Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 941 - 950

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 941

At most, she would only kill off the person instantly. Thus, she was better than Stanley in a way.

Stanley snorted at the panic-stricken woman. "You'd better not get on my nerves! If not, you'll surely regret doing so!"

Jacqueline gritted her teeth, stifling her simmering fury. "All right, you win this round. Stanley Quinn, you'd better wait for me to turn the tables around!"

Stanley hung up on her with utter disdain in his eyes. Hmph! Wait for you? Fine, I'll sit back and wait to see who will be the one who ends up in a pathetic state.

Without hesitation, Stanley put his cell phone into the pocket of his white coat and strode toward the elevator. He had to be punctual as he was specially invited by the management of the hospital to perform surgery for a patient.

On the other hand, Natalie and Shane were unaware that Stanley had a phone conversation with Jacqueline right after they left.

The moment they stepped into the ward, Joyce and the two kids' infectious giggles cheered them up in an instant.

Natalie burst into laughter as she put down the hospital discharge form. "You're laughing your heads off! What's so funny?"

Joyce replied casually, "I'm telling them jokes."

Natalie nodded. "Go ahead then."

Joyce glanced at her watch and stood up. "Oh, no! It's almost time. I have to go now. I promised to accompany my parents for a meal."

"Bye, Aunt Joyce!" The two kids waved goodbye at her obediently.

Joyce caressed the two kids' chubby faces. "Oh, I'm starting to get upset because I won't be able to see both of you for quite a while after this. I'll surely miss you."

Natalie chuckled. "If you miss them, feel free to visit us overseas any time. Get Shane to bring you there."

Joyce turned to look at Shane in an instant.

Shane was standing behind Natalie, his usual aloof expression on his face.

Joyce could not resist shuddering at his intimidating vibe. "It's all right. I'll fly there myself to visit you when I'm free."

Deep down, she grumbled and scoffed. Hmph! I'll never take the risk of flying there together with him. Ever since I plucked his hair previously, he's been giving me that kind of grim look! What if he takes the opportunity to pay me back when we're alone with each other?

Natalie could guess the reason Joyce turned her down. She shook her head and smiled again.

Even so, her smile froze as something came into her mind. "Oh yeah, Joyce, I bumped into Stanley just now when I was settling the discharge procedure for Sharon."

Joyce was dumbfounded and lowered her eyes. "He works in another hospital, doesn't he? Why is he here?"

"I'm clueless about that too. I bet he's here for something else. Are you all right?" Natalie was concerned about her friend.

Joyce waved at her casually. "Don't worry. I'm fine. Nat, you don't have to tell me anything about him. Didn't I mention that I've made up my mind to give up on him? Thus, I'm not interested in anything related to him again. I'm running late, so I need to make a move first."

With that, she took her bag and stepped out of the ward hastily.

Natalie let out a deep sigh as she watched her friend's figure disappear out of her sight.

"She doesn't look like she's really given up on Stanley yet as mentioned," Shane commented all of a sudden.

Natalie felt her temples start to throb. "If even you can sense that, how could I have not? Not to mention, Joyce and Stanley grew up together. She started to fall head over heels for him during her teenage days. That was almost twenty years ago. Of course, it's impossible for her to let go of everything within a short span."

"Did anything happen to them previously?" Surprisingly, Shane's curiosity was piqued.

Natalie shrugged her shoulders. "What happened between them was similar to our previous conflict."

Shane squinted his eyes as he pondered for a while. "So he thought that Joyce had killed both his parents?"

Natalie explained further, "Yeah, something like that. Stanley misunderstood Joyce for causing his parents' death indirectly. He thought Joyce was the one who spilled the beans about his parents' whereabouts to her parents. He claimed they leaked it to his parents' foes, causing them to be killed. No matter how Joyce has been clarifying that she and her parents were wrongly accused, Stanley refused to accept her explanation."

"No wonder." Shane nodded after getting a clearer picture.

"I've been trying to investigate it on behalf of Joyce all this while, but to no avail. It did happen a long time ago, after all. I haven't been able to obtain any evidence," Natalie lamented.

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 942

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 942

Shane kept quiet after that.

I'm not about to help Joyce investigate it! This is her problem, and it has nothing to do with me! Besides, I'm not even done with getting my own revenge!

With that in mind, Shane said, "I was at the court today. Sam's final trial has been brought forward to the 19th of next month. According to the lawyer, he'll be sentenced to death."

