Ruling 791

Chapter 791

Online friend? Jackson was growing suspicious and angry. “Who is this online friend of yours? You’re the one digging your own grave here. Did you really think that plagiarizing would be the right thing to do? Stealing someone else’s efforts and using it as your own? Tiffany would lose her job if you won. Is that really alright with you? You’re a disgrace!”

Beckett was completely unperturbed. “It’s every man for himself. I’m not a disgrace.”

Jackson couldn’t be bothered to waste his time on a shameless man like him. “Fine. It doesn’t matter if you won’t reveal the identity of your online friend. I can find out myself. One more thing, I will be sending my lawyers to speak to you about the losses and effects on the company, caused by your plagiarism.”

Beckett’s expression changed dramatically. “You…”

Jackson waved his hand disdainfully. “You can go. You’re fired. You’ve signed a contract with the company and you’ve violated the terms in your contract. You should pay for the damages you’ve caused. Go home and wait for your summons.”

Beckett was weak in the knees. He thought that Jackson would stand by him, even if he were exposed. He did not expect for things to develop into this manner. He simply couldn’t afford to pay for such hefty damages. He lost his grand, lofty bearings and was terrified. “Mr. West… I… I was wrong… I’ll make a public confession to the press. It won’t have anything to do with you; I’ll take all the blame. I’ll do whatever you want… I can’t pay for the damages…”

Jackson couldn't be bothered to argue with him. He called security and had them drag him away.

Now that Beckett had confessed to his plagiarism, the matter was pretty much settled. However, there was one scruple — who was the "online friend" that had leaked Tiffany's sketch to Beckett? Tiffany mentioned that only Arianne and Tanya had seen it… Arianne wasn't a newbie in the fashion industry, which would leave… Tanya!

He gave Tiffany a call, albeit hesitantly. Once she picked up his call, he immediately said, "I've confirmed the identity of the plagiarizer. It was a fashion designer from my company, Beckett Hushman. An online friend of his leaked your design to him when asking him for his opinion. You should know who you've shown your designs to. Ask them yourself."

Tiffany had just arrived home and was changing her shoes. She looked at Tanya, who was lounging on the couch, and was momentarily distracted. Beckett Hushman — "Hush". Could it be?

Jackson was puzzled at her lack of response. "Hello? Are you listening to me?"

She returned to her senses. "Yes, I understand. Thank you."

Jackson didn't answer, ending the call straightaway.

Tiffany finished changing her shoes and approached Tanya. "Tan, did you show my sketch to 'Hush'?"

Finally, it hit her. Tanya widened her eyes. “Yes… I only wanted to ask for his opinion because he’s more experienced. I really wanted you to qualify… Was that how your sketch got plagiarized?”

Chapter 792

Tiffany nodded. “That White Moonlight of yours, I’m afraid that he’s an employee at Jackson’s company. His name is Beckett Hushman. That explains why he chose ‘Hush’ as his online nickname. He’s shady. You probably shouldn’t talk to him again.”

Tanya was clearly shocked. “Hush” was like a white glow of moonlight to her. She never thought that her naivety would cause such a thing. “I’m sorry… Tiffany… I’m really sorry. I never thought that this would happen. It’s all my fault…”

Tiffany sighed. “We learn from our mistakes. Next time, just remember, don’t show anyone yours or my sketches. You really are a silly goose. You know that he’s a fashion designer and that he’s in the same industry, yet you actually showed him the sketch during a competition. Shouldn’t you be on your guard against this guy? Especially a company-related sketch. You must never show it to anyone. If the company suffers a loss, they will come after you.”

Tanya was close to tears. “I understand… I didn’t just hurt you, but I’ve nearly hurt Ricky too. How am I going to face him now? Please don’t be angry with me, Tiffie. I really didn’t mean it.”

Tiffany reached out her hand and tapped on her forehead. “That’s enough from you. I’m not angry. It’s just… It’s going to be hard on Jackson now. Forget it. I’ve been exhausted over the past few days. I’m going to get some rest, since we don’t have to go to the office today. Don’t over analyze this. It’s alright.”

Tanya watched Tiffany walk back to her bedroom and pulled out her phone. She sent a message to “Hush”: ‘Did you plagiarize the sketch I sent you? Why did you do this? I trusted you. I saw you as a respected senior. Why did you do it? You’ll only hurt yourself!’

This time, she did not wait for Hush's reply. Twenty minutes later, when she sent another message, she realized that her number had been blocked.

