

## The Mbahsb 281

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Two days ago, in the Larson Group.

"Ethan, have you heard the latest news about the Turner family?" Garrett asked with a knowing smile. Without waiting for a response, he added, "Some woman got pregnant for Luke."

'Tsk, tsk, tsk. Women never learn! I wonder why anyone in her right mind would dare to get pregnant for Luke. Several years ago, one of his numerous mistresses took in. It was a big scandal. In the end, the mistress died with the baby in her womb. Their death was just too sudden and mysterious. Other ladies should have learned a good lesson from that occurrence. But now, another reckless mistress is pregnant!' he thought disappointedly.

Just like before, everyone in the circle knew about Luke's new pregnant mistress. It was big news because no woman had dared to take in for him since that ugly incident. Ethan had heard it too.

"She's just another bimbo," Ethan said calmly. Scanning through the file on the table, he added seriously, "I need you to investigate something urgently. A car accident occurred a few days ago. According to the police report, the driver was drunk and several men lost their lives. But I don't believe that. Something smells fishy. I think someone orchestrated the accident to murder them. I want to know the whole story."

"Okay, always a pleasure." Garrett sighed and got up from the sofa.

Now that Jocelyn was no longer Luke's mistress, Ethan felt that he could deal with her anyhow he wanted. He was ready to break her finally.

It took Garrett only a few hours to find out the ins and outs of the car accident. It turned out that the men in the car were the perverts who had gang-raped Jocelyn. Fiona and Jocelyn had bribed an automobile technician to tamper with the car's brakes. As a result, they had a car accident.

"Gosh! Why does this have to do with Jocelyn again?" Garrett frowned and added, "Those two wicked women murdered many people. If the police finds out about this, they will be sentenced to dozens of years in jail. Anyway, serves them right!"

Ethan smiled without uttering a word. His instincts were right. This evidence was enough to get rid of those two women forever. It was as if a great weight had been raised off his shoulders.

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The day Janet was to be discharged from the hospital was sunny and cloudless.

During her three-day stay in the hospital, she rested and recuperated well.

Ethan was busy packing up her belongings when he noticed that she had been looking outside the ward for a long time.

"What are you looking at?" He zipped up the suitcase and grabbed its handle with one hand. Afterward, he reached out to hold Janet's hand with the other.

“Erm. I have been thinking of Laney. I just want to see her. She saved my life. I need to thank her properly before leaving. Didn’t you say she was admitted here too? Which ward is she in?” Janet craned her neck and looked at each side of the corridor.

Ethan’s face softened a little. He initially planned to help Laney leave the hospital as soon as she recovered, but he changed his mind on second thought. He reasoned that it was better to keep her close. Not only was Laney a good bodyguard, but Janet also seemed to like her. He felt that both women would become friends, so Laney could keep on protecting Janet in the future without arousing her suspicions. That seemed like a better plan.

“Okay. Since you insist, I will take you there now.” Ethan held his wife’s waist and steered her towards a ward to the right.

On the way, Janet suddenly stopped and looked very hesitant. She pursed her lips and said cautiously, “Laney is a little aloof. I don’t know what to say to express my gratitude. What if she doesn’t want to see me? I’m not sure I want to do this anymore.”

Janet was somewhat scared of Laney. She had sensed her aloofness from the very first time they spoke to each other at the sand bar.

When Ethan saw the shy expression on his wife’s face, he couldn’t help feeling a little jealous. He held her hand, interlocking their fingers. As he continued leading her, he uttered with a smile, “Don’t worry. She will be happy to see you. If she behaves otherwise, I will give her a piece of my mind. Trust me!”

Hardly had Janet chuckled and attempted to speak when Ethan pulled her into the ward.

They met Laney packing up her clothes into a bag. She looked up at them and asked quickly, “Hello, what can I do for you?”

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Janet saw that Laney’s face was slightly pale and she looked more fragile and beautiful. She suddenly had the urge to protect her. After pursing her lips, she said, “Miss Garcia, please pardon me for not coming before now to express my gratitude to you for saving my life. I didn’t have the strength to get out of bed previously. I’m here to thank you and also invite you for lunch.”

Laney readily accepted the invitation. The three of them went to a restaurant near the hospital and had lunch.

The bright sun rays reflected on the glass windows of the restaurant. A few people were inside at that time. The tantalizing aroma of different foods, snacks, and drinks filled the air.

Janet sat next to her husband, while Laney sat directly opposite her. Ethan took the teapot and poured some tea for them.

The two women chatted happily.

“Miss Garcia, what do you do for a living? Which company do you work for?” Janet asked inquisitively.