Natalie's eyes lit up upon hearing that. "Really? That's great!"

"It's indeed great news, but we have yet to find the second killer," Shane said as he looked up at her.

I really want to bring my parents' killers to justice.

Having felt his intentions, Natalie gave him a squeeze on the finger and said, "Don't worry, we'll find the killer."

Shane nodded with a smile and was about to say something when his phone rang.

He answered it immediately when he saw Silas' name on the caller ID.

"What is it?"

"Mr. Shane, I've caught a thief in your office! He was sent by Sean!" Silas reported angrily.

The look on Shane's face turned gloomy instantly, and an icy-cold aura emanated from his body. "What? A thief?"

Natalie stared at him in confusion and asked, "What thief?"

Shane ignored her question for the time being and pressed on with murderous intent in his eyes, "What did he steal?"

"He didn't steal anything, or rather he hadn't managed to steal what he came for. However, I interrogated him, and he confessed that Sean had sent him to steal an equity transfer agreement. I'm guessing it's the one for Well Properties," Silas replied.

There was no way Sean wouldn't know about Sam's arrest.

He was aware that Shane had found the will, so he knew that Shane was in possession of the equity transfer agreement for Well Properties. However, he didn't dare show up in person as Shane would surely catch him if he did.

As such, sending someone to steal the equity transfer agreement was the only way he could get his hands on it.

"I see..." Shane's lips curled into a cold grin as he said that.

I knew it! I deliberately put the word out that I had found the will just so I could bait Sean into making a move, but things have been so quiet that I thought Sean had given up on it. Looks like he's still trying to get it, after all! What secrets does Well Properties hold? Why did my mom give it to Sean, and why is Sean so obsessed with getting it? He's not even that obsessed about Thompson Group!

"Wait for me in my office. I'll come right over!" Shane ordered coldly.

"Yes, sir!" Silas replied.

Shane then hung up the phone and turned toward Natalie as he explained, "Sean sent someone to steal the equity transfer agreement for Well Properties from my office, but Silas caught him. I need to head over." Natalie nodded. "Go on, then."

Shane gave her a pat on the head and glanced at the two kids playing with their toys on the hospital bed. "Just give me a call if anything happens, and I'll come rushing right over."

"Don't worry, we'll be fine!" Natalie said with a smile.

Shane put his phone away, lifted her chin, and gave her an aggressive kiss before leaving.

Natalie didn't know whether to laugh or cry as she rubbed her lips that were hurting from his kiss.

Shane drove all the way to Thompson Group and went straight to his office.

Silas was sitting on the sofa with a tied-up man kneeling next to him.

The man looked like he was in his thirties and was dressed in a Maintenance Department uniform. He was trembling all over from fear as the door to the office opened and Shane stepped into the room.

Silas quickly stood up and greeted him, "Mr. Shane!"

Shane nodded at him in response before shifting his gaze toward the man in the Maintenance Department uniform. "This is the thief?"

Silas nodded. "Yes. I came to retrieve a document left in your office and saw him rummaging through your drawers and cabinets."

The man kneeling on the ground lowered his head in response.

The look on Shane's face grew increasingly cold as he asked, "Is he from the Maintenance Department?"

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 943

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 943

"No, he isn't. I've checked with the Maintenance Department, and they've confirmed that he isn't one of theirs. In fact, he isn't even from this company. He knocked out one of our staff from the Maintenance Department and took this uniform off him!" Silas replied angrily.

The coldness in Shane's expression intensified as he asked, "How is that employee's condition now?"

"He's fine and has already returned to duty. The elevators are scheduled for maintenance today, and this guy knocked the staff out while he was on his way to service the elevators. He then changed into this uniform and snuck into your office, Mr. Shane," Silas said while pointing at the man.

The man looked up at them with tears and snot all over his face as he whimpered in fear. "I'm sorry, Mr. Shane! Please spare me! I'm begging you!"

The man leaned forward submissively, only to have Silas kick his head back as he said with a sneer, "That's it? You were stealing from our CEO's office! Did you really think a simple apology would suffice?"

The man trembled even more intensely as he stammered, "I-I was just blinded by the money! I—"

Shane cut him off coldly, "Are you one of Sean's men? Or did he hire you just for this job?"

"I... He hired me just for this job. I'm a professional thief for hire that specializes in stealing corporate documents. I was gaming at home when I got a call from someone asking me to steal an equity transfer agreement from your office. I knew Thompson Group wasn't some small company that I can easily steal from, but the money offered was just so great that I..."

