her. Resigned, he stood up and mumbled disgruntledly, "Okay, I'm coming."

He looked dejected as he slowly shuffled along behind Grace and retreated into the kitchen.

Sonia giggled, clearly entertained to see him like this.

In the kitchen, Charles looked around the space and asked reproachfully, "What do you want me to help you with, Mom?"

Grace cast him a sideways glance. "Please; I know how useless you are with these things. There's a higher chance of you blowing up the kitchen than you actually being of any help at all."

He quirked his lips resentfully at the harsh comment. "So, what am I doing here?"

"You're here to tell me your intentions for Sonia. Do you still have feelings for her?" She looked at him intently.

Incredulous, he began to say, "Mom, how—"

"How do I know you still have feelings for her?" she continued for him, knowing what he wanted to ask.

He parted his lips as though to say something but fell silent in admission instead.

His mother was right; he liked Sonia, and he always had since they were kids. However, he never told Sonia how he truly felt about her because he knew she did not feel the same way toward him, and she saw him as her best friend. He thought his feelings were a well-kept secret, but as it turned out, his mother knew better.

"I didn't know at first, but you were the one who got drunk on the night of Sonia's wedding and blurted it out." Grace sighed heavily, then went on to say, "You know, I was pretty shocked when I heard it, too. If I had known that you like her that way, then I would have done everything in my power to set the both of you up together. But you decided to keep it a secret, and I just assumed that your affections for her were those of a brother's. By the time I found out about the truth, it was too late."

Charles rubbed his nose awkwardly and did not offer a reply.

Grace was still sorting through the vegetables as she said, "You still haven't told me if you still have feelings for her."

He turned around and peered around the kitchen entry, his eyes dark with longing as he stared in the direction of the living room. "My feelings for her have not changed in the slightest."

“Perfect. Sonia is single again, so all you have to do is to boldly pursue her and turn this boyfriend-act of yours into reality,” Grace quipped encouragingly.

She really liked Sonia, and she desperately wanted Charles to make the girl his wife.

However, he shook his head, and his face fell as he said, “No, I don’t think so. She doesn’t like me, and if I were to romantically pursue her, she would only shrink away from me out of fear. I’d rather we stay like this.”

It wasn’t as if he had not seen the age-old trope where the guy romantically pursued the female best friend, but the chances of a happy ending were slim to none, and the girl would end up being so terrorized that she would leave the boy for good. After all, the reality of a male best friend-turned-boyfriend was often harder for one to accept.

Charles didn’t want Sonia to grow apart from him, and he did not want to risk it, either. He would rather stay her best friend and be by her side than lose her altogether.

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Grace saw the glimmer in Charles’ eyes, but when it dimmed, she couldn’t help but prod him in the head. “Why are you always so caught up with your own thoughts? You’re too cowardly, and that’s why you missed Sonia.”

“It’s not my fault,” Charles grumbled plaintively.

She rolled her eyes at him. “Oh, so whose fault is it then? If you had just been bold enough to pursue Sonia romantically, then the both of you might have ended up together from the get-go.”

“It’s not as simple as you think,” he countered, lowering his eyes as he let out a bitter chuckle. “Not every girl could take their guy best friend as a boyfriend, you know.”

“Okay, so how would you know she won’t be able to take it if you never asked in the first place?” Grace pursed her lips in displeasure.

Charles gulped, unsure if he had the answer to his mother’s question.

With an impatient and dismissive wave of her hand, Grace barked, “Very well. Get out of the kitchen. You’re only going to get in my way if you stay here.”

His eyes widened. “You were the one who asked me to come in here, remember?” he argued exasperatedly, only to be ignored and pushed out of the kitchen.

“That kid’s hopeless, and it doesn’t help that he’s afraid of everything. If only he could just man up a little!” She shook her head in frustration. “Looks like I’m going to have to take things into my own hands instead. It’s time to set my son up with the girl of his dreams!” Having thought of this, she pulled out her phone and called a number. “Hi, Alaric. Didn’t you say you have an equestrian facility?”

“That’s right. What about it?” A middle-aged man’s bright and cheery voice spoke up on the other line.

Grace beamed. “Do you think I could have it for the weekend? I only need it for two days, and it’s crucial because I’m trying to set my son up with my future daughter-in-law.”

She had plans to trick Sonia and Charles into going horseback riding together, and she would create little nerve-wracking moments for them along the way.

Charles and Sonia’s chemistry might blossom into fireworks by the time they were through with horseback riding.

However, Grace’s bubble burst when Alaric explained apologetically, “I’m afraid that’s not possible. The facility’s been booked for the weekend.”

She frowned when she heard this. Disgruntled, she thought grimly, Which insolent fool has beaten me to it? "How many of them are there?" she pressed.

Alaric chuckled as he replied, "Just two. It seems as if they're planning for a date."

"Well, two isn't a crowd at all." Her eyes lit up with a brilliant idea. "Do you think you could squeeze two more in for the weekend? Maybe you could talk to your current guests and tell them that my son and my future daughter-in-law won't bother them at all!"

"Well..." He grew a little uneasy at the suggestion.

Sensing his reluctance, she put a hand on her hip and said darkly, "Have you forgotten how I've helped you out in the past, Alaric?"

It was only upon hearing this that Alaric broke into a breezy smile. Chuckling good-naturedly, he said, "Alright, you got me. I suppose I'll just have to be thick-skinned and put on my persuasive charm. I'll talk to my guests about this, okay?"

"Now that's the right attitude to have." Appeased, Grace hung up the phone and beckoned Charles and Sonia to join her at the dining table.

After the meal, Sonia patted her stomach, which bulged slightly under her shirt. She sprawled on the couch in a daze as she remarked, "Your culinary skills are as impressive as ever, Mrs. Lane."

Grace grinned at the compliment, and her eyes turned into crescents. "If you think my culinary skills are great, then you ought to drop by with Charles more often and have meals with us."

"Okay," Sonia agreed, nodding earnestly. "Your offer is too good to resist, Mrs. Lane."

"Well, I'm not asking you to resist it at all! I love cooking, and Charles and Curtis are almost never at home. There isn't a point cooking if there isn't anyone around to appreciate it," Grace complained.

Charles rolled his eyes when he heard this and paused in peeling the apple. "That's unfair, Mom. You're the one who always goes out shopping and traveling. You can't seriously blame Dad and me when you barely have time to cook for us."

"Don't interrupt our conversation, you punk. I'd hit you if I could," Grace warned through gritted teeth, clenching her fist and making as though she would punch him for real.

Charles immediately dropped the apple in his hand and leaped away from her, narrowly dodging her attack.

Even as he did so, he sang mischievously, "You can't hit me."

Sonia, on the other hand, burst into laughter as she watched the slapstick comedy that was Charles and Grace. At that moment, the living room was warm with happy sentiments.

It wasn't long before the sky darkened. Sonia glanced at the time, and when she saw that it was nearly 8.00PM, she excused herself courteously.

Grace invited her to stay the night, but she turned it down nonetheless.

"Charles, go drop her home," Grace urged as she shoved her son forward.

"I was going to do that anyway," Charles muttered. He grabbed the car keys from the coffee table and said, "Come on, darling, let's go."