Only now did she realize what kind of man her "White Moonlight" really was. She was hit by all sorts of emotions in an instant. Only she knew how she truly felt.

The next day at the office, everyone was envious over Tiffany's achievement in entering the qualifying round. They crowded around her to congratulate her. Tiffany's design was the only one that managed to enter the qualifying round. However, Tiffany couldn't find it within herself to be happy about it. Even though she was completely innocent, she couldn't shake the feeling that she had stepped on Jackson to reach her goals.

Someone heckled at Eric, their boss, to treat them all to a meal. After all, this called for a celebration. Eric tactfully declined. He had a rough understanding of how Tiffany was now feeling. It wouldn't be appropriate to have a big celebration. After all, Jackson was still in hot water.

Tanya slipped into Eric's office during her lunch break. "Ricky… I'm so sorry… I showed Tiffany's sketch to someone else. I never thought that this would happen. I've always had a good impression of that guy, and he had more experience in the fashion design industry. I just wanted to ask for his opinion on Tiffany's design… I never thought that he'd plagiarize. And I really didn't know that he was from Jackson's company."

Eric had already heard the story from Jackson and was not surprised. "I understand. It's fine. You don't have to blame yourself too much. Just be more careful next time, and don't be so gullible."

Tanya seemed full of dismay. “But everyone I’ve met has been so nice… Like you and Tiffany and the rest. I thought that I could be frank with everyone else. If only I never showed Tiffany’s sketch to him, he wouldn’t have had the chance to plagiarize it, and he wouldn’t have hurt himself and Jackson too… It’s all my fault.”

Eric consoled her saying, “It’s his fault for scheming. You’ve only made a small mistake. It’s truly not entirely your fault. Okay, time for lunch. Let’s fill our bellies for the rest of the day ahead. Hopefully, your design will enter the qualifying round next time. Keep up the hard work!”

Chapter 793

Tanya was moved by Eric’s magnanimity. She nodded and invited Tiffany to have lunch with her.

Her phone rang during lunch. It was a message notification from a social media application. She used to look forward to the sound of that notification because that meant that “Hush” had sent her a message. Now, she was very calm about it. She casually pulled out her phone and checked her message. She was shocked when she saw a friend request from Hush and glanced guiltily at Tiffany, who sat across the table from her. Then, she carefully accepted the friend request.

She did not initiate a message to Hush. She wanted to bide her time and see why Hush had sent her that friend request. He was the one who had blocked her first.

Soon, Hush sent her a message: ‘I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have been so obsessive and done such a thing. I really regret it now. I shouldn’t have used your trust in me. I’ve left my job. I’ll never set foot in this industry again. I’m getting sued by the company for a large compensation. I was in a really bad place so I blocked your number. Now that I think about it, I should have apologized to you. I won’t contact you anymore. I’d like some peace now. I’m sorry.’

This was Hush's first time sending her such a long message. It softened her heart and she replied: 'If you really do regret your mistakes, don't do it again. Just be a nice guy next time. You never seemed like a bad guy to me, Beckett Hushman.'

She wouldn't have discovered his real name if it weren't for this disaster.

Tiffany noticed the foolish look on Tanya's face as she concentrated on her phone. She knocked on the table. "What are you doing? Eat your food!"

Tanya returned to her senses and put her phone away. "Right. Bon appetit…"

Just as Tiffany had reminded her to concentrate on her food, her phone rang too. She looked at the screen and saw that it was a call from Alejandro. She answered it, "Hello?"

Alejandro's hoarse voice answered her from the receiver, "I heard that you've entered the qualifying round. Congrats."

She sighed. "I remember. I promised to buy you a meal if I got in. This weekend. I'll have time then. You can choose the place."

This time, Alejandro did not comply with her. "I want to see you today. Not this weekend."

After a bout of hesitation, she replied, “Fine… Tonight? There’s no need for overtime tonight, so it should be fine…”

Alejandro was satisfied with her “compromise”. “Sure. I’ll text you the address later.”

After returning to the office from lunch, Tanya pulled out her phone and continued chatting with Beckett. Her impression of Beckett had improved since his apology. Unexpectedly, Beckett asked to meet her: ‘You asked to meet me once and I rejected you. I’m sorry. I’d like to see you now. How about dinner tonight? Would that be alright?’

She remembered that Tiffany would be going out for dinner too, so she wouldn’t find out. She agreed, albeit hesitantly: ‘Sure. I’ll talk to you later.’