To buy some time, Laney took a sip of tea and stole a glance at Ethan.

They had both discussed what she would say to Janet, but she didn't want it to seem too prompt.

"Well, I used to be a secretary. But the company I worked for laid off a huge chunk of their staff and I got fired. Currently, I am job hunting," Laney replied straightforwardly and then set down the teacup carefully.

"Oh, sorry about that." Janet had begun to feel sorry for her when something occurred to her and her eyes lit up. She remembered that the Larson Group was currently recruiting secretaries for senior executives. "Our company is currently recruiting new employees. Would you like to work there? I can recommend you. Give me your resume."

Hearing these words, Laney glanced at Ethan again. He didn't seem uncomfortable with Janet's offer. He just sat straight at the table and did nothing. Laney was relieved to see this, so she sent a fake resume to Janet.

They had a good time during the meal. Now that they had gotten along well, Janet's impression of Laney changed. She didn't think she was an aloof woman anymore. Janet saw that underneath Laney's indifferent appearance, was a softhearted woman who had a free personality. She felt safe and comfortable with her.

Laney similarly realized that the woman who Ethan and Garrett ordered her to protect had a very interesting personality.

However, she still couldn't fathom why they hid the fact that she had been hired as a bodyguard. She thought, 'I wonder why they are keeping her in the dark. It would have been more convenient if she knows my job. Anyway, it's none of my business. I'm ready to do my job and keep my lips sealed as long as I get paid.'

"I'll make sure to put in a good word for you. Perhaps we could become colleagues." Janet's eyes were filled with expectation. It was pretty obvious that she liked Laney very much.

"Well, thank you. I hope so too," Laney commented bluntly.

It was up to Ethan whether she could join the Larson Group or not.

At this moment, Ethan's gaze became gentle as he stared at the expectant look on his wife's face. He patted her head and declared, "Of course, you can."

When Ethan got to the Larson Group the next day, he gave Laney's fake resume to Garrett.

Since his original plan was to get Laney into the company, Janet's suggestion was a welcomed development. He wanted Laney to protect her always.

"Why did you give me this woman's resume?" A chill ran down Garrett's spine when he saw Laney's full name in block letters.

"Employ her immediately. That way, she will be able to protect Janet at all times." Ethan's tone was authoritative. He wasn't making a suggestion. He was commanding Garrett to do it without fail.

Displeasure clouded Garrett's face in a split second. He asked sadly, "Why do I have to be the one to employ her?"

Ethan raised his eyebrows and eyed him as if he was looking at a fool. "Of course, it's because she will be your secretary."

"My secretary? Oh my God! But there are many senior executives in this company. Why did you make this woman my secretary? It's not fair at all!" Garrett threw Laney's resume on the table in defiance. The frown on his face also deepened.

Ethan retorted matter-of-factly, "You of all people should know that she's not really a secretary. As Janet's bodyguard, this job is just to keep her undercover. Besides, you are the only one that knows her true identity in this company. Which other senior executive could she possibly work for while doing her real job? Answer me!"

Garrett was rendered speechless. But he still couldn't accept the development. Just when he was about to refuse again, someone knocked on the door.

A second later, Laney pushed the door open and came in. She was wearing a white skirt and a light pink shirt, which made her look beautiful and harmless. With a stack of documents in her arms, she

said solemnly, "Good day, Mr. Harding. I'm your new secretary. Please feel free to advise me and give me any tasks to do. I promise to do my best."

Garrett was forced to swallow the words of refusal.

Despite Laney's harmless appearance, he couldn't help but remember how she had smacked him down with one hand the first time they met. Garrett rubbed his back. He could still feel a dull pain in his shoulder.

"Ahem. I'm afraid I can't do any of that." He suddenly suffered a banging headache.

Garrett was naturally a ladies' man. He loved beautiful women and behaved like a gentleman in their midst. Although Laney was beautiful, she was equally dangerous. He suspected she could easily break him into two, so he planned to stay away from her. She was a rose with thorns in his eyes.

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Sensing the tension in the air, Ethan stood up, picked up the documents on the table and left immediately. "You guys talk," he said as he walked out.

There was a helpless look on Garrett's gentle, strikingly handsome face. It was only when Ethan left that Garrett took his glasses off the bridge of his nose. He held his aching head and looked at Laney.

"Anyway, this was just part of the disguise. I have spared a room for you here, you can do as you please in there. There is also a gym at the company. Just don't stir up any trouble for me."

Laney nodded politely. She didn't like Garrett in the least bit and thought he was just a superficial man who enjoyed judging people by their appearance. She said in a plain tone, "Don't worry. I won't disturb you."