Sonia nodded as she hummed in response, then waved at Grace jovially. "Goodbye, Mrs. Lane."

"Goodbye." Grace waved back.

Sonia tailed after Charles as they walked out of the villa. Then, they got in the car and drove away.

When they pulled up outside Bayside Residence an hour later, Sonia unfastened her seatbelt and opened the car door. "I'll get going now."

“Okay,” Charles answered breezily.

Sonia closed the door and rounded the car, thereafter heading straight for the building.

At the same time, Charles received a message from Grace, which read, ‘Charles, I’ve set up a date for you and Sonia at Alaric’s equestrian facility. Alaric knows all about it, and the room in the villa has been set aside for the both of you, too. I believe that you’ll get the girl of your dreams, Charles. Good luck!’

His lips twitched when he read the text.

The woman had decided to play matchmaker after all. A date, however... There was a glimmer in his eyes as he rolled down the car window, and when he saw that Sonia was about to go into the lobby, he tightened his fists and summoned all the courage he had, then called out, “Baby!”

Sonia stopped in her tracks and turned around. “Yes?”

He took a deep breath and tried to school his features into his usual, nonchalant smile so that she couldn’t tell how nervous he was. “My mom just texted and said we should head over to Alaric’s equestrian facility this weekend.”

“Huh?” She couldn’t quite hear what he had said, given how softly he had spoken.

He raked his fingers through his hair and decidedly opened the car door, then took long strides toward her. When he came to a stop in front of her, he repeated his words from earlier. “My mom booked Alaric’s equestrian facility for horseback riding, but she’s going to Europe for a shopping trip on the same weekend, and she asked that we take her slot instead. She doesn’t want the deposit to go to waste.”

He dared not meet Sonia’s eyes as he said this, afraid that she might see through his lies.

However, she did not pay attention to him and was completely enamored with the thought of horseback riding. Her eyes lit up as she nodded and said, “Okay.”

She couldn't remember the last time she had gone horseback riding. It seemed as if she had given up on the hobby after her marriage with Toby.

Now that she thought about it, she could not believe how stupid she had been to give up on her hobbies just to keep a man who did not love her.

"Great. I'll pick you up this weekend," Charles replied happily, secretly letting out a breath of relief.

She hummed in response. "Alright, I should get back home now."

He nodded. "Go on, then." However, just as she was about to turn on her heels, a sudden thought crossed his mind, and he called out to stop her, "Wait."

"What is it?" She glanced at him in askance.

He averted her gaze as he mumbled, "There's something on your head."

"What?" She raised her hand and gently dusted the top of her head. "No, there isn't."

"You missed it. Here, stop moving. I'll get it for you," Charles offered.

"Fine," she said, relenting as she stood unmoving.

He reached out for the top of her head and stepped closer to her, bridging the gap between them as he dipped his head. His lips were close to brushing against her forehead.

But just as his lips were about to touch her skin, she asked suddenly, "Did you get it yet?"

He stopped in time and gave her a tight smile. "Yeah, I did."

He withdrew his hand and stepped backward, returning to his initial position as he heaved a quiet, bitter sigh. He couldn't help but mourn over what could have happened.

I was so close to kissing her on the forehead. But this is probably for the best; what if I kissed her, and she refused to go horseback riding with me this weekend?

Meanwhile, in the idling black sedan across the road, Toby's face was glum as he stared at the two figures standing by the building entrance. His fists clenched on top of his thighs as he felt anger thrumming in his veins.

For some reason, he couldn't help the murderous rage he felt for Charles when he thought about how the latter kissed Sonia.

Toby pursed his lips, then barked icily, "Go!"

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When Tom heard Toby's command, he did not dawdle and immediately started the car.

The moment the car pulled away from the curb, his gaze flickered over to where Sonia and Charles were standing at the entrance of the building, and he sighed quietly.

I wonder what compelled President Fuller to divorce Miss Reed in order to be with Miss Gray. Now he's paying more attention to Miss Reed than ever, despite having separated. If he had known how unhappy he would be to see her getting close with another man, surely he would not have gotten a divorce in the first place.

Presently, Sonia and Charles did not notice the black sedan that drove away from the scene. She glanced down at his hand and asked, "You said there was something on my head. What was it?"

"It was a piece of lint, but I've thrown it away. It must have come off your shirt or something," he answered dismissively, waving his hand.

She did not doubt this and nodded. "Okay, then. I'm going in now. Be safe on the way home."

"I will," he said.

She turned to leave while he stood in the same spot, watching her retreating figure until it disappeared into the elevator. Still, he remained where he was and looked up at the window on one of the floors of the building. He smiled when it lit up, then lifted his foot to walk away, bracing through the pins and needles in his legs.

The next day, Sonia showed up for work at Paradigm Co., and she was about to settle down in her office when Daphne brisk-walked into the office. The latter was a bundle of nerves as she said, "Something bad has happened, President Reed."

"What is it?" Sonia asked as she slipped the strap of her handbag off her shoulder.

Daphne had no idea how to start her explanation and passed the tablet to Sonia instead. "See for yourself."

Sonia raised a brow as she took the tablet, then lowered her head to scan through the contents.

There was a video of a riot pulled up on the tablet, and judging from the way the clip shook every now and then, it was clear to see that someone had recorded it on their phone. Nonetheless, the quality was clear enough.

Sonia saw an old lady sitting on the ground alongside a middle-aged woman. The both of them were sobbing as they let out a torrent of abuse, which sounded harsh and unpleasant to the ears.

Surrounding them were a bunch of construction workers who were pointing at them while discussing among themselves.

The video was a short one, and it didn't take long for Sonia to get to the end of it. However, her face was grim as she asked, "This is our site, isn't it?"

"It is," Daphne confirmed.

“Why are they causing a scene at the site?” Sonia’s brows furrowed as she pointed at the old lady and her middle-aged companion.

Daphne let out a quick sigh. “The head of the construction team sent the clip over, and he said that the excavator on site flung lumps of dried dirt that ended up killing the old lady’s and the woman’s husband and son, respectively.”

“What?” Sonia faltered. “Their husband and son were killed?”

“That’s what the women are saying. They claimed that their husband and son were walking by the construction site one night when they were hit by large lumps of dried dirt; they died on the spot,” Daphne clarified.

Sonia was incredulous. “The incident happened at night? But no one was working on the site at night, so there is no way that the excavator could have been operating then! Besides, the entire site was barricaded, and the excavator was operating in the center of the compound. How in the world could their husband and son get into the site in the first place? Are they seriously saying that dried dirt could be flung over hundreds of meters?”

This is obviously a false allegation!

More to the point, the construction workers were dispatched by the government, which meant that any fatality on-site would be taken care of discreetly before the two women could even get the chance to riot.

Daphne, too, was equally incredulous. “And now the two women are causing trouble while insisting that we compensate for their losses.”

“How much are they asking for?” Sonia asked casually as she took a sip of her coffee. She was no longer worried now that she knew the incident was fake.

Daphne raised her hand and stretched her five fingers, then said, “Five million. They’re saying that they would obstruct our construction work by causing a stir on the internet if we don’t compensate them.”

“Five million. How bold of them to ask for such a ludicrous amount from the get-go.” Sonia scoffed coldly. “As far as I’m concerned, they aren’t really asking for money; they want to get in the way of the construction.”

