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Sonia had one hand pressing her chest and the other fanning herself to cool down the flush on her face.

Toby stared at her in mild bewilderment and asked, "Are you okay?"

"I-I'm perfectly fine!" Sonia stammered, swallowing convulsively as she looked down to avoid his gaze. My goodness, what's wrong with me? Why is my heart beating so fast? Why is my face burning up? Calm down! He wasn't actually calling me 'baby'; he was only platonically referring to Charles' nickname for me, so why am I acting so weird about it?

Charles had more often than not called her 'baby', but never once had she ever felt the way she did now. Logically speaking, the way Toby had called her by the same nickname shouldn't affect her this much.

Presently, Toby could tell that Sonia was being evasive. With narrowed eyes, he gazed at her intently, as though he wanted to see through her.

After a pause, he appeared to understand what was going on. Dark amusement glittered in his eyes as he leaned forward, closing the distance between them. The corner of his lips curled with a devious smirk as he said slowly, "You still haven't answered me, Sonia. Does Charles still call you 'baby'? Hmm?"

This time, he added even more emphasis and bass to the word, and the suggestive edge that came with his gravelly tone only made Sonia draw in a sharp breath.

"S-Stay away from me!" She abruptly stood up and marched forward, effectively putting some distance between them. She had her back turned to him, and she refused to spin around no matter what

Catching sight of the red tips of her ears, Toby more or less knew what her face must look like at the moment. It's probably the same shade of red as her ears.

By the looks of it, he was sure that his words earlier had brought about her sudden rush of embarrassment. Realizing this, he rested his cheek against the palm of his hand, and a teasing grin played on his lips as he drawled, "Make him stop calling you that from now on."

"Why?" Sonia rubbed her face as though to relax her expression, inhaling deeply to calm her nerves before she spun to look at Toby.

He met her gaze and said plainly, "Because I don't like it."

She pursed her lips. "That's your problem. Why should Charles give up calling me that just because you want him to?"

"Because it's a term of endearment that connotes an intimacy the both of you do not share. You aren't lovers, and more importantly, I'll get jealous. I've tolerated his inappropriate behavior for long enough, and I have no plans to continue tolerating it. Sonia, I hope to be the only one who gets to call you by that nickname." There was no hesitation or mockery in his eyes as he said this, and his voice was as grave as it was steady.

Something glistened in Sonia's eyes as she demanded, "Don't you think you're a little too unreasonable right now?"

"Not at all. I'm just doing what I think is right," Toby countered gently, his features softening with an unspoken sentiment.

Sonia parted her lips, but just as she was about to say something, the door to the office swung open before Tom marched in with a laptop.

As soon as he came in, he registered the strange dynamics in the room and halted in his long strides. He saw that Sonia had stood up even though Toby was still seated on the couch, and immediately sensed that something was off. "Oh, did I—" He broke off and shot Toby a nervous look, his heart beating frantically in his chest. "Did I come in at the wrong time?"

From the looks of it, something had happened between Sonia and Toby, and his sudden entrance interrupted them. With that in mind, Tom wished that lightning could strike him on the spot. He slowly assessed Toby's icy expression and instantly knew that he had come in at a bad time. His lips twitched anxiously as he tried to telepathically convey his apologies.

Sorry, President Fuller! It was my fault! I should have known better! This won't happen again!

"It doesn't matter. Are you here because you've finished going through the security footage?" Toby asked in a bone-chilling voice, rubbing his temple tiredly.

Upon hearing the words 'security footage', Sonia hurriedly resumed her seat.

Tom nodded grimly. "Yes, I've gone through all of them. Tina was seen pulling up outside our building at 2.00PM, and from there onward, she stayed put in the car. Here's the footage I've edited." Having reported that, he placed the laptop in front of Sonia and Toby, after which he clicked into the footage in question.

The first thing Sonia saw was her own red Mercedes-Benz appearing in the footage, followed by the scene where she got down from the car and walked into the building.

Right after she walked into the building, a black sedan pulled up on the street across from her car.

Tom pointed at the black sedan and said, "Right there! That's Tina's car!"

Astonished, Sonia gasped with her fists clenched, "This was the car she was driving?"

"Why? Does the car seem familiar to you?" Toby asked, looking at her intently.

She shook her head, then nodded. "I don't actually find the car familiar, but the license plate rings a bell."

"The license plate?" Toby narrowed his eyes and looked back at the footage, focusing on the license plate on Tina's car.

The footage was clear and in technicolor, and Toby had no trouble reading the license plate at all. It featured a number thirteen, which seemed appropriate, given how Tina was the very definition of bad luck itself.

"This morning, Charles and I were driving over to Paradigm Co. when we noticed a car tailgating us. It was the same car, and I know this because the license plate was particular enough to catch my eye. But just as Charles and I were about to call the police, the car drove away. We figured it was only a coincidence that it was on the same route as us, but to be on

the safe side, I had Daphne look into the owner of the license plate after I arrived at Paradigm Co."

"So, who was the owner?" Toby urged, his face stormy.