After work, Tiffany took a cab to the address that Alejandro had sent her.

Tanya went home to make herself look more presentable. Beckett said that he would pick her up, and she was feeling nervous. After all, she had a crush on him once and this was their first meeting. She wanted to look nice.

Chapter 794

Once she had finished dolling herself up, Beckett called as promised. “I’m here, I’m at your lobby. Come down.”

Beckett had a very nice voice. They had been speaking to each other via social media messenger, and this was their first time speaking to each other on the phone. Tanya’s heart raced. “Okay, I’m coming.”

She saw Beckett's car in the lobby. It wasn't a luxury vehicle, but it looked clean and new. The car carried a car plate number from the capital. She climbed into the car and its fragrance filled her with a favorable impression of him. Beckett was just as she thought he would be, gentle and refined. He looked very neat and tidy, and there wasn't a single speck of dust in his car. She felt apologetic. "Sorry for the trouble."

Beckett smiled, turned to the side, and helped her put on her seatbelt. Tanya felt her heart race even more when the pair drew closer. "Wh-where are we going for dinner?" she stammered to steady her beating heart.

Beckett straightened up. "We can have whatever you like, it's up to you."

He seemed like such a gentleman to Tanya. He was cool and handsome. Her good impression of him skyrocketed. "Anything is fine with me. Aren't you… going through something? You must be trying to save money now. It's fine, I can pay the bill this time!"

A hint of embarrassment quickly flashed across Beckett's eyes. "You don't have to worry about my finances. This is our first meeting. How can I possibly let the woman pay? I know a great Japanese place, let's go there. By the way… I remember you mentioning that you're staying with a friend? Is Tiffany Lane your flatmate?"

Tanya nodded. "Yes. This whole matter… It's kind of my fault too. It's just… Could you maybe apologize to Tiffany too? She's really nice… She'll definitely forgive you."

Beckett lowered his gaze and dodged the question with a blank look on his face. “We’ll talk about this later. I will apologize… Let’s eat first.”

At the Japanese restaurant, Beckett ordered two bottles of sake. “The sake here is pretty good. You should try.”

Tanya never really liked alcohol, but she didn’t want to dampen the mood so she took a small sip. The thick smell of alcohol threw her into a fit of coughs. Her face went red. Beckett stared at her calmly and said, “Have a few more sips. You’ll get used to it. I’ll take you someplace special after dinner.”

“Where is that?” Tanya asked.

Beckett displayed a wounded expression on his face. “I might have to leave the capital, so I’d like to take you to my favorite spot and enjoy the most beautiful view. I would always go there whenever I needed inspiration. You’ll know when we’re there. You’re not… scared of me are you? I’m not that kind of a man. That plagiarism thing was my first crime ever. I’ve been very upset and conflicted too. I’ll apologize to your friend before I leave.”

Seeing as Beckett had already extended an invitation, Tanya had no choice but to accept. She had accepted his first invitation to dinner simply to dissolve any regrets. She purely wanted to meet the man who once felt like the white glow of moonlight to her and get a sincere apology for Tiffany.

Tanya had barely finished her food before finishing an entire bottle of sake. Now, she was drunk and unconscious.

Beckett's expression immediately turned cold and harsh. His calm gaze concealed a flurry of madness. He had been working in this industry for nearly ten years. How could he possibly watch his career go down the drain like that? And he had to pay a compensation fee too! He couldn't accept it. He had only made a mistake, one that many people would make. This punishment was too severe!

Jackson would release the full story to the media very soon, so he had to turn this thing around as soon as possible!

He led Tanya out of the Japanese restaurant, looking as if everything was fine. Tanya was obviously drunk, so no one else paid them any attention. He, on the other hand, hadn't had that much to drink. He drove Tanya to the top of a hill, a spot which he frequented alone. There was a panoramic view of the bustling capital under the cover of the night, yet it was far away from its noise. He had always loved standing at the highest point, far above everything else.

Chapter 795

After admiring the view, he pulled out Tanya's phone and found Tiffany's number. Then, he sent her a message: 'Confess that you've plagiarized if you want Tanya back alive. I want the answer in the news by tomorrow.'

Tiffany leapt to her feet when she received the message. Alejandro stared at her calmly. "What's wrong?"

Tiffany looked a little pale. "I can't really explain… I'm afraid I have to go. I'll buy you a meal again next time. Sorry!"