Had I known that I would get caught like this, I would never have agreed to the job no matter how much I was offered! I can't believe I let my successful attempts in the past get to my head! I actually thought I would get away with it even though Thompson Group is one of the top fifty companies in the world. Ugh, those smaller companies sure are nothing compared to large ones like these. Right now, I'm completely at their mercy...

The man smiled wryly and regretted his actions greatly at the thought of that.

"You specialize in helping others steal corporate documents?" Shane narrowed his eyes. This is the first time I've heard of such a profession!

Silas cleared his throat as he said, "It's true that such a profession exists, albeit in the shadows. When companies wish to obtain top-secret data or evidence from other companies, they would hire men like him to steal it for them. You can think of it as an underhanded method of acquiring said documents, Mr. Shane."

Shane sneered. "Heh, this certainly is eye-opening."

Silas shot the man a cold glare. "No one has ever dared steal from Thompson Group, so it's normal that you haven't heard of such things. This guy is just a little bolder than the others, that's all!"

The man shrank back a little. "I've already told you everything, Mr. Shane! Please let me go! I didn't steal anything! I've got an elderly mother and a young child to look after!"

"You have a child, and yet you're still doing this sort of thing? Do you want your child to live the rest of his life in shame because of you?" Shane asked coldly.

The man lowered his head. "I... It's not like I wanted to... I'm only doing this to survive!"

"To survive? Heh!" Shane couldn't be bothered to see if he was lying nor look into his actual identity. He then turned toward Silas and said, "Where's his phone? Have him call Sean and tell him he got the equity transfer agreement."

Silas' eyes lit up instantly. "Are you trying to bait Sean into coming out of hiding, Mr. Shane? Get him to reveal his location or something, perhaps?"

Shane nodded slightly. "Yeah."

"All right." Silas then whipped out the man's phone and held it up to his face as he said, "Unlock it and make the call."

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 944

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 944

The man did as told while Shane and Silas kept quiet as they watched from the side.

However, the call didn't get through, and all they heard was an automated message saying the number was no longer in service.

Shane clenched his fists tightly while a wide-eyed Silas asked in shock, "Is this phone bugged?"

The man shook his head profusely. "No, it isn't! It really isn't!"

Silas grabbed him by the collar and asked, "Were you having a conversation with Sean while stealing the documents? Did he hear my voice and realize you were caught?"

"No, I wasn't on a call with him! I wouldn't dare do so! Some companies have sensors that sound the alarm when they detect an unrecognized signal from calls being made. I was afraid that this company had those sensors installed too, so I didn't dare make any calls at all!" the man explained.

Silas froze.

He's right. Most companies do have such sensors installed, and Mr. Shane's office is no exception. Only a few phone numbers have been saved into the system, so phone signals from any other number would definitely trigger the alarm. That means this guy is telling the truth.

"This is just one of Sean's plans," Shane spoke up all of a sudden.

Silas looked at him in confusion. "One of his plans?"

"Sean knew it wouldn't be easy to steal the equity transfer agreement. He didn't have much chance at success the first time, so he never expected this attempt to be successful either. That's why Sean deactivated his number so quickly," Shane explained while rubbing his eyebrows.

"So, this man is a pawn that Sean has abandoned?" Silas asked with a glint in his eye.

Shane nodded. "That's right."

The man went pale the moment he heard that.

I-I'm just a pawn?

"Sean never expected for him to successfully steal the equity transfer agreement to begin with. He only sent him to find out where the document could possibly be hidden. Should this man fail to do so, Sean would just arrange for someone else to look for it elsewhere. Whatever happens to him won't affect Sean in the slightest," Shane continued.

The man on the floor was close to tears once again as he realized he had been tricked and used.

Silas gave him a sympathetic look as he asked, "I see... What shall we do about this guy, Mr. Shane?"

"Take him to the police station. He has stolen quite a lot of corporate documents in the past, so it's about time he paid the price for it anyway," Shane said with a wave of his hand.

Silas smiled and nodded. "Understood."

He then summoned some bodyguards and had them take the man away.

The man was still begging to be spared as he was being dragged outside, but Shane and Silas both ignored his pleas.

"Have someone install more hidden cameras in the building. I believe Sean will make another attempt at this," Shane ordered.

"Understood," Silas replied.

Shane then waved at him as he said, "All right, you can go now."

"Yes, sir."