Sonia chewed on her lower lip. "Well, the data showed that the owner of the license plate was just a normal civilian, so I let my guard down. But I didn't think that Tina would turn out to be the owner!"

When Tina had tried to run her and Toby down earlier, Sonia had been so caught up with avoiding the collision that she didn't even pay attention to the license plate. That would explain why, in the heat of things, she hadn't noticed that Tina's car was the same one that had tailgated her that morning.

"No, that can't be. If Tina was the owner all along, then your secretary couldn't possibly have said that the license plate belonged to a civilian," Tom countered doubtfully. "Could it be that your secretary is an accomplice of hers, Miss Reed?"

"That's impossible," Sonia said defensively. "Daphne could never work for someone like Tina."

Toby interjected coolly, "The problem likely lies in the license plate itself. Tom, look into the license plate and see if it belongs to Tina or the civilian Sonia mentioned."

Tom nodded gravely. "Right away, sir!"

While Tom took out his phone to make a call, Sonia and Toby watched the rest of the footage. There was nothing particularly exciting after Tina was spotted pulling up by the curb because she never got down from the car, and the street saw its usual stream of pedestrians and passing vehicles.

It wasn't until two hours later, when Toby and Sonia showed up on the other side of the street, that Tina's car started to move.

After that, the scene of the almost-accident played before their very eyes. Tina had attempted to crash her car into them, and they tried to dodge her.

Having finished the footage, Toby laced his fingers together and placed his hands on top of his knees, then lowered his gaze in thought.

Sonia, on the other hand, merely drew in a breath without saying anything.

Just like that, a tense silence descended upon the office.

A few minutes later, Tom hung up the phone and returned to stand before the two others, after which he reported dutifully, "President Fuller, we've looked into it, and the data shows that the license plate belongs to a normal civilian, just as Miss Reed's secretary had found."

"Which means Tina was using a forged license plate," Toby said with a wintry smile.

Tom nodded. "Apparently so. She must have had it made at the last minute; otherwise, she would be pulled over for driving a vehicle without a license plate, and that would hinder her plans of following Miss Reed."

"That's enough for now." Toby nodded solemnly. "Now, look into the Gray Family and the Stone Family. I want to know if they were helping Tina in the shadows."

Up until now, the news of Tina being alive had yet to be made public, though the police would have already informed the Gray Family about it. They had to, seeing as the Gray Family had previously been grieving after Tina reportedly took her own life by jumping off a building.

It would make sense then if the Gray Family, having stopped mourning over Tina's non-existent death, was secretly helping her plot revenge.

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"Right away," Tom replied solemnly, then left to carry out Toby's orders.

Presently, Sonia lifted her arm to glance at her watch and saw that it was drawing close to 4.30PM. Letting her arm fall back to her side, she was about to bid goodbye to Toby when

he beat her to the chase. "Well, if you're going to sign off on the factory, then you should probably get going now. Go straight home as soon as you're done, or it won't be safe after nightfall."

"Okay," she agreed, rising to her feet. "I'll be leaving now."

Just then, he picked up his phone and stopped her. "Hold on. I'll get someone to escort you back."

"Oh, that won't be necessary. I can drive," Sonia said, turning him down with a cursory wave of her hand.

He looked at her gravely and pointed out, "I think it's entirely necessary. I don't like the idea of leaving you on your own; who knows if Tina will ambush you along the way?"

Upon hearing this, Sonia fell silent, and she pictured herself driving along the way and running into Tina. She'd probably step on the gas and crash into my car, then hope that the impact would be enough to kill me.

Sonia shuddered at the eerie thought of this and decided to take up Toby's offer. Bowing her head in polite gratitude, she said, "Thank you."

He nodded once, then sent out instructions through his phone. After that, he set his phone aside and announced, "Done. You can head down to the lobby now; the team I've arranged to escort you will be waiting for you there."

She gave a small nod. "Okay. I'll get going now, then."

Toby gave a casual flap of his hand to dismiss her. "Go on."

With one last glance at his bandaged ankle and a gentle reminder that he should keep the area dry, Sonia slung her purse over her shoulder and walked out of his office.

As she stepped out of the elevator and into the lobby, she indeed came upon the men whom Toby had arranged to escort her. These men were uniformed bodyguards who towered over her and boasted strong, bulky physiques, attributes that instantly made her feel a sense of security.

That being said, what surprised Sonia the most was not the bodyguards' physiques, but the way they intended to escort her. She would be driving back with one of their cars tailing her and the other in front of her.

She had believed that Toby would want the bodyguards to be in her car while escorting her back, but as it turned out, he had thought differently.

Now that she looked at it, an arrangement like this was for the best in terms of security. With two cars escorting her, Tina would not be able to reenact her murderous scheme from earlier that afternoon, at least not without crashing first into either one of the bodyguards' cars.

Warmth coursed through Sonia as she smiled to herself, a little surprised by Toby's foresight in planning all this.

She suddenly realized how much attention to detail Toby paid to whatever he did or intended to do.

At the entrance of the newly built factory, Charles flicked his cigarette butt away when he saw Sonia's familiar red car draw near and accused, "Took you a while to finally get here, baby,"

Sonia got down from the car and flashed him a quick, apologetic smile. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Charles."