It would be foolish for anyone to fork out five million to stifle people like them.

“No way.” Daphne’s eyes widened in disbelief. “Why would two women keep us from plant construction, anyway?”

“Because someone else is orchestrating this, and these two women are just puppets,” Sonia explained flatly as she narrowed her eyes.

Daphne’s jaw dropped when she heard this. “President Reed, are you saying that someone paid for these two women to cause a scene at the site?”

“There’s an 80% chance that that is true, otherwise it would take a lot more than two women to gang up and defraud us of five million. Someone’s backing them up and giving them instructions, and whoever it is knows that we won’t fork out five million, nor could we afford to. The mastermind’s intention is as clear as day,” Sonia elaborated icily.

Her analysis of the situation took Daphne by surprise. “If that’s the case, then whoever is orchestrating this is an odious person indeed! Did we rub anyone the wrong way?”

Sonia pursed her red lips. “Have you forgotten the person who has been eyeing my land?”

“Titus! You’re talking about President Gray, aren’t you?” Daphne answered hurriedly.

Sonia nodded. “That’s right. It has to be him. He practically warned me that he would come after that piece of land when he failed to buy it from me, not to mention his attempt at barring all the engineering teams in Seafield from working on our plant construction. Now that Titus knows the construction is underway, he’ll do anything he can to stop it.”

“How shameless could he be?” Daphne hissed angrily.

The corners of Sonia's lips curled up in an ominous smirk. "How shameless, indeed. But I have to admit that he's made a clever move this time. According to the law, any fatality on-site would warrant the construction to halt for three months, but we'd still have to go on paying the wages for all the workers as well as other necessary expenses."

"Not to mention the penalty that we'd have to pay if we don't complete the construction on time," Daphne added.

Sonia nodded. "Precisely. Once the project comes to an abrupt halt, we won't be able to complete the construction within the stipulated time. The penalty and all the other payments would be enough to crush us. Titus is planning to kill two birds with one stone."

Even if Titus did not succeed in stopping the construction works, he might very well bankrupt her company.

He might even ruin her reputation in the process, considering somebody died on her construction site due to alleged negligence. It would be hard for her to make a comeback from such an incident, and though this was a low blow on his part, she had to admit it was a ruthless and clever move on his part.

"So what should we do, President Reed?" Daphne asked worriedly.

Regardless of the situation, Sonia was nonchalant as a bubble of mirth escaped her parted lips. "Oh, there's nothing to worry about. We'll just let him wreak havoc however he wants."

"What do you mean?" Daphne was bewildered.

Sonia did not answer but returned the question with a question instead. "How's the government's museum project going?"

"They've laid down the foundation for it."

A glimmer flashed in Sonia's eyes as she perked up and said, "Well then, you could try to get the word out to Titus and tell him that the museum construction is part of our plant project as well."

At that moment, comprehension dawned upon Daphne, whose eyes lit up as she gave Sonia a thumbs-up. "Talk about a brilliant strategy, President Reed!"

Sonia smiled. "Remember—he can't find out that we're the ones who leaked the word."

"Got it."

"Go back to your desk now. There's nothing more we can do about this. We'll just have to let someone else teach Titus a lesson." With that, Sonia waved her hand to dismiss her secretary.

"Yes, ma'am." Daphne turned on her heels and left.

Meanwhile, it wasn't long before Titus heard the news, and his face darkened as he brought his fist down on the desk. "What? She's taken upon construction for two plants?"

"Yes, because it would be a waste to build just one plant on that large piece of land, so she decided to build two instead," his assistant answered respectfully.

Titus grew thunderous at this, and his wizened features twisted into a menacing grimace.

The land was in a prime location with excellent topography, and its commercial value was impressive. It would be a waste to use it for plants, regardless of how many Sonia planned on building.

At the thought of how Sonia was going to sully the priceless land that was supposed to be his, Titus felt as if someone had stabbed him in the heart with a knife.

"President Gray, should we carry on with the false riot?" the assistant asked cautiously when he noticed the shift in the atmosphere.

Titus was sullen as he snapped, "What do you think? Get someone over and deface that plant of hers immediately!"

"Yes, sir." The assistant nodded and immediately left to carry out this latest set of instructions.

Just then, Toby and Tom walked into the office.

“Titus, did I just hear you say you want to deface Sonia’s plant?” Toby frowned as he asked, but there was no telling if he was angry about this.

Titus waved his assistant away before looking over at Toby. “So, you heard everything?”

“Pretty much.” Toby shrugged slightly.

Titus narrowed his eyes dangerously. “You don’t happen to be asking so you could stop my plans and help your ex-wife, do you?”

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“No,” Toby answered curtly as he walked over to the couch and sat down.

Sonia’s plant construction was being taken care of by the engineering team dispatched by the government, who would undoubtedly be in charge of handling all mishaps on-site, so there was no need for Toby to intervene or help out at all.

Having heard Toby’s firm, unaffected answer, Titus perked up slightly and crossed the room to the couch as well. “So why do you ask in the first place?”

“Have you forgotten all about Fox Eyes, Titus?” Toby looked up at the other man inquisitively.

At that moment, hatred flashed in Titus’ eyes as he spat through gritted teeth, “Of course I haven’t, but it doesn’t matter, because this time around, I’ve been really discreet; I didn’t even leave any digital footprints. There’s no way he could trace anything back to me.”

"There's no guarantee that he won't." Toby reached for a cup and poured tea for himself, then said breezily, "He could very well trace everything back to you if he wants to."

"Alright, that's enough now," Titus said irritably. "Are you here just so you could lecture me?"

He had always thought of himself as the elder, not to mention Toby's future father-in-law. As such, he found himself constantly annoyed by the latter's casual mannerisms during their conversations. He would much rather Toby show his respect.

That being said, he could not speak his mind on this, given Toby's stature and power far exceeded his own.

Presently, upon seeing that Titus was getting irritated, Toby let the matter drop. He took a sip of his tea and put down the cup, then he explained, "I'm here to talk to you about the partnership. I've gone through the proposal, but there are a couple of amendments that need to be made."

Tom had been standing behind Toby when he heard this, and he smoothly handed a document over to the latter.

Toby flipped the document open and placed it on the coffee table, thereafter sliding it toward Titus as he said, "I've highlighted the parts that need amendment. You could take a look if you'd like, Titus."

"Very well," Titus declared, taking the document. After scanning through the proposed amendments, he nodded and said somberly, "I agree that these terms are much better than the previous ones I've come up with. Alright then, I'll have these amendments made and send you a final copy."

"That's fine by me." Toby rose to his feet. "I shall take my leave then, Titus."

With that, he turned around and left with Tom in his wake.

Once the both of them had gotten in the car, Tom glanced briefly into the rearview mirror and asked warily, "President Fuller, don't

you think President Gray is a little presumptuous to think that he has gone off the grid just because he left no digital footprints?"

Toby pinched his nose bridge tiredly as he answered, "He's growing impatient after his recent plans were foiled by Sonia and Fox Eyes. He's desperate to teach Sonia a lesson, so naturally, we shouldn't expect him to make any carefully-calculated moves."