Shane waited till Silas was gone before opening the safe in his lounge. Inside the safe were some precious jewelry and a folder.

He took the folder out of the safe and retrieved the equity transfer agreement for Well Properties inside.

The last time Shane went to Well Properties, he saw the manager and asked him if he knew why his mother gave Sean the shares.

The manager said he didn't know why, and that he only knew Sean was the chairman because Shane's mother said it herself.

As such, she had truly given Well Properties' shares to Sean willingly.

Naturally, Shane didn't take too kindly to that, but he was more curious about the reason behind his mother's actions.

Although he was unable to find Sean, he could try to lure him out through Sam.

If that didn't work, he would put the word out about auctioning the equity transfer agreement as Sean was bound to show up then.

Even if he didn't, he would still send someone in his stead, and catching that guy would also lead them to Sean.

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 945

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 945

With that in mind, Shane then placed the document back into the folder and left his office with it.

The next day, Natalie was saying goodbye to Shane and Joyce at the airport.

The two kids sitting in the wheelchair waved goodbye at Shane too.

"Bye, Daddy! Remember to come see us and Mommy over the weekend!" Sharon shouted.

Connor nodded and chimed in as well, "Yeah! Don't forget that, Daddy!"

"I will," Shane replied as he knelt down and gave them both a hug.

They're my wife and kids! There's no way I wouldn't go see them!

Natalie let go of the wheelchair to give them some space and walked up to Joyce. "I'll be leaving the company in your care, Joyce."

"I know, don't worry." Joyce nodded and shifted her gaze toward Shane and the kids as she continued, "Honestly, I was shocked when you told me Shane

was their biological father, and I still am. How did the DNA paternity test results turn out positive when they were negative before?"

"That's because someone sabotaged us," Natalie replied.

"Whoever did that sure is a real scumbag!" Joyce exclaimed with a sigh.

Natalie chuckled. "All right, let's not talk about this now. Take good care of yourself, okay? Feel free to come see us if you miss us!"

"I will. You take care too," Joyce said and reached out to give Natalie a hug. However, before she could do so, Shane pulled Natalie aside and flashed her a cold glare.

Seriously, Mr. Shane? I just wanted to give Nat a hug! I've never seen a man so petty before! Joyce rolled her eyes at the thought of that.

Natalie didn't know whether to laugh or cry at Shane's actions. "Don't be jealous, Shane! Joyce is a female!" she said while patting the back of his hand.

"Makes no difference to me. Remember to call me once you get there," Shane said while tucking Natalie's hair behind her ear.

"Okay." Natalie nodded.

At that moment, the announcement for them to board their flight was heard on the PA system.

Hugging Shane, Natalie pressed her ear on his chest to hear his heartbeat as she said reluctantly, "We'll be leaving now."

Shane gave her a kiss on the forehead. "All right. Go on, then."

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Natalie took a deep breath and let go of him as she turned around.

She was about to make her way to the boarding gate when Shane called out to her all of a sudden, "Hey, Nat!"

Natalie paused in her tracks and turned around. "What is it?"

Shane then stepped forward, wrapped an arm around her waist, lifted her chin with his other hand, and kissed her on the lips.

Joyce quickly whipped her phone out and snapped away excitedly while Connor closed his eyes on the wheelchair.

Of course, he made sure to cover Sharon's eyes as well.

The two of them kissed for about two minutes before Shane finally let go of Natalie.

Wow, they sure gave that kiss their all! Their lips are all red, and there's even a strand of saliva hanging between them! Oh my god! This is so hot! Joyce clicked her tongue and tried to suppress her excitement.

Neither Shane nor Natalie knew what was going on inside her head, and they wouldn't have cared even if they did.

Natalie gazed deeply into Shane's eyes and said, "All right, I'm leaving for real now."

"Okay." Shane nodded.

Natalie then let go of his neck and turned around to push the wheelchair toward the boarding gate.

Shane simply stood there and watched as the three of them slowly disappeared from sight.

"Mr. Shane, you could go there with them and rush back later," Joyce suggested from behind him.

Honestly, why are these two being so dramatic? It's not like they're going to be separated forever or anything!

Shane turned around and shot Joyce a glance in response, prompting her to giggle apologetically. "Hehe... Pretend I didn't say that!"

"No, you're right." Shane flashed her a rare smile before running toward Natalie.

Joyce blinked a couple of times as she stared in disbelief. "Wait, he actually listened to me?"