"Nah, don't worry about it. I've only been here for half an hour," he said with a grin. Then, he noticed the two cars that had escorted Sonia back and asked curiously, "Hey, what's going on here, baby? Who are these people?"

She was being frank as she pointed at the other two cars and explained, "Those are Toby's cars, and the ones driving them are Toby's bodyguards."

"And why did his bodyguards follow you here?" Charles pressed, frowning.

"It's a long story, but basically, Toby dispatched them for my own safety, and they'll leave once they've escorted me back to Bayside Residence later," she elaborated, running her fingers through her hair to keep it in place.

Charles gave another pointed look at the cars, and he was about to say something when Sonia glanced at the time and said, "Okay, that's enough for now, Charles. It's getting late, and we have a factory to see."

"Oh, right," he said, snapping out of his thoughts when he heard this. He stored away his questions and fell in step behind her as she walked through the factory entrance.

It was 6.00PM when they signed off on the factory. The sky was gradually darkening, and Sonia was ready to leave after she had finalized the amendments and handed them to the construction team.

Charles, on the other hand, was sitting in Sonia's car as he eyed the bodyguard's car up front, then poked his head out of the window to peer at the other car following them. Suspicion filled him as he prompted unhappily, "I think it's about time you explain to me why Toby sent two bodyguards to escort you, baby."

He hadn't wanted to ask back at the factory, not while Sonia had been busy checking through the construction work. However, now that they were already making their way home, he figured she had no reason to avoid his questions anymore.

Next to him in the driver's seat, Sonia was unfazed by Charles' curiosity. Knowing him, she knew that he would not relent until she gave him all the answers he wanted.

With her hands on the steering wheel, she began unaffectedly, "Well, if you must know, something happened this afternoon..." She told him about the incident where Tina tried to kill her in a car crash.

Having heard the end of the story, Charles looked aghast as he exclaimed, "What the hell? I didn't know something as dramatic as that went down!"

"Yeah, and out of concern for my safety, Toby dispatched two bodyguards to escort me. He's just worried that Tina might ambush me again," Sonia said, glancing at the car behind her through her side mirrors.

Charles couldn't bring himself to be unhappy with Toby after this. After all, Toby was taking all the necessary measures to keep Sonia safe. If I start protesting over something like this, then I'd look downright petty.

"By the way, baby, didn't you say that Toby sent someone after Tina? If he's having these bodyguards escort you home, does that mean Tina got away?" Charles asked, his brows knitted tightly together.

Sonia hummed in response. "They were close to cutting off her escape route, but she had back-up and got away. Now, Toby's looking into her potential connections to see who's been helping her in the shadows, and once he finds out, he'll let me know."

"Damn!" Charles slapped his thigh in a fit of anger. "I don't get it. How could anyone still back Tina up after all the mess she brought onto herself? What kind of connections does she have?"

Sonia lowered her gaze in thought, looking somber as she said, "Who knows? But no matter who her connections are, I won't let her get away that easily!"

He nodded at this. "Obviously."

Without adding anything more to the conversation, Sonia pursed her lips and grew reticent. At the sight of her grim expression, Charles left her alone and began to scroll through his phone in silence.

They pulled up at Bayside Residence half an hour later, and the bodyguards who had done their job bade Sonia goodbye before leaving in their respective cars.

Watching their cars drive into the distance, Charles rubbed his chin pensively and pointed out, "To be honest, baby, I think you should hire a couple of bodyguards to follow you around at all times like those two did, seeing as Tina is still lurking in the shadows and probably getting ready to ambush you."

Sonia did not object to his suggestion and merely laughed good-naturedly. "I'll consider doing just that."

Then, she opened her side of the door and got down from the car while Charles followed suit.

She rounded the front of the car and walked up to the passenger's side where Charles was standing, then said, "Why don't you take the car tonight and pick me up here tomorrow morning? There's a meeting at Paradigm Co. tomorrow that you could sit in for."

"Okay," he answered readily with a grin, then walked over to the driver's side of the car jauntily.

Having done so, he held the door open and waved goodbye at Sonia. "Guess I'll be leaving then, baby."

She hummed in response, but just as Charles was about to duck into the car, she suddenly thought of something and spun around to call out to him, "Hey, wait a minute, Charles!"

"What's wrong?" Charles was already halfway behind the steering wheel when he heard her and ducked out from the car.

Toby's words echoed in Sonia's mind, and she parted her red lips as she stammered, "Uh... Charles, do you think you could maybe stop calling me 'baby' from now on?" She found herself agreeing with Toby that the term of endearment was far too intimate to be appropriate for a friendship like hers and Charles'.

The grin on Charles' face slipped when he heard this, and he demanded in bewilderment, "Did you just ask me to stop calling you 'baby'?"

"Yes," she replied with a firm nod.

"But why?" He slammed the car door shut and closed the distance between them with a couple of long strides, seeking an explanation from her.

She looked up at him and said, "Because I don't think it's appropriate."

Confusion dawned upon him. "How is it not appropriate?"