"That's true," Tom agreed with a nod of his head. Then, a sudden thought crossed his mind, and he asked, "By the way, President Fuller, why didn't you mention that Miss Reed's plant project will be handled by the government's engineering team? If President Gray insists on wrecking the site, then he'll be arrested once they find out he orchestrated it."

Toby lowered his gaze, thereby concealing the dark gleam in his eyes as he answered easily, "I didn't think there was a need for me to do that. Titus has always wanted to go head-to-head with Sonia, and he often knows no boundaries. It would do him some good to calm down after this incident teaches him a harsh lesson."

"Is that so?" Tom cast Toby a sideways glance, clearly skeptical of his explanation.

When he heard the implication in his assistant's tone, Toby demanded sullenly, "Why? Do you think I'm up to something else?"

I thought you were trying to help Miss Reed get back at President Gray, Tom thought. However, he dared not try to be sassy, and instead schooled his features into a solemn expression as he quipped, "No, of course not."

Toby scoffed coldly and decided to let him get away with it.

When it was 2.00PM, Sonia managed to hear about the news about the museum site being wrecked by a bunch of thugs who had vandalized and destroyed the newly-laid foundation.

According to the thug leader, the site on which the museum was being built was their territory. They extorted protection rackets from the construction managers, threatening to wreck the site if they did not get the money.

Shortly after, the thugs were arrested.

“Good riddance!” Daphne was mightily pleased as she went on to say, “Did they honestly think that they could get away with wrecking the museum’s building site?”

While the engineering team in charge of the museum project was also carrying out Sonia’s plant construction, the employers for the respective projects were different. They could not have the two women who had caused a ruckus at the plant site arrested without Sonia’s orders, but the same could not be said for the fiasco at the museum site earlier; the thugs were arrested without hassle.

“So, what happened to the thugs?” Sonia asked now with a smirk playing on her lips.

Daphne quickly regained composure as she answered, “They’re being kept at the detention center. The higher-ups are very concerned about this incident and will hold a thorough interrogation. There’s no telling if that bunch of thugs could take it.”

“Got it. Have someone keep an eye on the perimeters of the detention center, and let me know if anything interesting happens,” Sonia instructed coolly as she nodded.

“Yes, ma’am.” Daphne turned to leave.

Meanwhile, at the detention center, the thugs were all scared witless.

They knew that they might very well end up in this place, but they certainly had not expected to be interrogated by SWAT officers instead of the usual policemen.

All the color drained from the thugs’ faces when they saw the weapons the SWAT officers were carrying as well as the stun baton strapped to their waists.

They were mere thugs, and they had never once encountered such intimidating forces. With the living daylight scared out of them, they dared not lie throughout the interrogation and told the whole truth, claiming that someone had sent them to vandalize the site.

Following this, the SWAT officers carried out their investigation based on the information they elicited, and it didn't take long before they traced everything back to Titus.

Consequently, Titus was taken away by a couple of police officers during a company meeting.

Sheer disbelief was written all over his face as he was taken into custody, and there was a look of bewilderment in his eyes. Try as he might, he could not fathom how he had exposed himself as the mastermind,

Soon, the news of Titus' arrest began to circulate around the internet.

The netizens were in an uproar as they tried to guess what the chairman of Triforce Enterprise could have done to be arrested.

Almost in an instant, the stocks for Triforce Enterprise plummeted on the market, stirring panic among the shareholders.

Daphne and Sonia were at Paradigm Co. when they saw the clamor that was beginning to fan out over cyberspace, and they were in better spirits afterward.

Charles, on the other hand, opened a bottle of red wine to celebrate the occasion. "The old fogeys at Triforce Enterprise ought to start questioning Titus' managing capabilities now that he's been taken into police custody."

Sonia swirled her wine as she mused, "If only I had enough cash to buy the residual shares for Triforce Enterprise. After all, it was a shame not to acquire these shares during the company's stock market crisis.

Charles grinned as he leaned closer to her. "I could get them for you as a gift."

"Forget it." She shrugged nonchalantly. "I won't have much use for them even if I were to buy them now."

"Okay then." He was somewhat dejected as he returned to his seat. "By the way, we would have had a much harder time getting

back at Titus if that internet buddy of yours didn't work together with the government."

"Oh, that reminds me," she exclaimed mildly, then took out her phone.

Realizing that she did not intend to elaborate on her sentence, Charles asked, "What is it?"

"I need to thank him," Sonia explained briefly with a smile. She found the name Z-H and clicked into the conversation, then typed out, 'Thank you.'

Toby was in the middle of a meeting when his phone beeped next to him with a new message.

While the volume had been turned down, the sound of the notification still rang loud and clear in the stifling silence of the conference room. Everyone at the table turned to glance at Toby curiously.

There was a glimmer in his eyes as he said coolly, "Go on with the report."

"Yes, sir," everyone responded in unison, then lowered their heads to get back to the work at hand.

It was only then that Toby took his phone to click on the message. When he saw Sonia's message of thanks, he immediately understood what she was thanking him for, but he pretended otherwise as he replied, 'What are you thanking me for?'

Within seconds, Sonia replied, 'Thank you for the idea you gave me the other day. I wouldn't have been able to take down Titus without it.'

Z-H wasted no time in typing, 'Oh, is that all? You don't have to thank me for it, seeing as you've already thanked me last time.'

Sonia laughed lightly as she texted, 'Nevertheless, thank you. When are you returning to the country?'

Returning to the country? Toby frowned slightly. He wasn't sure why she was under the impression that he was abroad, but he did not deny this, but instead opted to go along with it as he answered, 'There's no definite plan yet.'

Sonia couldn't help the surge of disappointment when she read this. 'Very well, then. Let me know when you're back so I can buy you a meal. I ought to properly thank you for all the help you gave this time.'

The corner of Toby's lips curled up. 'Okay.'

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After that, Sonia stopped texting and placed her phone on her lap.

Charles sounded a little jealous as he smirked at her. "Well, that took quite some time."

She could sense the acrimony in his voice, to which she responded by rolling her eyes. "Alright now. Aren't you going back to your office? Why are you still hanging around?"

"Hmph, you woman! The only thing you like to do is to drive me away!" He stood up and left a puzzling remark.

She was both amused and speechless at his reply but did not pay any more attention to him. Instead, she turned around and picked up a file to read.

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At the Gray Residence, Julia was stunned and helpless after learning of her husband's arrest. At that moment, she could do nothing but cry.

Slumped on the sofa, she had a box of tissues on her knees. In front of her, the coffee table was already littered with a heap of crumpled tissues.

“Tina, what can we do?” With swollen eyes, she looked at her daughter, who was seated across from her.

Tina did not cry, but she bit hard on her lower lip tensely. “I don’t know either. Let me make a call to the guys in the company. I’ll ask if they have any way to bail Dad out.”

“Quick, go make the call.”

Julia urged her to do so. As a full-time stay-at-home-mom, she had been living comfortably on Titus’s generous provision. Now that he was arrested, she felt as though her world had collapsed.

Tina pulled out her phone and made a call to a shareholder who was quite close to their family. Soon, the call was picked up, but a few minutes later, she put the phone down with a sour expression.

Seeing that, Julia had a bad premonition about their attempt, but she still asked her daughter with hope, “How was it?”