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 946

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 946

Shane quickly caught up to Natalie, who had just arrived at the entrance to the VIP passage.

She spun around when she heard him, and her jaw dropped in surprise. "Shane? What are you doing here?"

"I'll go there with you three and come back later," Shane said as he took the wheelchair over from her.

"Are you serious?" Natalie asked from the side.

The two kids were looking at him in shock as well.

"Are you really going there with us, Daddy?" Connor asked.

Shane gave him a pat on the head and replied, "Yup!"

"What about your schedule, then? Silas said you wanted to inspect the subsidiary company in the afternoon, right?" Natalie asked.

She was happy that he would go with them, but she didn't want him neglecting his work because of them.

Even if he's the CEO and chairman of the company, the shareholders would still be displeased with him!

"Don't worry, I can just postpone it till tomorrow." Shane brushed it off casually.

Natalie frowned. "But this isn't appropriate."

"It's fine. I can have the vice president go in my place instead. Sometimes, giving your subordinates a little bit of authority will result in them being more loyal," Shane said.

Natalie nodded. "That's true... Fine, I suppose there's no talking you out of this anyway. Still, you haven't purchased a ticket, and it's already past the cut-off time now."

"Oh, I won't be needing a ticket. My private jet is parked right outside," Shane said as he pushed the wheelchair with one hand while holding Natalie's with the other. "Let's go."

Natalie found it both touching and hilarious at the same time.

Oh well, whatever. I'll just let him send us there if he wants to. Besides, the kids are happy with this arrangement too, so it's fine!

Just like that, the four of them happily boarded the private jet.

Meanwhile, Jacqueline was standing below the deck of a fishing boat at the pier. She was trembling with anger as she stared at the iceboxes around her.

"I can't believe that b*stard Sean would arrange for me to hide in a fishing vessel like this!" Jacqueline was losing her mind as she glared at the lobsters swimming around in the iceboxes.

It's so stinky and filthy here. This is way worse than the bridge cavern! Sean must've done this on purpose! He clearly had other ships that he could've used, but he chose this fishing vessel just to torment and humiliate me! Just you wait, Sean, I'll get my revenge for this!

With that in mind, Jacqueline kicked one of the iceboxes aside angrily and pinched her nose.

She then crouched down to not lose her balance when the ship began to move. On top of that, she had to remain well-hidden to avoid being caught by the coast guard.

All she had to do was make it to international waters safely and she would be free.

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Shane and Natalie were still unaware of Jacqueline leaving J City, as none of them expected her to sneak out of there under the deck of a fishing vessel.

That way, she was able to avoid Shane's men, who were searching for her at the docks.

Natalie and the others arrived at their destination about seven hours later, and Sally came over to pick them up at the airport.

She was astonished to see that Shane had come along with them and asked in surprise, "Mr. Shane? What are you doing here?"

"What, I can't be here?" Shane responded coldly.

Sally flailed her arms anxiously as she explained, "No, that's not what I meant! You see, I didn't know you were coming along, so I drove a four-seater to pick them up. There's no room for you in the car!"

"It's simple. You can just hail a cab instead. Now, hand me the keys," Shane replied and held his hand out.

Sally had no choice but to do as told with a helpless look on her face.

With one arm around Natalie's waist, Shane wheeled the two kids that were fast asleep all the way to the parking lot elevator.

Natalie flashed Sally an apologetic smile when they passed her by. "I'm sorry I forgot to inform you, Sally. I'll call the housekeeper and have her come pick you up, so just wait here in the airport."

"No, I'll just hail a cab myself. Mr. Shane came here in person, so I don't want to disturb you guys any further. I'll go have some fun in the city myself and head back later!" Sally said with a smile.

Natalie nodded. "All right, have fun! I'll have Shane cover the expenses later!"

Sally's eyes lit up instantly. "Sure thing! Thanks, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson!"

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 947

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 947

Shane simply snorted in response while Natalie found herself amused by Sally's antics.

"Come on, let's go!" Shane said as he moved his hand from Natalie's waist to her cheek and turned her head away from Sally.

"All right, all right. I'm coming!" Natalie didn't know whether to laugh or cry in response as the four of them carried on walking.

Due to the difference in time zones, Shane chose not to spend the night there and took a flight back later that evening.

Since it was also nighttime when he returned to the country, he was able to avoid suffering from jet lag.

The two kids were disappointed when they woke up and saw that Shane was gone. However, they smiled happily again when Natalie comforted them and said he would come over a few days later.

