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This Time, I Will Get My Divorce, Mr Chapter 539 - 540

"It just isn't, okay?" Sonia let out a weary sigh and went on to say, "Look, a term of endearment like this should only be used if you and I are lovers, but we aren't. We're just friends, and calling me 'baby' is a little over-the-top."

Charles laughed, but it was cold and devoid of his usual humor. "Oh, suddenly it's 'over-the-top'? I've been calling you that for over a decade, and you've never said there was anything wrong with it until now. Did somebody talk to you about this and make you stop me from calling you that?"

Sonia's eyes widened by a fraction, but that was enough to make Charles understand the truth behind this unexpected shift. He clenched his fists and said through gritted teeth, "So somebody does want me to stop calling you that. Let me guess—is it Toby?"

There was no answer from Sonia, but something flashed in her eyes that looked a lot like admission.

"I'm right, aren't I?" Charles sneered in disgust. "Look at you being an obedient little girl and asking me to stop calling you a decade-long nickname just because he told you to."

Guilt rose within her when she heard this, and she chewed on her lip as she tried to explain, "I'm sorry, Charles. I'll admit that Toby was the one who asked me to do this. He said to tell you that he wants you to stop calling me 'baby' because it's inappropriate, but when I seriously considered it, I found myself agreeing with him. A nickname like that really is inappropriate between the both of us."

Sonia hadn't given much thought to this matter until Toby brought it up. After he had, it was as if something clicked in her. The nickname Charles had given her was far too intimate and flirtatious to be considered platonic.

However, Charles was less than understanding as a contemptuous smirk tugged on his lips. "No, this has nothing to do with whether the nickname was inappropriate or not. You're just worried that if you let this continue, you're going to make a certain someone very unhappy, and you don't want that."

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Sonia stiffened. "W-What?"

"Nothing!" Charles took a step back and returned to the driver's side of the car. He opened the door, then ducked to retrieve the key from the ignition. "I'm going to ask you one last time: do you really want me to stop calling you by that nickname?"

She parted her lips, hesitation overwhelming her. But at that moment, Toby's face flashed in her mind and batted away the doubt that threatened to cloud her judgment, and she finally nodded with a firm hum.

Upon hearing her answer, Charles felt his heart drop to his stomach, and the hope he had been clinging to disappeared.

There was bitterness in his eyes as he drawled, "Got it. I can see that you've made up your mind on this, and if that's what you want, then I'm fine with it. From now on, I won't call you 'baby' anymore, but you know what? As soon as I stop calling you that, our relationship will no longer be the same."

She frowned. "What do you mean? All we're dropping is the nickname, but that doesn't have to change anything between us."

"If it's a real friendship we're talking about here, then of course, nothing will change. But we're different." He tightened his grip on the car keys and took in a breath. "You were the only person I've ever called 'baby', because doing that makes me feel like I have a special place in your heart, like I'm irreplaceable. Now that you've taken away my privilege to do that, it only goes to show that I'm no different than any other friend you have; I'm not as important or irreplaceable as I thought. So I guess this is it."

With that, he put the keys on the car's hood and turned to head for the pavement.

"Charles!!" Sonia cried out at the sight of this, suddenly growing frantic.

However, it was as if Charles hadn't heard her at all. He didn't look like he was going to turn around or stop in his tracks as he marched toward the pavement, then raised an arm to hail an approaching taxi. The next second, he got into the idling car and left.

Seemingly frozen in place, Sonia watched the taxi speed away with indecipherable emotions rushing through her.

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She had picked up on several things from Charles' soliloquy earlier, and one of them that she was suddenly made aware of was his feelings for her.

She felt her nails dig into her palms, and she shook her head to clear her thoughts as disbelief colored her expression.

Needless to say, she couldn't believe that Charles had never treated their friendship as a platonic one all along and that he actually had developed romantic feelings for her over the years.

If he hadn't said all that, then Sonia would have been completely kept in the dark.

So that was why he wanted to call me 'baby' and why he reacted the way he did when I asked him to stop.

Indeed, had he seen her as just a friend and nothing more, then he wouldn't have reacted quite so dramatically when she asked him to stop calling her 'baby'. He might be wounded, but not to the extent of wanting to keep a distance from her.

"Oh, Charles..." Sonia muttered under her breath ruefully, staring in the direction where Charles had gone.

Although she grew sad at the sour turn their relationship had taken and how they would no longer be as close as they had been, she didn't regret what she had done.

Maybe she would regret it if she had never discovered Charles' hidden romantic feelings for her, but right now, she was sure she had done the right thing. If she had allowed the nickname to go on between them, then Charles' feelings for her would only grow deeper and take root, so much so that he wouldn't be able to let them go.

But she could never love him back, and whatever sentiments he had for her could never be reciprocated. She would only hurt him in the end.

Having him give up his affectionate nickname for her had as good as clarified her feelings toward him. Her stance in the matter was clear: she saw him as just a friend and nothing more. Perhaps all this had happened soon enough to keep him from falling even more for her, and he could save himself from inevitable heartbreak.

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At the thought of this, Sonia sighed ruefully and walked up to the car. She picked up the keys Charles had left on the hood and turned to head into the apartment building.