Alejandro frowned. "You can tell me, I'll do my best to help you."

Tiffany shook her head. “It’s fine. I don’t want to trouble you. We’ll talk later. I’ve got to go!”

She ran out of the restaurant, as swift as the wind. Alejandro shot Jett, who was next to him, a look. Jett understood and followed suit. “Miss Lane, I’ll drop you off!”

Tiffany did not refuse the offer. She did not drive today, and hailing a cab would waste time. Having Jett made it a lot more convenient. She knew who sent that message. Beckett was once Jackson’s employee, and Jackson was probably the only one who could help her now. She didn’t want to trouble Alejandro, an outsider.

She never thought that Tanya would meet up with Beckett, and certainly never expected for Beckett to resort to such extremes.

Once she arrived at White Water Bay Villa, she thanked Jett and hurriedly got down from the car. Jett watched her as she left and called Alejandro. “She’s gone to see Jackson West.”

On the other end of the call, Alejandro’s expression sank. She would rather ask Jackson for his help, than ask him?

“Understood,” he replied then ended the call.

She was shocked. This security guard seemed unfamiliar to her and was probably a new employee. She used to come and go frequently in the past, and was never stopped. She had been interrogated so much that she was rendered speechless. It’s true that she wasn’t the owner of the house, and no longer had

the right to visit whenever she pleased. She ignored the security guard, stepped aside and called Jackson. Her call was answered very quickly. “Where are you?” she asked, choking with sobs from her panicked state. “I’m at the entrance gate to White Water Bay Villa, but the security guard won’t let me in! Something’s happened to Tan!”

Jackson leaped to his feet from his office chair. He snatched up his coat and rushed out the door. “I’m in the office. What happened?”

She gradually calmed herself. “Well… I think Tan’s met up with Beckett. Beckett used Tan’s phone to send me a message. He’s asked me to confess to plagiarizing his design, and if he doesn’t see the results in tomorrow’s paper, something will happen to Tan… I don’t know where they are. Beckett used to work for you, so you should have some knowledge of him. That’s why I’ve called you!”

Jackson was already hard-pressed over the plagiarizing incident. Now that this had happened, he was even more frustrated. “Stay there and don’t move. I’m picking you up, right now.”

Chapter 796

After the call ended, a very panicked Tiffany began to pace in circles, as the wait tormented her.

She did not know how long she had waited, but alas, Jackson’s car appeared within her field of vision. Quickly, she rushed toward it as the man pulled the car over. “Get in.”

Tiffany yanked the door open frantically and claimed the passenger seat, urging, “Did you manage to contact Beckett? I don’t have his number, and Tan isn’t picking up, and — oh my God, I’m panicking right now!”

Jackson massaged his forehead to soothe his growing headache. “First thing first: buckle up. I’m gonna give this Beckett a call right now.”

Tiffany’s hands were shaking as she willed them to click the seatbelt shut. Tanya was already a lonely orphan with no surviving relatives. If anything were to happen to Tanya, Tiffany would carry that guilt to her grave, especially since this entire debacle was aimed at Tiffany herself.

If worse came to worst, she would have to resort to his demand. She would have to admit that she copied Beckett’s work.

Jackson could see just how panicked she was from her shudders and helped her buckle up. “Calm down, Tiffany, let me pinpoint Beckett’s exact location first; Tanya’s gotta be with him,” he said in an attempt to comfort her. “According to what I know, Beckett Hushman’s a meticulous, calculating man, but he isn’t very ballsy. He doesn’t strike me as an extremist, so I’m guessing he just wants to rescue his name from a burning pile of sh*t instead of actually murdering someone.”

Tiffany, however, was in no way placated enough to stop stammering, “B-b-b-but w-what if… What if he got desperate and… Oh my God, what if he really does it… Oh my God!”

Knowing that his effort to calm her was futile, Jackson stopped trying and went straight to dialing Beckett’s number. As though knowing that he would try to call him, Beckett had kept his phone off, so all they heard was the voice message prompt.

Tiffany was sitting on pins and needles. “What are we going to do? Should I call the press right now and tell them… tell them I’m the plagiarist? We have no other choice, Jackson! I don’t care about my career. I can throw it away! I can go back to managing that café; I can survive with just that!”

Jackson mulled over their options for a second before suggesting, “Call Tanya again. See if it works.”

Tiffany did as he said and dialed Tanya’s number, but hers was shut, too.