Tina shook her head helplessly. “Mr. Renault told me that Dad had destroyed a museum that was built by the authorities. Since there is solid evidence of the crime, he can’t post bail.”

The truth came as a shock to Julia, whose face paled immediately. She felt the world spinning around her. Placing a hand on her chest, she sobbed even louder and wailed, “Why did this happen? Why would your dad want to destroy the museum?”

Tina kept quiet and lowered her head to hide the contorted expression on her face.

She was confused by the situation. Titus had asked that Sonia’s factory be destroyed, but how would he end up destroying a national museum instead?

What exactly went wrong?

“Tina, you should look for Toby.” An idea popped up in Julia’s head, and she desperately clutched her daughter’s hand. “Look for Toby?” Tina looked at her.

“That’s right! Since your dad can’t post bail, the only way to release him is to ask the authorities for help. Isn’t Toby a good friend of Zane Coleman? Have him talk to Zane and get your dad released,” Julia nodded and explained.

Tina’s eyes sparkled with excitement, and she stood up. “I will find Toby now.”

No matter what, she was determined to save her dad. If not, once Titus was kept under arrest for a long time, his position as the chairman would definitely be removed through the joint decision of the Board of Directors. Even if he had the majority shares in his hands, he would lose control and influence over Triforce Enterprise.

By then, her status in the socialite circle would plummet.

A handbag in her hand, she left the Gray Residence for the Fuller Residence.

When Toby returned from work, he found Tina chatting with Jean at home.

“Toby!” When Tina saw him, she stood up with a wide smile. “You’re home.”

Jean smiled too. “And I was wondering why Tina suddenly went silent. It turns out that she was focused on you! Okay then. An old lady like me shall excuse myself.”

“Madam White!” Tina promptly blushed in embarrassment. Jean covered her mouth and chuckled as she left.

“Why are you here?” Toby placed his briefcase down and stared at her. She walked up to him and took his arm affectionately. “Why? Can’t I pay a visit?”

“No. I mean, if you want to pay a visit, you can tell me ahead of time so that I can pick you up.” He led her to the sofa, and both took a seat.

She poured a glass of water for him. “That’s fine. I can drive here. You don’t have to pick me up.”

He grunted, and his eyes gleamed. “Did something happen to make you pay a sudden visit?”

She hesitated for a while before asking, “Toby, have you heard about my dad’s arrest?”

“I know.” He took a sip of water. “So, are you meeting me to discuss that matter?”

“Yes.” Tina nodded. “Toby, could you please help my dad out? He did not intentionally destroy the museum.”

Titus did not intentionally destroy the museum?

His eyes flickered with a hint of mockery that disappeared within seconds. Shaking his head gently, he confessed sincerely, “I can’t help him this time. In fact, I have asked around about your dad. From what I know, there is solid criminal evidence, and the government forbids him from posting bail.”

“I know. I’m not asking you to bail him out. I just wanted you to put in a word with Mr. Coleman. I believe that if the Coleman Family interferes, Dad could definitely be released.” She stared at him with misty eyes that shined with hope.

He frowned at her. “Indeed, the Colemans could help to save him, but they won’t do so. Once they offer help to a suspect, their enemies would grab the opportunity to ruin them. Do you understand, Tina?”

On top of that, it was the time of the year when Seafield underwent its change of city leadership, which the Colemans were eyeing. Therefore, they would never allow themselves to take the wrong step at such a critical moment.

“I don’t.” Tina’s eyes welled up with tears. “You have not even talked to them! How would you know that they won’t help?”

His frown deepened. “Tina, do you think that I’m lying to you?”

“No, that’s not it.” Her eyes wavered in guilt as her voice was soft. Still, Toby immediately picked up her white lie. He pursed his lips and felt a wave of fatigue washing over him. “Anyway, keep out of this matter. Titus—”

“How can I keep out of this matter?” Clenching her fists, she cut him off. “He’s my dad! I can’t just watch on as he gets sent to prison. If you don’t want to help me, I will think of a way myself!”

With that, she ran out of the residence crying. Toby wanted to call out to her, but for some unknown reason, he could not open his mouth.

On the second floor, Tyler leaned against the balcony railing and watched as the drama unfolded beneath him. “Toby, aren’t you going to run after her?”

“No. It’s good to give her some space to calm down.” Toby rubbed his swollen and throbbing temples.

Tyler smirked and added, “Ah, well, Tina is really something. You did not say that you wouldn’t help her, but she took it as a rejection. You must be thinking of another way to save Mr. Gray, but she doesn’t get it. Not only that, she gets angry at you. How unreasonable!”

“That’s enough. You should talk less,” Toby reprimanded his sibling impatiently.

Tyler scoffed and continued, “I am going to say it anyway. Look, I can tell what’s going on perfectly fine. After you turned down her request to meet with Zane, she started blaming you secretly. Now, I can finally see the whole picture. Tina is not as nice as she tried to portray herself as—she’s incredibly petty!”

To that, Toby merely lowered his gaze without a word. When Tyler observed Toby’s lack of rebuttal, he stared at his brother agape. “No way, Toby! Do you also agree that she’s petty?”

This time, Toby shot him a cold look. Instead of feeling fear, Tyler ran downstairs in excitement. “Toby, since when did you know that Tina is petty? Since you know about it, why would you still love her? What is it that you see in her?”

What is it that I see in Tina?

Toby’s eyes gleamed with doubt and suspicion. When he thought about it, he could not recall the qualities that made him fall for Tina. He was in love with the girl that he exchanged letters with,

an angelic being who was kind, lovely, and as vibrant as the sun. She radiated a warm energy that could cheer up everyone around her.

To his disappointment, he rarely observed any of those qualities on Tina, causing him to doubt himself a couple of times. Is Tina really the girl I exchanged letters with?

But who else could she have been if she was not Tina?

“Toby, what are you thinking?” Tyler sensed that he was distracted and waved a hand in front of him.

He pursed his lips. “Nothing. I’ll go upstairs for now.”

“Toby, you haven’t answered my question!” Tyler trotted behind him closely.

Toby couldn’t care less about his gossipy brother and closed the door in Tyler’s face.

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Tyler almost slammed his face into Toby’s closed door, but thankfully, he stopped in time. After that, he sighed and left with a disappointed look.

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The next day, when Sonia and Charles were pouring over the files in her office, Daphne rushed in worriedly and exclaimed, “President Reed, this is bad! Titus Gray is released!”

“What?” Sonia’s face fell at the unbelievable news. “He’s released?”

“When was that?” Charles questioned.

Daphne's eyes quickly swept past him, after which she replied in a respectful tone, "It happened this morning. He even posted a status update on the official website of Triforce Enterprise, announcing that he was not arrested for breaking the law; he was only at the police department to cooperate with an investigation. Now, the stock price of Triforce Enterprise has also stabilized."

"How could that happen?" The frown entrenched on Charles's forehead was so deep that it could instantly crush a passing mosquito.

Sonia bit her lip and mused. "Something must have happened behind this. It's impossible for Titus Gray to be released!"

"I'll send some men to look into this." As Charles spoke, he took his phone and went to the balcony to make calls. Left alone in the office, Sonia cast her glance on the floor with a troubled expression on her face. She was completely in a bad mood.

