

Chapter 3

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Joe was furious, and he left without glancing back.

The girl followed him happily and flashed me a victorious smile.

I arrived home as the sky turned darker.

Then, I sat in the living room until nightfall before I finally opened my laptop. As I gazed at the faint blue light, I wiped my tears and submitted my portfolio to various companies.

My phone rang twice, and I noticed that it was Jason, who had added my number the night before.

He asked if I had eaten already.

“Are you still working on your art career? I remember that you’d forget to eat whenever you got really focused. Are you free today? Want to have dinner together?”

“I’m home, but I don’t feel like eating,” I replied weakly.

Before long, there was a knock on my door.

Jason was standing at the entrance with a warm meal box in his hands.

“It’s from Mellow Diner. Your mom says you like it, and it’s still hot.”

He glanced at me under the dim hallway light and froze. “Who made you cry?”

I sighed and let him in. After that, I briefly explained what had happened.

“I just picked the wrong person. He’s powerful and influential, so I can’t afford to provoke him.”

The food from Mellow Diner was indeed scrumptious. As I ate, my mood gradually improved.

Meanwhile, there was a storm of emotions on Jason’s face. He sat in front of my laptop and sent some emails on my behalf. He had taken off his coat, and he was wearing a fitted black shirt underneath. His side profile showed that he was an incredibly handsome man.

“These companies don’t look too promising. I have similar businesses, so why don’t you drop by for an interview?”

I looked down and suddenly felt overwhelmed. “Wait. How are all of you so rich? Why can’t I be rich too?!”

Jason chuckled and eased up. “So, what do you think of my suggestion? Would you consider it?”

I stirred the food on my plate, and a sense of unease settled over me. “But what if we have a falling out someday and you end up firing me?”

Jason suddenly leaned in and looked straight at me. “Remember when we were kids, you promised that we’d stay close forever? So, there’s no backing out now.”

I backed away a little and felt unsure about meeting his gaze. “That was when I was younger. What if you change...?”

He shoved his phone into my hands and said, “Save my mom’s number. If I ever mistreat you, just complain to her.

“I see your talent and effort, so don’t be afraid. I’m not that influential to dictate your path, so you’ll have to rely on your own abilities at the interview. Just give it a shot.”

I felt reassured by his steadfast gaze and nodded gently.

Several days drifted by peacefully as Jason moved into the house across from mine. I would see him leave for work in the mornings during my walks, and it would take me back to our younger days.

I started receiving responses for the resumes I had sent out. Apart from Jason’s recommendation, I also decided to explore a few other promising options.

Unfortunately, the companies that scheduled interviews with me rejected me on the day itself.

“Ms. Scott, as you know, we have zero tolerance for plagiarism as creators. Therefore, we’ve decided not to hire you.”

I was utterly confused. I never even got a chance to clarify before I was escorted out of the office.

As a kind gesture, the human resource personnel who arranged my interview showed me a video.

Joe’s new girlfriend, Kimberly Faye was on the screen, and she was showcasing her comic. It had just gotten serialized recently, but it was popular.

The cover looked almost identical to one that I had submitted at my previous company. The only differences were in the characters’ clothing and hair colors.

I quickly used my phone to search for her comic online.

Even though there were only a few chapters, the comic was about 80% similar to the incomplete version I had submitted. Even the storyline matched closely.

I felt like I had been struck by lightning.

She had plagiarized my work.

As soon as I got home, I dove straight into gathering evidence.

I took screenshots of chat records with my former supervisor, submission timestamps, and computer logs.

However, the moment I posted about her plagiarism on my account, someone reported me. My account was banned before I could share any of the evidence.

Immediately after, Joe called. The background on his end was noisy, as though he was at a bar.

He spoke with amusement in his voice. “Veronica, I don’t like it when you go against me.”

I felt a surge of anger and replied, “Joe Smith, aren’t you shameless for indulging in your girlfriend’s theft of my work?”

Joe chuckled lightly and said, “I don’t see her as my girlfriend, so stop being jealous over nothing.

“I’m drunk, and I don’t feel well. Give me a ride, and we’ll make up. I’ll handle this for you.”

I did not respond. I calmly saved a recording of the phone call and hung up.

Jason was beside me, and he was helping me gather evidence. He glanced over and said, “I’ll use the company account to speak up for you. Don’t worry. We need to get back at him for this.”

We worked until midnight and felt exhausted as well as sore.

Just then, I heard the sound of the fingerprint lock at my door. Joe opened the door without hesitation and called out to me.

“Dear, why didn’t you pick me up...?”

Soon after, he narrowed his eyes and asked, “Veronica, why are there men’s shoes here?”