Suddenly, Natalie's phone rang on the nightstand, and she answered it happily when she saw Jared's name on the caller ID. "Hey, Jared!"

"Hey, Nat! Are you still in Astoria?" he asked gently.

Natalie nodded. "Yeah, I am. Why?"

"My teacher is going to organize a traveling exhibition, and the next stop will be Astoria. I'll be able to see you then!" Jared replied.

Natalie was overjoyed. "That's great! Sharon and Connor will surely be happy when they hear this. When will you be arriving? I'll go pick you up!"

"Tomorrow at four in the afternoon," Jared replied.

Natalie noted the time down in her head. "Got it!"

My competition will be over by four, so I'll have time to go pick him up at the airport.

The two then chatted a little bit longer to catch up before ending the call.

Natalie went to tell her kids about their uncle coming over to visit them, and they were really happy as they hadn't seen him in a long time.

The three of them played for quite a while. The kids were very energetic as they had been sleeping during the day.

Natalie, on the other hand, was really tired and sleepy.

Fortunately for her, Connor eventually told her to get some sleep in her room as he could help look after Sharon.

As she had always found Connor to be very reliable, Natalie left them and went to bed after blowing her hair dry.

The next morning, she was woken up by Sally, who said, "Someone called asking for you earlier."

"Who was it?" Natalie asked with a yawn while leaning lazily against the door frame.

"It's someone from the mental hospital. They said Jessie has been found to be pregnant," Sally replied.

Natalie's eyes went wide instantly when she heard that. "What? Jasmine... I mean, Jessie is pregnant? Who's the father?"

Sally shook her head. "I don't know, and I doubt the mental hospital does either. Only Jessie would know the answer to that."

"I can't believe she got pregnant!" Natalie exclaimed with a frown.

"I know, right? I was shocked too when I first heard about it! The staff from the mental hospital was asking how we plan on handling this. They want to know if we plan on letting her out to better care for her baby, or if they should keep her there," Sally said.

Natalie pursed her lips. "I'll ask Shane about this."

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I don't want to make this decision by myself! A human life is involved here! I should talk to Shane first.

Sally nodded. "Sure. I'll leave this to you and Mr. Shane then. Hurry up and come downstairs for breakfast. I'll go get the kids."

"Okay."

Natalie waited till Sally had left before frowning as she closed the door behind her.

Damn, I wasn't expecting Jasmine to get pregnant... It's nighttime where Shane is right now, so he should have arrived by now.

With that in mind, she sat down on the bed and gave Shane a call.

Shane's tired voice came on the phone moments later. "What's up?"

"Hey, Darling! Did you not get any sleep on the flight?" Natalie asked with a frown.

He didn't sleep at all before coming here with me, and he stayed up the whole time to look after the kids on the flight here. That means he has stayed up for over a day! Not getting any sleep on the flight back would mean he has been up for 36 hours!

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 948

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 948

"No, I had some work to do on the flight home," Shane said.

Natalie pursed her lips upon hearing that. "I knew I should've insisted on not having you come with us. That way, you wouldn't have ended up having to work on the flight home."

Shane smiled when he heard her blaming herself for it. "There, there. It's not your fault. So, what's up?"

"Oh, I just received word that Jasmine is pregnant," Natalie replied.

Shane arched an eyebrow in response. "Who's the father?"

"I don't know. The mental hospital staff are asking how we plan on handling this. They want to know if they should let her out to care for the baby or remain in the hospital. I couldn't make the decision on my own, so I thought I'd seek your opinion on this," Natalie answered.

Shane narrowed his eyes. "She has a private ward in the mental hospital. Staying there won't affect her pregnancy in any way."

Natalie understood what he meant instantly. "So, you mean we shouldn't let her out?"

"Yes, there's no need to. She can keep the baby if she wants to or have it aborted if she doesn't," Shane said.

While he wouldn't choose to abort an innocent baby himself, the mother's own decision was none of his concern.

"Got it." Natalie nodded before pouting as she continued, "Are you still busy working? If you are, you should stop it and get some rest. You hear me? I don't want you dying from overworking yourself! If you die, I'll take the kids with me and remarry! Let's see how you like it when they call someone else 'Daddy'!"

Shane's expression turned gloomy instantly.

Although he knew Natalie was just saying that out of concern for his well-being, hearing it still made him feel somewhat uncomfortable. "Don't even think about it!"

Remarry? Have them call someone else "Daddy"? Not a chance!