At first, she believed that Titus Gray could never escape prison time. With him gone, she could easily bring down Triforce Enterprise. After all, a Triforce Enterprise without its shrewd leader at helm was nothing more than a defanged tiger, powerless and defenseless. Therefore, she was aghast to learn that Titus Gray was released in no time, which had messed up her plans.

At the thought of it, she rubbed her temples in aggrievement. Right then, someone knocked on the office door, so she drew her hand and announced, "Come in."

The visitor entered, and it turned out to be the secretary of Asher Dafoe of Paradigm Co.

Why is his secretary here?

"Is there anything?" she calmly asked with her eyes fixed on him. He smiled at her and replied, "Vice President Reed, President Dafoe has invited you to join a meeting at the meeting room."

Her pupils shrank after she heard the news. Asher Dafoe is back! When did that happen?

She immediately looked over at Daphne, who had been standing quietly at the side, but the latter shook her head in shock, indicating that she had no idea about President Dafoe's return as well.

Sonia tightened her lips with a heavy heart, but she maintained a faint smile on her face. "Got it. Tell President Dafoe that I'll be there soon."

"Sure," the secretary answered and left her office.

At that time, Charles happened to reenter the room and immediately sensed the change in the atmosphere. Seeing the look on Sonia's face, he could not help but ask Daphne, "What's wrong with my baby?"

Although Daphne was used to hearing him calling Sonia his 'baby', she still felt a little bitter every time she heard the affectionate nickname. Looking down at her feet, she carefully hid the sorrow in her eyes and tried her best to sound natural. "President Dafoe is back."

"What? When did he come back? Why did we hear nothing before this?" He narrowed his eyes doubtfully while Sonia pursed her lips tighter. "Looks like he purposely hid the news of his return from us because he was worried that we'd stop him."

In the whole of Paradigm Co., the person who disliked her the most must be Asher Dafoe. He was one of the earliest followers of her dad. After the death of her dad, the company fell right into Asher's hands.

Last month, had it not been Asher's business trip, she could not have even received the right to manage Paradigm Co. despite being the biggest shareholder. Perhaps he was worried that she would stop him from returning because she wanted to manage the company, which was why he chose to return without a sound.

"Is he delusional?" Charles rolled his eyes.

Sonia let out a suppressed sigh and stood up. "Alright. Let's get to the meeting room for now."

Without a word, he nodded and followed her to the venue. However, just when they were about to reach the meeting room, she received a sudden call from Toby.

She was initially taken aback by the unexpected caller, but she soon rejected the call, for she had no intention of talking to him at all. Before this, she had made it clear that she did not want to get involved with him in any way. Therefore, she had no good reason to take his call.

“Who’s that?” Charles questioned.

Her eyes flickered for a bit, but she hurriedly shook her head. She was about to tell him that it was a stranger, but her phone chimed uncooperatively at that moment.

It was a text from Toby. ‘Grandma is sick. She wants to see you.’

After reading his text, her eyes were filled with a look of concern. She immediately abandoned her plan to draw a line between herself and Toby and called him back. “What sickness is it?”

Toby could tell the worry in her voice and gave her a stern reply, “Last night, she fell down when she was using the toilet.”

“What?” Her voice was instantly raised by a few octaves as her heart leaped into her throat. Clutching tightly onto her phone, she inquired anxiously, “How’s Grandma’s injury? Is it serious?”

Even a young person could get seriously injured from falling down in the bathroom, not to mention the impact on the elderly.

“Don’t worry. She’s pretty lucky to only suffer from a fractured leg. Other than that, she’s fine,” Toby replied while pinching the bridge of his nose.

Sonia let out a sigh of relief. “That’s good to hear. Is she in the hospital now?”

Toby gave a light nod and grunted.

“Got it. I will visit her in the afternoon,” she promised.

"I will pick you up."

"No, it's fine." Her face was expressionless when she rejected him with a cold voice. "Just share the location with me."

Without giving him a chance to speak, she immediately hung up.

Staring at his home screen, he pursed his lips with an amused look. In the past, he was always the one to hang up on her. After the divorce, the tables had turned.

This is how terrible it feels to be coldly hung up on.

"Was that a call from Toby?" Charles stole a glance at her phone, sounding obviously jealous.

She was puzzled by his reaction but nodded truthfully. "Grandma fell down and injured herself. I will visit her at the hospital in the afternoon."

"She's Toby's Grandma, and you have divorced him. Why would you visit her?" he sneered.

She tucked her phone away and explained, "Don't put it that way. Grandma has always been good to me. Now that she's hospitalized, how can I not visit? Alright, let's go. We'd better not keep President Dafoe waiting."

Charles merely shrugged at her proper response.

The two pushed the door open to find that the meeting room was packed with people. Countless pairs of eyes were staring at the latecomers, and they were all the shareholders or senior management of Paradigm Co.

After scanning the room, she turned her attention to the most important seat at the end of the long table.

Before today, she had always been sitting there. Right now, the seat was occupied by someone else—Asher Dafoe, the current president of Paradigm Co.

“President Dafoe, welcome back,” she squeezed a smile and greeted him.

The man fiddled with the fountain pen between his fingers. “Ah, I thought you purposely arrived late because you were unhappy about my return.”

Even though her eyes darkened, she still held the smile on her face. “Why would I be? I was slightly delayed by some matters. President Dafoe, you’re an understanding man. I hope you won’t hold this minor issue against me.”

He narrowed his eyes and started to scrutinize her cautiously.

At first, he had wanted to teach her a lesson by giving her a hard time for her tardiness. By doing so, he wanted to hint that he was the one with de facto power in the company, even though she was the largest shareholder.

To his surprise, the quick-witted young lady responded with a bright comment, reminding him of the unimportance of this insignificant issue. If he were to press on, he would be painted as a petty man who liked to bully others. That’s some fast reflex. Looks like I have underestimated her.

Smiling robotically, he cooed, “Of course not. I’m not the petty type. Why would I get angry over an understandable matter?”

“Thank you, President Dafoe.” She still had a smile on her face when she replied.

Charles gave her a thumbs-up underneath the table and whispered, “Baby, you’re awesome.”

“Stop joking around.” She reacted to the compliment by rolling her eyes at him.

The subtle interactions between the two were all observed by the sharp-eyed Asher, whose wrinkled face showed a somber look. “Okay. Since everyone’s here, the meeting shall commence.”

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The attendees immediately straightened their postures and paid attention to Asher, who started to share stories from his business trips abroad.

When he was done speaking, he instantly shifted the topic to Sonia. "I heard about the problems that surfaced during my absence in the company. Sonia has managed everything well on my behalf. Good job!"

On his behalf? She winced at his description but soon broke into a smile. "President Dafoe, please drop the formalities. After all, I am the largest shareholder in this company and as the vice president, I have the responsibility to manage the company. All the blood, sweat and tears are part and parcel of the job."

Upon hearing that, Asher's lips twitched as he simmered in anger. This young lady is a tough nut to crack indeed.

He refused to believe that she was oblivious to the subtext of his words—that he was back to reclaim his power to manage the company.

"Oh, is that so? Sonia, you are quite the sensible and mature young lady! Anyway, now that I'm back, you can take a back seat and relax." Asher stared at Sonia with a fake smile.