By this point, all kinds of worst-case scenarios had dominated her mind: Beckett Hushman, a young man, alone with Tanya, who had most probably lost consciousness or control over her body, now utterly defenceless against the man’s whims and will.

“What do we do?! That’s it; I’ll tell the world I copied his work. I don’t give a f*ck anymore! I just want to save my friend! Besides, this is something good for you, too, so let’s… let’s all pretend that I did this for you!”

Jackson leveled a pensive sidelong glance at Tiffany, his eyes suddenly unfathomable. “You may be quick to give it up, but you need to know that this admission will be the death of you in this field forever. As for me — I don’t give a f*ck about whatever benefits I’m supposed to get. To me, the more important angle is this: if you abet Beckett’s lie by falsely admitting to plagiarizing his work, you’re enabling him in a self-destructive path of crime. The only thing we should do is to lodge a report to the cops, and let them do their work.”

Tiffany bit her lips and went silent. She believed in Jackson’s take, but most importantly, she hoped that the latter was right — that Beckett would never kill anyone.

Jackson drove to the nearest police station and the pair lodged a report, providing all of the evidence they got. Unfortunately, the only proof they had was the message Beckett had sent via Tanya’s phone.

Tiffany felt a little light-headed after their exchange with the police. “What do you think Beckett actually wants?” she muttered. “His future is ruined, and now jail time is waiting for him. Do you think he would be so desperate that he would want someone to die with him? Do you think he will harm Tan? Jesus Christ, I’m so, so scared…”

Jackson took one look at his wristwatch. “We’ve reported this to law enforcers, so all we can do right now is wait. Worrying won’t do any of us good,” he replied. “It’s getting late. I bet Beckett got your house address from Tanya’s mouth, too, so don’t return home, please. It isn’t safe… But my place is. You could stay a night there.”

Tiffany’s first response was to reject him. “W-what? No, no need. Beckett wouldn’t possibly dare show up and risk getting caught! My home should be safe. I’m not inconveniencing you!”

Chapter 797

“You don’t happen to believe it’s more dangerous to stay at my place than to be kidnapped, do you?” Jackson quipped. “Look, I don’t want anything to happen to you before Tanya’s problem is solved, okay? Because the last thing I want is a double-whammy. If you’re that worried about what I might do, then fine; I’ll take you to my house and then spend the night in my office.”

His explicit concession made it hard for Tiffany to reject his offer, mostly since she was, in truth, terrified of going home. If Beckett saw no problem doing things to Tanya, then he would have no problem ambushing Tiffany in her condominium too. And if he did get his hands on her… Even if she came out of his clutches alive, she would probably be in stitches.

“W-well, if you insist… Then sorry for the inconvenience,” Tiffany relented.

Jackson answered nothing. Tiffany had never referred to him in such a formal manner before, so he was having a difficult time adjusting to it now.

The car stopped before the giant entrance to White Water Bay villa. Recognizing Jackson's car, the security on patrol immediately lifted the boom barrier.

Jackson rolled down his window and looked at the man. "Yo, this is my girlfriend right here. Remember that and let her in and out whenever she likes."

The security guard took a glance at Tiffany in the passenger seat before nodding and gushing, "Yes sir! I didn't know that before. My most sincere apologies!"

Hearing him refer to her as his "girlfriend" introduced a weird feeling into Tiffany. Sure, the apparent reason was for easy access to White Water Bay Villa, but hearing it still made her heart skip a beat. Seriously, what was stopping this fella from fibbing something more innocuous, like his distant relative, instead?

The car pulled over in front of the door. Jackson passed the keys to Tiffany without showing any sign of getting out of his driver's seat. "You go in. I'll be heading to the company."

After some hesitation, Tiffany relented a little, "Look; maybe you should stay at home. I mean, it's not like I'm afraid of you or anything… And it's not like we hadn't done kinkier sh*t when we were staying together. What's there for me to fear? Plus, you've said that you don't ever go back to your old flames, so I'm actually quite relieved."

He raised his eyebrow. “Oh, but what if that was just a convenient, casual lie? A man and woman, all alone in a room. What if I lost control, hmm? What then?”

Tiffany shot him a look of daggers. “Don’t you frickin’ try, Jackson West! It’s not like you’re short on sex and partners. Is keeping it in for just this one night really that impossible?”

She came out of the car and bolted into the house. Almost instantaneously, she noticed that its interior looked like it had recently gone through a massive spring-cleaning. The couches were coverless, and most other usual paraphernalia was missing. It made his house look emptier than before.