Meanwhile, Toby went back to the Fuller Residence after Sonia had left his office, and he had only just gotten down from the car when his phone rang.

He raised his hand, signaling Tom to stop pushing the wheelchair, and answered the call.

“President Fuller, we have escorted Miss Reed safely back to Bayside Residence,” the man on the other line reported.

Toby hummed. “Well done. Any sightings of strange cars along the way?”

“No, sir.”

A frown etched upon Toby’s face as he replied stoically, “I see. From now on, I want the both of you to watch over Sonia and keep her safe, but stay hidden throughout.”

“Yes, sir,” the man on the other line said solemnly, nodding.

Without another word, Toby hung up the phone.

Upon seeing Toby put his phone down, Tom proceeded to wheel him through the doors of the Fuller Residence.

As soon as Toby entered the living room, he was greeted by the sight of Jean sitting with her back turned to him on the sofa.

She appeared to be holding a mirror in one hand while the other was placed on her collarbone, her fingertips brushing against something. She was also muttering something along the lines of, “Absolutely gorgeous.”

Toby quirked a brow and asked aloud, “Mom, what are you doing?”

Startled by his voice, Jean faltered, and the mirror she had been holding nearly clattered to the ground. It dropped onto her lap instead with enough force to bruise her skin, and she hissed at the impact.

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However, she paid no mind to this as she threw the mirror aside and rubbed the sore spot where the mirror had landed. With one hand pressed to her collarbone, she hurriedly spun around and flashed Toby a nervous smile as she said, "Toby, I didn't know you were coming home today. I thought you'd be staying at your own place."

Seeing the panic that lay behind her forced smile, Toby narrowed his eyes and explained flatly, "I'm just here to take a couple of things. What's wrong with your neck, Mom? Why are you covering it?"

His piercing gaze made her all the more uneasy as cold sweat threatened to roll down her temples. She gazed at him with wide, watery eyes as she said, "I-I'm having allergies, so my neck—"

Before she could finish speaking, her phone rang and cut through the brewing tension in the room. Upon hearing the ringtone, Jean reached for her phone instinctively, but she realized what she had done the moment she lifted her hand away from her collarbone. A cry nearly escaped her as she thought, Oh, no! He caught me!

Standing behind Toby, Tom felt his jaw drop in surprise when he saw the necklace Jean was wearing and demanded incredulously, "Is that the Ocean's Heart?"

Having seen it too, Toby frowned and asked darkly, "Mom, isn't the Ocean's Heart supposed to be in Sonia's possession? Why do you have it on you right now?"

Jean swallowed when she heard his confrontational tone, and her gaze darted from one corner of the room to the other as she tried to come up with an excuse. "T-This is a knock-off! A premium knock-off! It's not the real thing!"

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"A premium knock-off?" Toby repeated grimly, the air around him growing cold.

Tom's lips twitched, and he was rendered speechless as he thought, A premium knock-off of the Ocean's Heart? What a ridiculous lie!

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Not knowing that Toby and Tom had already caught her in her lie, Jean thought she had them fooled. Nodding frantically, she said, "Yes, a premium knock-off. I specifically went to the mall to get it, and it cost me thousands!"

"Mom, do you seriously think the Ocean's Heart would have a knock-off in the market?" Toby demanded as he stared at her impassively.

Upon hearing this, Jean felt the sirens going off in her head, and a wave of uneasiness crashed over her as she stammered, "W-What do you mean?"

"What I meant was that the Ocean's Heart was auctioned off as soon as it was made, and no photos of it had ever been made public. The rest of the world only knew the Ocean's Heart as an extremely valuable piece of jewelry, but they never saw what it looked like. As for that shop that you supposedly went to, why don't you tell me where they came across the real Ocean's Heart and thereafter produce a counterfeit like that?" he asked icily and pressed his lips into a thin line.

She blanched and began to stammer, "I-I..." She was at a loss for words, having reached the peak of embarrassment now that her bluff had been called.

Rubbing the space between his brows, he asked, "So, are you ready to tell me how the Ocean's Heart came to be in your possession?"

She held onto the Ocean's Heart that was nestled upon her collarbone and forced herself to meet Toby's piercing gaze. Understanding that she could not lie any further, she finally spoke the truth. "Sonia gave it to me."

"That's impossible!" Toby countered sternly with a frown.

Hurrying to her own defense, Jean insisted, "She really did give it to me! You were hospitalized when she came over to look for you. I was the one who greeted her at the door, and she handed the necklace to me so I could pass it to you, but I—"

"But you decided to keep it for yourself instead when you realized that it was the Ocean's Heart, is that it?" Toby asked, narrowing his eyes dangerously.

Jean looked down in shame as though to confess in silence.

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Taking a deep breath to keep his rage at bay, Toby reached a hand toward her and barked coldly, "Give me the necklace."

"No," she cried in protest when she heard this and tightened her grip on the Ocean's Heart. She shook her head vehemently, her unwillingness showing on her face. "You were the one who bought the Ocean's Heart in the first place, Toby, and when you first gave it to that bit—"

His expression grew sullen. "Hmm?"