Garrett didn't even want to look at her any longer or be bothered by her mere presence. He waved her out and said, "Alright, you can leave now."

“Okay, Mr. Harding,” Laney replied in the same bland tone. She put down the documents in her hands and was just about to leave. Before she closed the office door, she made a departing comment, “Mr. Harding, my name is Laney, Laney Garcia. If you find it so difficult to pronounce or remember, just call me Miss Garcia. If you keep calling me ‘woman’, I will mistakenly think that you are being disrespectful to me and I might lose my temper.”

Laney had always been a straightforward person. Perhaps it was because she had spent much of her time around men. She learned that when there was any conflict, the most effective way to deal with it was to put up a fight.

With an unhappy scowl in his face, Garrett did his utmost not to snap at her. He said, “I see, Miss Garcia.”

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On her first day at work, Laney spent half of the day in the gym. She didn’t have many hobbies but she was positively obsessed with exercising and fighting. There weren’t many people in the gym during work hours, so she ran a full ten miles on the treadmill.

After working in the office for the entire morning and having attended a two-hour meeting with the senior executives at midday, Garrett’s entire body felt sore all over. He decided to hit the gym to ease the muscle tension.

He changed into his gym attire and walked in. The first thing he saw was Laney punching a sandbag in the corner, her wrists wrapped in white gauze.

Although Laney had a feminine, petite build and looked like she couldn’t hurt a fly, when she hit the punching bag, it sunk in from the brute force. Garrett could tell how strong Laney was from the sound he heard when her fists made contact with the punching bag.

He thought that not even a tall, strong man could be sure to win a fight against her.

He had practiced boxing techniques before, but he only did it to build up his body rather than with the intention of fighting.

As he watched Laney practicing, he wondered who would be able to handle such a tough woman.

Nothing escaped Laney’s sharp eyes. In the reflection of the mirror, she saw Garrett enter the gym in his black sportswear and look her up and down repeatedly.

“Mr. Harding, do you want to fight me?” The hostility in Laney’s eyes was obvious. She raised her fists slightly in his direction, as if to say she was welcoming his attack.

“I wouldn’t dare,” he said. Garrett raised his hand and took several steps back. His tone was much gentler and more polite than before.

He had thought of what she had said to him earlier. She was right. As a man, he ought not to be so petty.

Now that Garrett was treating her in a much more respectful manner, she stopped staring at him. She took the towel that was hanging around her neck and wiped the beads of sweat rolling down her forehead. Her intention was to keep up her practice for another two hours.

“Miss Garcia, may I ask you something?” Garrett was surprised at how fit she was and was curious to discuss the topic with her. “Why would you become a hit man? I mean, you are a woman, and...”

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Laney waved her fists and continued punching. The punching bag swayed in the air. After a while, she held the punching bag and finally replied calmly, “I’m in this line of work to earn a living.”

She then picked up a water bottle from the floor and uncapped it. After taking a few sips, she looked at him with displeasure in her eyes. “So what I am a woman? What does my gender have to do with my fighting capability as against that of a man? After all, you are a man, but I can easily kick your ass.”

These words filled Garrett with fear. He scratched his head uneasily, not knowing what to say. ‘This woman looks tiny and harmless on the outside, but she’s actually inexplicably tough. What she said is very true. I had better not mess with her!’ Garrett admitted defeat in his mind.

All his life, he had only met sexy and charming women. They were all weaker than men and this always aroused his pity and love for them.

Laney was the first woman he had met that was charming but tough. She was also stronger than most men, including him. And this bruised his ego greatly.

He thought that it would be unwise to argue with her, so he put on a fake smile and did a welcome hand gesture. “There’s nothing wrong with that. Please go on.”

Then he walked to a treadmill and began to run.

He had known from the very beginning that they were two worlds apart.

They were the only ones currently in the gym because it was still working hours. As a result, they seemed too close to each other even though the gym was spacious.

Laney punched the punching bag a few more times before she began to practice her fighting skills. Garrett watched her for a while with his mouth agape. The sight of her fighting skillfully filled him with more fear. His self-esteem was dwarfed in her presence.

After making several futile attempts to concentrate on his exercise, he decided to pack up and leave.

Laney sneered under her breath when she saw him pick up his fitness bag carefully and make his way for the door.

She wasn’t surprised one bit. Ever since she became a professional fighter, she had come across a lot of men like him. Not only did they find it weird that a girl like her was a good fighter, but they were also intimidated by her. They always wanted to stay away from her.

‘Humph! Good riddance to bad rubbish!’ Laney didn’t give a damn about insecure men like Garrett because she didn’t like them too.