Jackson soon caught up with her realization. “Oh, I forgot. I told Mrs. Contracted Janitor to perform some kind of spring-cleaning today, and a lot of stuff got thrown out. I don't think I have an extra mattress or cover, and the couch is clearly not an option to sleep on, so I guess you might have to share a bed with me.”

Tiffany was so skeptical of his claims that she ran up to the spacious balcony, where his laundry was left to dry and air. After making sure that the couch and bed covers were still wet, she was beginning to have second thoughts. “Maybe I should just go home?”

Jackson sighed. “I’ll stay in my study. You go ahead and sleep.”

Just as he claimed, he walked straight into the study with the look of someone preparing to wait through the night. Worried, Tiffany followed him and scanned the room.

Just as everywhere in the house, the study had been thoroughly cleaned, too. The couch in the study was naked, as its covers had not dried yet. Was he supposed to sit across his computer the entire night?

Tiffany’s conscience began to gnaw on her mind. When she called him, he was still in his office working overtime. And now she was essentially forcing him to go through the night, not sleeping? Would his heart fail from stress and tiredness?

After a long debate with herself, Tiffany mumbled, “Fine, let us sleep together. But I’ll tell you this right now: if your hands and feet are one hair out of place, I’ll castrate you.”

Chapter 798

A smile flitted through Jackson’s eyes. He rose and tailed Tiffany back into the bedroom.

She took off her jacket, leaving her camisole and skinny jeans on, before climbing to bed. Meanwhile, Jackson, all dressed up in an actual nightie, looked at her and asked cryptically, “Well, aren’t you gonna take those jeans off? I’m not even gonna talk about how filthy it must be from wearing it the entire day. Instead, my question is, doesn't it feel stuffy and uncomfortable for sleep?”

She shot him a glare. “Nice try, but I’m not taking it off! If you think it’s filthy, then don’t sleep with me!”

Then, after remembering that this was, in fact, his home, an embarrassed Tiffany added after mustering enough sense of self-righteousness, “You’re the one who insisted that I come here!”

Jackson went to his closet in mild annoyance and tossed one of his thin white sweaters at her. “What I meant was that you should change into something else that would make sleeping much more comfortable. Don’t worry — my shirt is long enough to cover your knees.”

Tiffany's silence was one of tacit agreement. She snatched the sweater and headed into the bathroom.

After her change, she was shocked to see that Jackson had not been exaggerating its length — the sweater's cuff almost terminated over her knees. Had he always been this tall? More importantly, why did she feel like she was a little kid wearing an adult's clothes?

Upon seeing her with his clothes on, Jackson gibed, "Yo, it really did reach your knees! Holy sh*t, you're small!"

Tiffany grabbed a pillow and decked it across his face. "Excuse me! It's your shirt that's too big! It's not me!"

"Okay, okay! You win! My shirt's too big!" he said, faking submission.

The two laid down on the bed, and silence returned.

Tiffany's mind began to drift to Tanya, and the more she thought about it, the harder it was for her to sleep. She turned to Jackson's direction, hoping to squeeze some conversation from him but found that he was already fast asleep.

That was surprising. He never slept that well in the past.

On the peak of a hill, Beckett Hushman waited wordlessly in the car, all of his sleep having left him. It was past midnight; he had switched both his and Tanya's phone on only to find them filled with useless calls and voice messages.

It seemed that his only way of knowing if the plan worked was to watch the morning news. He knew Tanya had no relatives and that Tiffany was her best friend. This was why he had staked his bet on her; now, he just needed to bide his time, and his dream of fame and career would come true.

Around six in the morning, Tanya woke up blearily. Recognizing that she was in a strange place, her mind became a tad bit confused. "C-Christ, did I overdrink last night? Where am I?"

Beckett passed her a bottle of water. "You did. I wanted to show you the night view, but you overdrank and turned tipsy. That's fine. It's not too late yet to catch the Capital in the first ray of sun. You just have to wait for the fog to fade, and you'll see how beautiful she is."

Tanya took the bottle without feeling any sense of alarm and drank it. "I hadn't even told Tiffany that I won't be back for the night! She must be beside herself worrying. Please, can you send me home right now? I promise we'll watch that beautiful view together next time."

A beat of silence later, Beckett replied, "Nope. Can't do. You can't go yet."

The unsettling signs finally caught up to Tanya, and her senses heightened. "What was that?"

