

## **BYWafADA Chapter 544**

### Chapter 544 Breaking the Ice

“You—”

Asher and his supporters grew so incensed at her words that their faces turned the color of beetroot, but they couldn't retort against her. She was right; she might be the vice president now, but the fact remained that she was the largest shareholder of the company, and that meant she enjoyed privileges they did not. As unhappy as they were, they had neither the means nor standing to retaliate against her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Seeing this, Sonia quickly called out, “Charles, wait.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, I won't—"

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

She was setting boundaries when she asked him to stop calling her 'baby', and her stance was clear: the both of them would never work out as a couple. She hoped she had put that point out emphatically enough to make him understand how important it was for him to let go of a relationship that never could be.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes," she confirmed solemnly, nodding once.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Daphne froze. "Look for him?"

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

"But—"

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