A smiling Sonia looked straight into his eyes. "That's fine! I am still young and I have no problem taking on some challenges. President Dafoe, you have nothing to worry about."

Asher's expression immediately fell after he heard her courageous reply.

At the same time, members of the senior management and other shareholders lowered their heads and held their tongues, for they were surprised at Sonia's guts to publicly wrestle with Asher

Dafoe for power. Should we describe her as courageous or hopelessly naive?

Even Charles was stunned by her bold move.

Although he personally thought that she had recklessly started a power struggle at the wrong time, he chose to stand by her side regardless of whether she made the right decision out of his love for her.

“Baby, all the best!” He punched the air with his two fists to cheer her on. After being stupefied by his actions, Sonia fired back at him, “Oh, shut up.”

Charles giggled and promptly fell silent.

When Asher saw Sonia flirting in the middle of the tense situation, his eyes widened in anger at her insolence. “Young lady, are you being serious right now?”

She smiled. “Of course I am! As the largest shareholder and the vice president of the company, it would be bad not to have any decision-making powers. That is why I request to share the leadership with you!”

Deep down in her heart, she knew very well that she could not win against Asher. After all, he had been managing the company for years and the majority of the senior management as well as the shareholders were on his side.

Still, Sonia could not bring herself to surrender her power to Asher. Therefore, she came to the secret decision that even if she could not safeguard all her power, she had to at least keep half of it.

The intensity of Asher’s anger gradually transformed into hilarity and bewilderment as he cackled, “Wow, the younger generation nowadays is truly ambitious. Why have I not seen that side of you before?”

Sonia flicked her hair before she answered calmly, “That’s because I was living under my dad’s protection. Now that he’s no longer

around, I have to stand up and carry the weight on my own. If he were alive, he would have been elated for me. Don't you think so?"

He tightened his fists and hid the malice in his eyes as he replied through gritted teeth, "You are right." This young lady is really something! She brings up Henry to attack me and remind me that I was one of Henry's mentees, which means I would be an ingrate to mistreat his daughter!

Too bad Henry was unable to retort, for if he did, Asher would be seen as an ingrate and public opinion would swiftly turn against him.

Plus, it was the cold, hard truth that Asher did not hold as many shares as Sonia. If the share prices were affected by public opinion, the shareholders would definitely pin the blame on him. He could almost foresee the domino effect—the bunch of them would call for a shareholders' meeting to reelect the company's president, which would send his years of management down the drain.

At the thought of it, his chest rose violently, but he restrained his explosive rage and stared at her. "Sonia, you are indeed Henry's daughter! Sure, I can share the leadership with you, but..."

Sonia's gaze wavered at the abrupt turn in his sentence. "Please continue, President Dafoe."

She knew it. He would not share the power without putting up a fight. Of course he would set a trap for her to fall into.

Asher picked up a document beside him. "This is a proposal for a partnership on an alternative energy technology. It took me a lot of effort to gain a seat at the meeting for this proposal. The partner who conceived the idea plans to have five partners onboard. As long as you can secure a seat in this partnership for Paradigm Co., I will share the leadership with you."

After a pause, he introduced the grim consequences of failure, "If you can't secure a place, you have to surrender your leadership and leave Paradigm Co. as just another shareholder. Of course, if you fail in your mission but insist on taking the leadership from me, please do not blame me for taking things to the extreme and ruining the company. Sonia, what do you think?"

“You’re threatening her!” Charles pointed an accusatory finger at Asher, but Sonia pressed Charles’ hand down and looked at the old fox. “Okay, I agree to the conditions.”

“Sonia—”

Sonia looked at Charles with a serious expression. “Charles, you should know what Paradigm Co. means to me. Even if this is a trap, I will have to jump into it. Do you understand?”

He opened his mouth but could not utter a word. She beamed in satisfaction and reached out to Asher. “Give me the document then.”

Asher obliged with a conniving smile. “Two in the afternoon—that’s the time of the meeting. Sonia, don’t run late like you did just now!”

He did not believe that she could successfully secure the partnership, for the leading partner had declared that they would only work with the most capable companies. He knew that Paradigm Co. was underqualified to be a business partner; therefore, he was coolly waiting for her defeat.

The meeting ended just like that. Charles answered a call and left the room while Sonia returned to her office with the proposal. She took a seat and immediately started to peruse the document.

Her work continued until 1:00PM, when she finally placed aside the proposal that she had reviewed countless times. Then, she drove to the venue of the meeting—Universal Hotel.

She arrived at the hotel at 1:50PM, which was ten minutes from the meeting time. She parked her car and rushed into the hotel in her high heels. The closing doors of an elevator caught her eyes and she hurriedly called out, “Wait for me! I need to enter too.”

That’s a familiar voice... Toby narrowed his eyes and placed a hand between the closing elevator doors.

When the elevator sensed the obstruction, it came to a quiet stop before it slid open again.

Upon seeing that, Sonia's eyes sparkled with hope, for she knew that the person in the elevator was waiting for her. She quickened her steps.

Finally, she rushed into the elevator. While her hands were on her knees, she bent over and panted heavily, "Thank you."

Toby lowered his eyes to look at her and his gaze accidentally fell on her slightly-opened collar.

He could clearly see Sonia's pale skin that trembled from her huffing and puffing through the low-cut collar. It was a dangerously seductive sight to him.

His eyes darkened as he replied in a low voice, "Don't mention it."

Sonia was in the midst of wiping away her sweat when she came to a sudden halt. Since she thought that she must have misheard his words, she straightened her posture and looked up at the man.

When she realized that he was indeed Toby, she placed a hand over her eyes in defeat. God, are you messing with me? How could I run into him on a random elevator of all places?

She pursed her rosy lips and took two steps to the side with an icy expression to keep a distance between them.

He observed the huge space between them, which could accommodate another three more people, and his expression darkened. Am I the plague? Why is she avoiding me?

Toby looked at his feet, battling the frustrated feelings in his heart.

Soon, the elevator arrived on her floor. As she was eager to get out of the space she had awkwardly shared with him, she impatiently stepped out.

After taking a few steps out, she heard the sound of footsteps closely following behind her.

"Wait, that can't be it." Sonia's lips twitched in surprise and she slightly turned her face sideways to steal a glance from the corner

of her eyes. When she confirmed that Toby was indeed walking behind her, she could not help but come up with a bold guess. Could he be headed toward the same destination as me?

Her wild guess gradually turned into silent confirmation as they inched closer to the room.

When she finally stood outside the room and turned around to look at Toby, she could tell from the shock in his eyes as she confirmed that he was here for the same meeting as well.

With that being said, it did not come as a surprise for her because the Fuller Group was a heavyweight in Seafield. Since Toby was the head of the Fuller Group, it wouldn't make sense for him to be absent from the discussion of a lucrative business proposal.

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"Aren't you going in?" By now, Toby was also aware that Sonia was here for the meeting, even though he had no idea how she managed to secure a place in the meeting.

She bit her lower lip in hesitation and answered, "Why don't you head in first? I don't want to enter at the same time as you."

At that moment, she could tell that the room was bustling with activity from the muffled sounds.