Beckett pushed his glasses up his nose as a smirk shadowed his lips. "Do you know the reason why I took you on a date and made you so drunk that you blacked-out? It was so that I could force Tiffany Lane to admit that she stole my work. I've been working in this scene for ten years, Tanya — ten years of effort

brought me so close to fame and recognition. I cannot possibly let it all go to dust just like that! If I win, I own everything. If I lose, I become a disgraced nobody with nothing. Do you know, Tanya, that when I first came here, I had nothing? No money to feed my mouth. No place to take shelter. All I could do is stand on this peak and look over the Capital below my feet, and then I'd scream about how, one day, I'll finally root myself firmly here, that I'll become an elite…

"I'm always this close — this close — to success."

Chapter 799

Tanya frowned. "What did you… What did you do while I was drunk? I always thought you were a local in the Capital, but you aren't at all? Look, I get it. You wanna succeed. I do, too, just as much — I want to take root in this city and grow. But I also know that you need to keep your feet on the ground first if you want to take roots! Whatever you're planning right now — it'll only ruin you!

"You're already a success story to me, Beckett. You own a car, a house, and a high-paying job. You're smart, knowledgeable — educated! You've got all of these, so why do you still do this?"

"That's all an illusion! That house is rented! This car is bought through a loan! And my job might be high-paying, but ten years of it still won't be enough to cover a mere down payment in this city!" Beckett fumed, gritting his teeth. "I can't see my future, and I hate it! I hate that I don't know when my life will finally turn around! But then there's you… You're a God-given ticket out of this, and I'm not letting you up! Don't you know that this stinkin' city isn't at all lacking schmucks like me, who are neither better nor worse off? How else am I gonna stand above the rest of this oversized crowd, huh?!"

Desolation began to tinge Tanya's face. "You… You never liked me, did you? You didn't take me out on a date because you liked me. And you're not gonna apologize to Tiffany, too, are you?"

Beckett's answer was immediate and unwavering. "Hell no! Oh, I know how you feel about me, but the woman I'm looking for is not a naive idiot like you. No, it has to be a native of the Capital, because only then can I truly assimilate into this society and become a member of this elite city! And nowhere in hell will I ever apologize to Tiffany Lane. In fact, I want her to admit to being the copycat!"

Tanya's clutch on the water bottle tightened. Seething, she splashed every bit of remaining water directly on Beckett's face. "You… You bastard! No matter how much I used to admire you, well… it's no more! You're… You're worth nothing to me now! I thought that the world had far more kind souls than the wicked, but you showed me — you showed me that disgusting, rotten bastards like you are still far too many! You don't deserve even an ounce of my respect. And Tiffany will never bow down to your bastardly request. Your evil scheme is doomed to fail!"

Instead of lashing out in anger, Beckett smiled while wiping the water away from his face with a paper. "I don't give a damn about what you think of me. I know you're an orphan, so Tiffany is all you have. In a way, you're almost like her charge. And now, for your sake, she'll admit to the press that she's the disgraceful plagiarist. Just you watch. A few more hours later, and we'll have our answers."

"No! No, no, no!" Tanya bristled, her teeth clenched. "Ari won't let you! Jackson won't let you! And I — I'm going home and stopping you!"

She reached out to the car door, but it was locked.

"Aww, don't look so troubled. I don't plan to harm you at all," Beckett said in a hushed, airy tone. "Once I see Tiffany doing what she's supposed to do, I'll let you go. So now, all you have to do is to stay put in this goddamned car. By the way, I already know that Jackson West isn't gonna let me off the hook easily — after all, he and Tiffany go way back. I already expected him to forgo his company's brand and fame just for a woman, too. That said… Who the hell is 'Ari'?"

As soon as the word left his mouth, his expression changed a little as though he remembered something. “No way… You aren’t referring to Arianne Tremont, are you?”

Tanya’s eyes were puffy and red as she cried, “That’s right — Arianne Tremont! You’ve provoked the wrong people, you bastard! Tiffany is Arianne’s most precious friend — you made Tiffany mad, so the whole Tremont family will be mad. Even if Tiffany lied for your arse, do you really think your life will turn around? Do you honestly think the Tremonts can’t turn the tables on you? I can’t believe I used to think you were smart, worldly, and visionary. But now, it’s become clear—you’re a goddamned dimwit! Ari has visited Tiffany in Jackson’s company before; you must have seen it! And yet you managed to hatch a suicidally stupid plan like this one, huh? Oh, and maybe I should tell you this secret too: Tiffany was once Jackson’s fiancée. That’s right; that’s why he would always put her first. They might be separated, but they still love each other!”

