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Chapter 214 I Didn't Plagiarize It, Coolest Girl in Town

"Alright. I'll hold you to it, then." The smile Elise gave Alexander was so sincere that it was practically infectious, and he voluntarily reached out to grasp her hand. "Come on, let's go home." Shoulder to shoulder, they walked off into the moonlit night. ... The next day, Elise went to work as usual, only for a grim Brendan to follow her into her office immediately upon her entry. With a complicated look in his eyes, he stared at her and pursed his lips for a moment before stating, "I have something to ask you, my darling sister-in-law." Startled by both the appellation and the stern look on his face, she urged, "Go on."

After a moment of contemplation, he continued, "Have you finished the draft for your design? May I see it?" Even though Elise found it to be a strange request, she carelessly flipped through her papers to locate her design draft and hand it over to him. "It's mostly done. If you need it urgently, I can finish it by today." Yet, Brendan's expression turned ugly the moment he saw her design draft. "What's going on?" she queried. In the next second, he lifted his gaze and stared right into her eyes. "Did you show this draft to anyone else before this moment?"

After thinking about it earnestly, she answered, "No one has seen it apart from you. Why? Did something happen?" Without answering her directly, he pulled out his cell phone and handed it over to her. "Look at this." Elise took the phone and glanced down at it, and all of the blood drained out of her face. "How is this possible?! This design is my own. How can

this person's design resemble mine so much?" "This is the work of a local first-rate designer, Coner. She announced it to the public last evening as part of her new series—the design I showed you being the main diagram.

The whole series is in a style identical to yours." "It's my design. I didn't plagiarize it," Elise muttered darkly. The fact of the matter was that Brendan believed her, but his trust would do no good in a situation where Coner had already published her designs. This meant they could no longer use Elise's design. "We can't use these diagrams anymore, Elise. You'll have to redesign them." The more Elise thought about it, the more she realized that something was wrong.

After all, she *had* noticed that someone had touched her drawing papers when she came back from lunch the previous afternoon, and now her design was on the Internet a scant few hours after that incident. There was no way this could be a coincidence. "I designed this myself—" she uttered slowly, "—and now I suspect that someone has stolen it." The moment she said that, Brendan stared at her gravely. For some reason, he felt like she was telling the truth, but evidence was needed for everything nowadays. "Do you have any proof?" It made Elise smile without any warmth in her eyes.

"No, but the truth can't be hidden or falsified. I will find the proof I need to claim my innocence. Until then, I hope you'll believe me." Upon hearing that, he nodded obligingly. "If that's the case, I have a solution." Once again, their eyes met and he leaned forward to whisper into her ear. After Brendan left, Elise looked down at the design diagram in her hands and clenched her fists silently. After putting the diagram away, she took up a blank piece of paper and began to redo her design in a brand new style.

Not long after that, Molly walked in with a fresh cup of coffee. "Your coffee, Miss Sinclair." Keeping her eyes on the drawing, Elise answered carelessly, "Put it down. I'll drink it after I

finish my drawing." "Of course, Miss Sinclair." Molly was quick to respond. After putting the coffee aside, she turned to leave, only to have Elise stop her. "Just a moment." Molly turned back at that. "Did you need something else, Miss Sinclair?"

It was only then that Elise paused in her motions and slowly lifted her head to stare at Molly. Her gaze was as clear as always and free of any stray thoughts, but Molly got the vague impression that she was behaving differently than normal. "I have a question for you, Molly." Molly nodded and added, "Go ahead, Miss Sinclair." Humming her acknowledgment, Elise continued, "Thing is, something has gone missing from my office yesterday.

Did you see anyone come in here around lunchtime?" Immediately, Molly looked shocked. "Have you lost something, Miss Sinclair? What is it? Is it valuable? Nothing like this has ever happened in our studio. Perhaps you should search for it again." Staring at the woman placidly, Elise continued, "The object itself isn't very valuable, but I did lose it, after all. Perhaps I should file a police report." Of course, the mention of a police report terrified Molly out of her wits, but she willed herself to keep a straight face. "Maybe that's blowing things out of proportion, Miss Sinclair.

I don't think there's a need to file a police report if it's nothing valuable, since that will have a negative impact on the studio's image." The response more or less confirmed Elise's suspicions, but she only sneered internally without giving anything away. Nodding her head, she agreed, "You're right—it's not valuable enough to warrant such an action. Even so, I won't rest until I find the thief. You may leave now." Just like that, Molly felt a chill run down her spine. Even though she felt like Elise was hinting at something, she dared not dwell on it and only strode out of the room without a second thought.

It wasn't until she had left that Elise's gaze darkened. Meanwhile, as Molly was standing outside the office patting her chest and blowing out a sigh of relief, she saw Ashlyn walk in

with a strange woman. At once, she went up to welcome them. "Miss Lawson, what a pleasant surprise! What are you doing here?" Looking at Molly with an indifferent expression, Ashlyn asked carelessly, "Is Brendan in?" "He's in the office," Molly answered truthfully.

"Allow me to escort you." With that, she led Ashlyn to Brendan's office, whereupon Ashlyn threw open the door and walked in. "Brendan!" she called out with a broad smile. After all, the pair had grown up together and were very familiar with each other. It was only after the previous incident that Brendan was no longer as gentle with her and only treated her with the cordiality of a casual friend. "Ah—Miss Lawson.

We have yet to complete the formal gown that you requested of us, but surely you don't need us to run ourselves into the ground for it. I will notify you once we've finished the design." "What are you saying?" Ashlyn chuckled and continued, "I'm not here to rush you. I'm actually here for another reason." With that, she ushered the woman behind her forward. "I imagine you must be quite familiar with this person." It was none other than the designer, Coner.