If she entered the room with him, the attendees might gossip about them due to the awkward nature of their relationship.

Toby sensed her concern and lowered his gaze. "There are three minutes left. If you're late, you will lose the right to join."

After that, he pushed the door open and entered the room, leaving her standing alone and gawking at him.

Was that a kind reminder?

Sonia regardlessly took his words in all seriousness and turned to her wristwatch. A minute later, she took a deep breath and stepped into the room.

Her appearance had caused widespread shock and exclamation.

“Isn’t this President Fuller’s ex-wife?”

“She is also the vice president of Paradigm Co.”

“Paradigm Co.? How were they invited to this meeting if they’re on the brink of bankruptcy?”

Everyone started whispering and murmuring except for Toby and Titus.

Toby slightly hung his head as though he was sorting the materials in his hands, but he was secretly stealing side glances at Sonia.

She was not nervous at all in the face of such animosity and that observation made him smile. A fleeting look of admiration flashed across his eyes.

On the other hand, Titus scrunched his eyes and stared maliciously at her, as if he wanted to tear her apart in the next second.

Upon sensing the hostility, Sonia did not back down. Instead, she smiled at him gracefully. “President Gray! It’s been a while.”

Titus was suddenly caught by surprise, for he saw his mother in Sonia’s demeanor, especially the provocative smile on Sonia’s face that resembled his mother when his mother was younger.

Sonia evidently had no idea why he was staring at her intently. As she had no interest to guess, she looked away and directed her attention to Toby.

Since he was sitting at the head of the table, she assumed that he could have been the one to organize the meeting.

Upon realizing that, her heart sank to the pit of her stomach.

To start with, she was already losing confidence in her ability to clinch the partnership because Paradigm Co.'s competitive advantage was lackluster. Still, she harbored a sliver of hope.

However, now that she had learned that the initiator of the partnership was her ex-husband who had no feelings—but probably some hatred—for her, the situation had changed. He would definitely not choose to partner with her, which meant that she was at a loss.

Sonia hung her head low and she appeared downcast due to the thoughts in her head.

Upon seeing that, Toby frowned slightly and wondered, What's the matter?

"President Fuller, it's time." At the same time, Tom reminded his boss to start the meeting.

Toby instantly shifted his gaze from Sonia and placed the materials for the meeting on the table. Next, he scanned the faces in the room and asked, "Has everyone here read the proposal?"

"Yes." Everyone nodded.

Toby opened his mouth again. "The alternative energy technology mentioned is the latest research of our research department. It can be utilized across many industries to greatly increase productivity. Most importantly, it is eco-friendly."

After shifting in his seat, he added, "The government has been notified of the success of this new technology. Due to the concerns about monopoly, Fuller Group was prohibited from launching it, which is why I have gathered everyone here to select five suitable partners who would implement this technology alongside Fuller Group."

Upon hearing his explanation, Sonia mumbled, "Oh, that is the reason."

When she first received the proposal from Asher, she was puzzled by the concept; if the organizer had such cutting edge technology, why didn't they keep it to themselves? It's all about issues of trust.

Indeed, if Fuller Group had monopolized industries with their advanced technology, that could upset the balance of the domestic economy, which warranted the government's interference.

"President Fuller, we totally understand what you mean. However, I have a question." Titus abruptly raised a hand.

Toby looked at him. "What is it?"

Titus's eyes landed on Sonia and she immediately understood that he was about to attack her again.

As expected, he pointed at her. "When you first invited us to the meeting, you clearly said that you were going to invite the top twenty companies in Seafield, from which you will select five partners for this project. This begs the question: Why is a representative of Paradigm Co. present today?"

The rest of the attendees were now looking at her with amused and pensive looks.

Now that Sonia was placed on the spot, she tightened her fists as her expression fell.

It was that moment she realized that Toby had only invited the top twenty companies in the city to the meeting. How did Asher manage to secure a seat for us in this meeting?

Sonia was trembling in anger from being kept in the dark.

Upon seeing that, Toby felt a little sorry for her even though it was not obvious in his emotions. "It's because of the additional seats. I had Tom help me to set it up. Some of the small and medium enterprises could land a seat through a lucky draw. I see this as giving them a chance."

"Why haven't I heard about the allocation of the additional seats? And what a coincidence! That seat was taken by Paradigm Co.! Toby, did you purposely give it to her?" Titus observed Toby's face in doubt and suspicion.

Toby's face soured after being accused. "President Gray, if you don't believe me, you can look into the matter on your own. Alright, let's continue with the meeting."

Titus could tell that Toby was unhappy, so he snorted and let the matter rest.

Although he was Toby's future father-in-law, he understood that Toby and Tina were not married yet. It would be wise not to offend Toby for the time being.

"President Gray, I have given you a clear explanation earlier," Toby added. "I will only pick the most suitable companies to work with. As for the metrics, I prefer to judge your capabilities according to the partnership plan that you draft."

His gaze swept across the attendees and lingered a little longer on Sonia's face. "Each one of you will come up with a partnership plan, which includes the utilization, value and SWOT analysis of the alternative energy technology. Send it to Fuller Group by next Monday, and I will make the final decision based on the soundness of your plans."

Everyone nodded and concurred, "That's a good idea."

At this moment, Titus decided to cause trouble again. "President Fuller, you won't favor Vice President Reed just because she's your ex-wife. Am I right?"

Toby's expression froze and he wanted to speak up, but Sonia beat him to it. With a smile, she purred, "President Gray, I have no relation whatsoever to President Fuller. How would he unfairly favor me? Even if we had something in the past, he won't do me a favor now. By the way, you are his future father-in-law, which makes you the most suspicious and plausible candidate for favoritism. So..."

She directed her attention to the man at the head of the table with a faint smile. "You are the future father-in-law of President Fuller. As long as you ask for it, he will definitely keep a seat on the partnership for you, even if your plan is terrible. After all, he still has to get your daughter's hand in marriage. Isn't that so?"

Everyone's expression changed after hearing what she insinuated and they shot doubtful looks at Toby and Titus, with obvious hostility toward the latter. Ah, yes, Titus Gray is Toby Fuller's future father-in-law. Of course President Fuller would keep a seat open for him.

Technically speaking, the selection was completely up to Toby's preference, yet everyone could not help but feel aggrieved. They were all present to join a healthy competition and there was no good reason for Titus Gray to bag a seat through his connections.

Titus sensed the anger rising in the room and he was incensed to the point where his wrinkled face was contorted. That goddamned young lady did that on purpose. She intentionally manipulated the perception of others about me in order to block my escape route.

Indeed, Titus had planned to ask Toby for a place in the partnership. The other competitors were effectively antagonized due to Sonia's words. If he still went ahead and asked Toby for a favor, it would mean facing the wrath of the ten odd companies.

At the thought of it, Titus suppressed the rage in him and forced a smile to mollify the crowd. "Don't worry, ladies and gentlemen. I would never do that."

"Even if you won't, that does not mean Miss Gray won't do the same." Sonia had no intention to spare him. As she rested her cheeks on her palm, she smiled. "If Miss Gray brings up the idea to President Fuller, he will definitely agree to grant you the partnership."

Toby clutched his fists and addressed her coldly, "Am I such a weak and unprincipled man in your eyes?"