Realizing he was angry, Natalie broke into a chuckle as she said, "All right, I'm just kidding! Hurry up and get some rest! You're already in your thirties, remember? What would the kids and I do without you? Hmm... You know what? I think I might actually remarry and take them with me!"

"You dare?" Shane raised his voice.

Natalie laughed even louder in response. "Try me!"

Shane's smile vanished as he said, "You won't have the chance to do that. You will only belong to me."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. Go get some rest. I'm going to head out for my competition soon, and I still have to pick Jared up after that!" Natalie said while glancing at the time.

"Okay," Shane mumbled before hanging up.

He then put his phone down and stared at the documents laid out in front of him. After a few seconds of silence, he pushed them aside and got up.

He was a little hurt by Natalie's comment on his age as well as her threat to take the kids with her and remarry.

The fact that his kids would be calling another man "Daddy" angered him even further.

Hmph! Fine, I'll get some rest, then! You're not going to remarry some other guy! Shane thought to himself and rubbed his forehead as he walked toward his bedroom.

"What a silly guy!" Natalie muttered with a smile as she put her phone away.

I bet Shane is getting some rest right now like I told him to! He may look all cold and aloof on the outside, but you'll see how childish and egotistical he can be once you get to know him. Maybe this is how he truly is deep down inside, but his upbringing and education led to him hiding his personality underneath that cold personality. He only shows his true self to those who are close to him, and I'm the closest one there is.

After breakfast, Natalie handed the kids over to the housekeeper and left for the competition with Sally.

With more and more participants being eliminated from the competition, the rules began to change accordingly as well.

Instead of eliminating the two participants who came in last in each team, the entire team would be eliminated instead.

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 949

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 949

The competition was a group competition with unique regulations. The organizer called in a few models with unusual body shapes, and they would be allocated to each team. The teams were supposed to custom design clothes for their respective model, with the aim of downplaying their shortcomings and showcasing their strengths.

So, that effectively removed all the designers' models, including Sally, from the competition for that round.

Sally went up to Natalie and pouted, "This competition is too tough, Nat!"

Natalie nodded in agreement, saying, "Indeed. They don't set a theme but instead request we design according to our model's strengths and weaknesses. That means the creations will be so varied in style and difficult to compare. Also, if the style does not suit that particular model, no matter how brilliant the design is, that creation would end up losing points and lowering the team's average score."

Designers prided themselves on their sense of style, and when they conceptualized a design, it was not meant for people with imperfect body shapes or proportions. In fact, they often did not want such people to wear their clothes so as not to ruin their designs.

More importantly, they felt having imperfect people wear their clothes would degrade their image and brand.

As such, most of the top designers in the world had not designed with imperfection in mind. The unique regulation was a real test for them, and many were deeply troubled by it.

Natalie was no exception, and even her mentor Mercede had not done any customized designs for such people before.

Their inexperience in designing for such people was not because of discrimination or snobbishness, but rather due to lack of exposure. In the fashion world, they had never had models with unusual body shapes, and even the sketches they studied drew tall and lanky models. Moreover, they were mentored by top designers, and with that background, the clients they were exposed to were the rich and famous, who were usually very image-conscious. These people rarely allowed their bodies to get out of shape.

"My goodness! Can you feel it, Nat? The atmosphere is so solemn and gloomy!" Sally rubbed her arms and declared.

Natalie was tickled by her expression and laughed. "Of course. How can it be otherwise? All of us have never designed with that requirement in mind, so basically, everyone is panicking inside, not knowing what to do now! A designer and his or her model complement one another. A great model can inspire the designer, and without one, some designers may lack inspiration and end up with a mental block."

"That's true! From what I see now, all of them are in that uninspired state," Sally concurred.

"It can't be helped! Designers have too high an expectation for aesthetics and cannot tolerate imperfection. If they cannot overcome that and learn to accept and embrace imperfections, it will be difficult for them to get their creative juices flowing," Natalie stated with a sigh.

"What about you, Nat? Do you have any inspirations?" Sally asked.

Natalie shrugged and confessed, "No, not yet. I don't know which model will be working with Team A yet."

She turned her gaze toward the few models on stage and studied them, taking note of all their special features. One was a dwarf slightly over three feet tall, while another model was a pair of conjoined twins sharing a body. There was also a model with half of her body wasted due to muscular atrophy.

The organizer was really cruel yet brilliant to have come up with such a special requirement for that round of competition. It would be an incredibly challenging test for all the designers.