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Staring up at the person before him, Brendan narrowed his eyes. It was none other than Coner, the designer whose design was completely identical to Elise's. If it weren't for the fact that he saw Elise's design first, he would have thought that she plagiarized Coner's. Moreover, it wasn't simply that Brendan saw Elise's design first; it was that he trusted Alexander's judgment and believed her to be the kind of person who would never do such a thing. It was an inexplicable sort of trust, but it gave him so much unshakeable faith in Elise

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that when he finally met Coner, he didn't feel the least bit of goodwill toward the stranger and only asked bluntly, "And who might you be?"

Bolstered by the fact that he did not seem to recognize Coner, Ashlyn hurried to introduce, "This is the designer, Coner, who is also my schoolmate from overseas. Coincidentally, her latest design happens to be a formal style of dress that I quite like. I'm hoping to recommend her to you so that not only may she work here, she can also undertake the entirety of my dress design by herself." As Brendan listened, he rhythmically tapped his fingers on the desk, looking back and forth between Ashlyn and Coner. For a long time, he was silent, leaving Ashlyn with no way to guess his state of mind.

"Is that okay with you, Brendan?" she prompted. Coming back to his senses, he responded, "Of course, but I need a copy of her CV. If there are no issues, we can hire her." Overjoyed, Coner whipped out her resume. "Here's my CV, Mr. Griffith. Please have a look." Then, she handed her design diagram over. "This is my newest design, which is also the formal gown that Ashlyn mentioned. You may have a look at it." After glancing at her design, Brendan flipped her resume shut and couldn't help sneering. "What a coincidence!" he taunted. "I feel like I've seen your design somewhere before." L

ooking shocked, Coner hurried to explain, "You must be mistaken, Mr. Griffith. Designers have a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism and I would never plagiarize someone else's work." "Is that so?" He arched his eyebrows and countered, "I'm willing to believe your word, but we're not lacking in designers at the moment. However, it seems like Miss Lawson is willing to take you as her designer. How about this? You can be Miss Lawson's private designer. I think that's a pretty good solution." As soon as he said that, Ashlyn felt her smile disappear.

After all, given their years of friendship, she had assumed she would be able to convince him to hire someone simply by putting a word in. It never occurred to her that he would refuse. "Coner does excellent work, Brendan. She won many international awards while she was abroad. Talent like hers is hard to come by, and I'm recommending her to you only because I'm impressed by her designs," Ashlyn pleaded earnestly as she tried to appeal to his feelings. Nevertheless, Brendan did not fall for it. All of a sudden, he remembered that Ashlyn had come by the studio on the previous day as well.

For her to drop by the studio with Coner today seemed fortuitous, unless there was something going on between them that he wasn't privy to. In the past, he would never have second-guessed Ashlyn. However, now that she had revealed her dark side to him through the things she did, any goodwill he had for her was completely gone. "Here's the thing—I'm sure it's purely coincidence, but the work of the designer you're currently recommending to

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me is similar to the work of one of our designers. I dare wager over 80% of the work is similar, so perhaps there's a misunderstanding here that could be cleared up if I summoned our designer. How about that?"

Never in a million years did Ashlyn think that Brendan would say that. Does this mean that he suspects me? But how can he have connected the two situations? This won't do! I have to keep my cool. And so, Ashlyn smiled and asked him calmly, "Are you pulling my leg, Brendan? Nothing is more important to a designer than their reputation and originality. It's fine if you're not willing to accept Coner. I can recommend another good studio to her, but I will not stand here and allow you to drag her name through the mud like that!" Her indignation sounded so righteous that Brendan almost believed her for a second.

However, he only pulled out his cell phone and dialed Elise. "Bring your design to my office, Elise." Currently, Elise was drafting a new design and was flummoxed by the instruction. Nonetheless, she put down her pencil and went to his office with her design in hand. The moment she opened the door, she saw Ashlyn. Despite being somewhat taken aback, she simply walked up to Brendan. "Here it is." Meanwhile, Brendan accepted the diagram and pulled Coner's up for comparison.

Elise's face darkened instantly, and she turned her head to stare coldly and silently at Coner. Incredibly, the latter was the first to speak up. "My goodness! How could this happen? This is my design, so how did it end up here? Did you copy my work, ma'am?" Despite her derision, Elise held her temper in check and asked evenly, "Since it's your work, do you mind telling me your design concept?" Upon hearing that, Coner retorted disapprovingly, "Every designer has a concept that's exclusive to the work they designed. Of course I have a concept since it's my work."

"In that case, please do share it with the room," Elise continued. Fighting the urge to retreat, Coner glanced at Ashlyn, who gave her an encouraging look. Feeling her courage return to her, the former continued, "Every girl dreams of the perfect wedding dress that will showcase her unique charm at her wedding. As I wanted to bring that dream to life, I based my design on that concept and embellished the skirt of the wedding dress in different blue hues. In addition, I made it multi-layered to give off the impression of lightness, airiness, and etherealness."

With a sneer, Elise countered, "I see. If that's the case, do you mind explaining to me why the left and right sides of the upper half of the wedding dress aren't coordinated?" Up till that moment, Coner had failed to notice the issue Elise pointed out. It was only after hearing

Elise's question that she took the diagram back for a second glance and noticed that the left and right sides were, indeed, uncoordinated.

It was an issue she had failed to catch beforehand. "I... I..." Coner kept stammering. She stood there red-faced and frozen to the spot for a long time, not being able to come up with an explanation.