Knowing how he felt toward Sonia at the moment, Jean realized that she had said something wrong. She opened and closed her mouth, then tried to cover up her mistake as she argued, "What I meant to say was, Sonia was the one at fault when she snatched the Ocean's Heart away in the beginning, and now that she has returned it out of her own good conscience, you could give it to me instead of letting it lie around the house."

"No!" Toby snapped through gritted teeth, then reached out to her once more. "Give me the necklace."

Jean tried to persuade him once more. "Toby—"

However, he did not budge as he hissed, "Give it to me!"

She heard the impatience and dangerous undertone in his voice and thought better than to push his limits. She quickly unclasped the necklace and handed it over to him reluctantly, all the while clenching her jaw.

Having taken one end of the necklace, Toby made to pull it in, only to find that it would not budge in mid-air. Frowning, he looked up to see that Jean had not entirely released the other end of the necklace even as she handed it over, and her face was the perfect picture of reluctance.

He sighed wearily. "Tom."

"Yes, sir," Tom replied swiftly.

"Have a set of jewelry made for Madam White tomorrow."

"Very well, sir," Tom answered respectfully with a nod.

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Then, Toby turned to look at Jean like he was dealing with a child. “Did you hear that, Mom? Tom is going out tomorrow to have an expensive set of jewelry made for you, so could you please let go of the Ocean’s Heart and let me have it now?”

He couldn’t pull the Ocean’s Heart out of her hands by force. Otherwise, he might risk breaking it.

Meanwhile, Jean stared longingly at the Ocean’s Heart, not at all interested in or overjoyed at the prospect of owning new jewelry. She knew that no jewelry could come close to being as valuable as the Ocean’s Heart, and naturally, she would not settle for less.

“Let’s talk about this, shall we, Toby?” Jean forced out a smile on her plump face as she desperately argued, “Sonia has already returned the Ocean’s Heart, which could only mean that she no longer wants it. You—”

“No,” he snapped in brusque rejection. “Even if she returned it because she didn’t want it anymore, I would still keep it for her. As far as I’m concerned, she’s the only one who gets to have the Ocean’s Heart.”

“But—”

Toby had completely lost his patience now, and through gritted teeth, he hissed, “No buts. Let go of the necklace.”

At last, Jean let go of her end of the necklace and let him take it. As unwilling as she was, she dared not go against him. He might be raised by her, but his demeanor took after his grandmother’s, and hell hath no fury like a scorned Toby.

Presently, after taking back the Ocean’s Heart, Toby felt the anger in him subside as his expression softened. He carefully slipped the necklace into the pocket of his pants, then shot Jean a somber look. “Mom, I’m sure Grandma has told you about how Sonia and I would eventually remarry and how you should stop having such unwarranted hostility against her, right?”

Jean nodded slowly at first, then asked unhappily, “Are you really planning on going through another marriage with her, Toby?”

“Yes,” he answered firmly.

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Incensed, Jean protested, "What's so wonderful about her anyway? Why can't you just let her go?"

"Maybe you should tell me why you have such little regard for her. What did she ever do to make you hate her so much?" he countered coolly instead of answering her questions.

Scoffing, Jean began to say, "She's a terrible person through and through! She—" Just as she was about to come up with examples of Sonia's supposed terrible personality, Jean found herself at a total loss of words. Surprised and somewhat bewildered by this realization, she wondered why she couldn't pinpoint any of Sonia's flaws.

As though reading her mind, Toby rubbed his temples wearily. "Do you know why you can't think of a single bad thing about Sonia, Mom? Because you know as well as I do that she has done nothing wrong. Six years ago, she showed you respect regardless of how you treated her, and she never retaliated. She took care of Tyler even when he bullied her, but she only brushed it off and did what was asked of her. It's precisely because she has done everything right that you can't nitpick on her, so I don't understand why you hate her so much."

Why? Jean lowered her gaze and muttered, "Because she comes from a terrible family, and she'll only pull your leg if she sticks by you. How do you expect me to tolerate having a daughter-in-law like her?"

"A terrible family?" He scoffed incredulously. "That's the most ridiculous reason I've ever heard!"

Behind him, Tom nodded in agreement with Toby; he couldn't quite understand Jean's argument, either.

Granted, having daughters-in-law who came from questionable or below-average family backgrounds was taboo among older women in the upper-crust society, but these women differed from Jean. They were born and raised as blue-bloods with impressive wealth at their disposal, so Tom could see why they might think lowly of daughters-in-law who had poor roots.

However, Jean's background was worse off than Sonia's. At the very least, the latter's family had been affluent, even if for a short while. The former, on the other hand, was born into an

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average working-class family, so for her to look down on Sonia's upbringing was confounding.

"Why is that ridiculous?" Jean put her hands on her hips, indignant. "I just don't want you to marry someone who can never match up to the Fuller Family's standards, someone who could never offer you the help or support you need. Bringing a woman like her into the family will only make you the laughing stock of the circle. Can't you imagine the shame of it all? I'm saying this because I see you as my own son, Toby, and I don't want you to go through what your father did back in the day."

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