Soon, it was time for the team leader of every team to head onto the stage for a random draw that would determine the model their team would get.

Under the intense gaze of her teammates, a highly-pressured Eleanor, the team leader of Team A, went up for the draw.

"Nat, look at her! She looks like she's heading to the gallows!" Sally gleefully jested.

"Poor Eleanor! She's under a lot of pressure, worried she'll be blamed if she gets a difficult model," Natalie commented as she watched with her arms folded across her chest.

Sally made a funny face and remarked, "In my opinion, that's such an unnecessary worry. Although the models on stage have different body imperfections, it's equally challenging to design for any one of them, so it makes no difference which model she gets."

"No, the rest are equally difficult, but one is especially so," Natalie said, her gaze set on the conjoined twins.

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 950

Feel the Way You Feel, My Love Chapter 950

Sally followed her gaze and blinked, asking, "You mean Number 2?"

Natalie solemnly nodded. "Yes. Although they share a body, they are two unique individuals, so their preferences, likes and dislikes, fashion sense et cetera will likely be different. It'll be easier if they have a similar sense of style, but what will happen if they have totally opposite preferences?"

Although Sally was not a designer, it was not hard for her to understand Natalie's concerns.

A girly fashion style would differ greatly from a sporty fashion style, and they would demand totally different elements and accessories to be incorporated into the design.

If the conjoined sisters liked those two vastly different styles, the designers would have to incorporate all the contrasting elements into a single design to fit on their shared body.

Sally shuddered at the thought of mixing those two unrelated styles together, as she could not imagine how they could blend in with one another.

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"I get it now! So Eleanor is worried she would get that conjoined twins, right?" Sally couldn't help but fix her gaze on Eleanor, who was about to dip her hand into the box for the blind draw.

"Most likely," Natalie replied.

"I think she got what she feared most!" Sally couldn't help but laugh out loud when she saw the pathetic look on Eleanor's face as her glance shifted from her little draw ticket to the conjoined sisters.

Natalie broke into a small smile too. "Then this is meant to be. Murphy's law at work! Well, if we look on the bright side, the greater the challenge, the bigger the sense of satisfaction when we overcome it! It'll motivate us to move beyond our comfort zone."

It might not be a trend to design with the special needs population in mind yet, but that could very well change in the future. People with special needs had been neglected by the mainstream designers all this while, but they had always been part of the population. It was a long-overlooked niche demand waiting to be satisfied.

Suddenly, something occurred to Natalie, and she couldn't help but take a second look at the models on stage.

She suddenly thought of the National Design Association and suspected it already had this vision in mind. Those models could have been sent by the National Design Association to test the waters during this competition.

If the designers successfully created a range of clothing that could bring out the best in these models, the Design Association might become a pioneer in this field!

They would have identified a group of designers they could work with to create designs for the special needs groups.

Natalie would only know if her speculation was right by monitoring the association's announcements after this competition was over.

As her mind was wandering off, Eleanor led the conjoined twins down the stage and was greeted with hostility from her team of designers.

Despite their displeasure, the designers could only accept the fact that they had to design for the twins, as the allocation was final and the organizer would not entertain any request for a change of model.

"Let's have a meeting to get to know the sisters better. We can then discuss and come to a consensus on the style of design for the twins so our designs would be more in line with one another. If our range has an eclectic mix of styles, that would be detrimental to our scores. In that case, we could lose out to the other teams," Natalie suggested.

The rest of her teammates agreed, and they managed to get a conference room from the organizer to do so.

The timeline for this round was a week, not the usual one-day deadline for completion that they were used to in the previous rounds.

The organizer probably knew no one had any experience designing for special needs people, so they gave a generous one week for them to design and come up with the actual clothes. The last day of the competition would be when the models showcased their creations on stage.

The designers breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing that. They had no inspiration at all, and it would have been mission impossible for them if the

organizer kept to the usual rule of finishing in a day. To them, one week was a more reasonable timeline.

After the meeting with her teammates, Natalie left the competition venue together with Sally, armed with all the information about the twins.

"Where are you heading next, Nat?" Sally asked.

Natalie took a look at the time and suggested, "It's going to be noon soon, so let's get lunch first. After that, I'll go visit Jessie before heading to the airport to meet Jared."

"Jared? Is that your brother?" Sally asked curiously.

During their time at J University, she had heard about Natalie's brother, but they never had a chance to meet.