Beckett knew how influential the Tremonts and the Wests were in the Capital, which meant that he had indeed doomed himself, especially since the disputed work was not his creation in the first place.

Finally realizing the extent of his foolishness, he lost his last ounce of composure and changed tact. “Tan, please, I didn’t hurt you, did I?” he pleaded. “After bringing you out last night, I didn’t do anything remotely harmful to you, right? This doesn’t constitute a crime; I mean, I’m not kidnapping you. You won’t make things up just to get back at me, will you?”

Chapter 800

Tanya was soft-hearted by nature, but it did not mean she was incapable of fury. “Oh, oh no, you didn’t do the worst to me, but aren’t you also denying me the freedom to leave this stinkin’ car, which constitutes unlawful detention? Huh? And boy, how about the fact that you threatened Tiffany by using me?!”

Beckett immediately unlocked the door. “Well, let us all pretend that it was done in jest, okay? Just give a call to Tiffany right now and tell her you’re okay, all nice, no hair harmed. I’ll send you back right away, alright? Just pretend that this is all a big, fat baloney my drunken a** came up with, okay?

“Come on, Tan. I’ve tried to make it big in the Capital for ten years. Ten frickin’ years! I was just upset, okay? Don’t hold that against me, please!” he dropped his voice into a plea. “If I ended up in prison, I’m doomed. My future is over! Please, my parents… My parents are still in my hometown, waiting for me to bring home fame and pride, yet I kept failing them. That’s why I haven’t returned home for years…”

Once bitten, twice shy; Tanya was apprehensive of being fooled again, so she asked, “But didn’t you come up with outstanding works in the past? You’re quite famous in the designing circle, anyway. Is that not good enough for your parents — not good enough for you to go home?”

“Yes, but that was a long time ago. After that, nothing I’ve done ever made a splash. That was the only year I returned to my hometown to see my parents with the money I’d earned. And that was it — until now, I haven’t gone back,” Beckett replied dejectedly. “Maybe this is why. How could you be satisfied at being a mediocre existence when you’ve once been something more? Please… I’m begging you to believe me just one more time. Please, please…”

A fierce mental tug-o-war later, Tanya decided that she did not have the heart to ruin him. After all, she saw herself in Beckett — just an outsider trying their damndest to carve out a spot for themselves in this city. She understood the pain.

“Fine, I’ll give Tiffany a call and tell her I’m alright, okay?” she relented. “Even if you can’t continue in your current career, you could always try another trade, right? You’ll still have a chance to make it work — as long as you don’t turn to crime ever again. It will backfire.”

Beckett bobbed his head in gushing agreement. “I know, I know. Thank you… Thank you so much…”

Watching the man and his pathetic ways were the last blow to any admiration Tanya had. Right now, all she saw was a pathetic loser.

After calming herself down, she called Tiffany, rousing the latter from her slumber due to its loud ringtone. Knowing that Jackson was still deeply asleep, Tiffany swooped the phone from the desk instinctively and bolted into the bathroom to avoid waking him up.

She had been so worried last night that sleep came very late to her. Still bleary, she missed the name on the screen when she answered, “Hello?”

Tanya steeled herself before answering, “Hey, Tiffany. I’m fine. I drank a little too much with Beckett last night… I’m sorry. Must have worried you a lot.”

The news and her voice refreshed her a bit. “W-wait, what’s that supposed to mean? You mean you’re okay? Fine? No problem? Did that mofo kidnap you or nah? — Hon, I even lodged a case to the cops! Almost rang up the press to tell them that I copied his work and whatnot! What the hell happened?”

Tanya gave a side-eye leer at Beckett before fibbing against her genuine wish, “N-Nothing, really. He was drunk-texting stupid things. Sorry… You told the cops? Then I’ll go to them and explain myself. I really am fine. I’ll be back soon!”

Now that she was sure Tanya was unharmed, Tiffany drew out a long sigh of relief. “Ohhh. My. Goooood! I was sh*tting bricks worrying about you! Okay, real talk, you better stay away from that no-good Beckett Hushman from now on, okay? Even though he was drunk-texting, the words were incriminating enough about his character. They say people show their real face when they’re drunk! Who knows if he’ll really pull off something in his text next time! Anyway, alright, come back soon. I’ll be heading back as well.”