Midway towards the door, Garrett stopped in his tracks and walked back slowly. He looked at Laney sideways and saw that her slightly pale face and long hair were soaked with sweat. Raising his eyebrows, he said seriously, "Remember to take a shower after you are done here. The bathrooms are behind the gym. The one with hot water is on the left and the cold one is on the right."

Blinking her eyes in confusion, Laney asked, "And why are you telling me that?"

When Garrett noticed that she was getting angry, he raised his hands and replied innocently, "It's just a piece of harmless advice. You are supposed to work here as my secretary. If the other employees see you in my office in this sweaty state, they would think we just had sex. I already have a terrible reputation, so it won't get to me. But I doubt if you can take such embarrassment."

Laney glared at him with a flushed face. She then uttered crossly, "Okay, you can leave now!"

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Now that Laney became Garrett's secretary, she got to see Janet often.

Today, she invited Janet out to dinner. "Thank you for recommending me for this job," Laney said as she handed the menu over to Janet. "This one's going to be my treat!"

Although Janet hadn't really done much, Laney never liked owing favors to anyone.

Janet waved her hand and smiled. "It's nothing, Miss Garcia. You're the one who saved my life. I don't even know how to thank you properly for that."

"You don't need to be so formal with me. We are friends now. Please just call me Lane. It's what all my buddies back at the club call me." A wistful smile played on Laney's lips.

Janet leaned forward, curious as a cat. "A club? What kind of club is it?"

Laney stopped short. She had blurted out the words without thinking. "Well... You know, just a hobby club." She cleared her throat and took a sip of water. "But they've all relocated to the countryside. I plan on saving a lot so that I can invite them back to the city."

"How about you, where are you residing at the moment?"

"Down at Ester Street."

"That's quite a distance from work. How about I help you find a place near Larson Group?" Janet offered. "The closer you live, the more convenient it is in terms of commute. Actually, I live in a pretty good neighborhood, with lots of affordable apartments. Would you like me to make an inquiry for an available unit?"

The opportunity was too good to pass up, and it would certainly be easier for Laney to protect Janet if they lived close to each other. "That's great! Please do, and thank you."

Thrilled, Janet wasted no time and immediately called up the real estate agent.

Soon enough, Ethan was notified of her request. It was only a matter of course, since half of the properties in the neighborhood was owned by the Larson Group.

Eventually, the women found a single-bedroom apartment. It was cheaper than most units in the area, despite it being fully-furnished.

Since Laney's move, the two often traveled to and from work together. On some weekends when they were both free, they would go shopping and have dinner.

"You're such a kind and generous person, Janet," Laney remarked one day. "You must have a lot of friends."

But Janet shook her head in response. "Not at all. I never really had friends even when I was a child."

Since primary school up to her university days, no one had dared to befriend her for fear of incurring Jocelyn's wrath.

"Well, then," Laney said emphatically. "I'll be your good friend from now on."

No matter how they had come to know each other, it was clear that Janet and Laney had the same wavelength and got along really well.

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It came to Charis' attention that another woman had been hanging around Janet recently.

It didn't take long for her to look into the woman's identity.

"Laney Garcia?" she read the report, frowning.

Charis sensed that Laney was not the typical office worker. She might be petite, but she had quick reflexes and was rather nimble on her feet, and anyone with a sharp eye would recognize the faint traces of scars on her arms and shins. This woman was obviously a fighter.

Charis was instantly suspicious of Laney's sudden appearance in the company, and ordered her men to investigate her background.

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Charis's private investigator couldn't find a lot of information about Laney whose identity was kept confidential.

However, there was a piece of information that shocked Charis. It was that Laney was one of the top bodyguards in the country and she had protected many wealthy personalities in the past. This indicated that she had several years of experience under her belt.

Another shocking detail was that Laney was also the same woman who had saved Janet from the car accident.

Charis didn't need anyone to tell her that Brandon was the one that hired her for Janet's utmost protection.

'Aargh! Brandon even got Laney into the Larson Group so that she could watch and protect Janet closely. Since he is going all out to protect that bitch, it means she's very dear to his heart. This is so annoying!' Charis became angrier and more jealous as she put two and two together.



“Why does he like her so much? Humph!” She snorted.

She was so heartbroken that the urge to make Janet disappear became stronger than ever before.

‘Gosh! He has only known Janet for a few months, but she’s already a very important person to him. Is he blind? What does he see in her? I really can’t understand why he’s head over heels in love with that Plain Jane.’

The more Charis thought about Brandon’s strong love for Janet, the more worried she became. She feared that he might even decide to announce to the public one day that Janet was Brandon Larson’s wife. Not Ethan, Brandon. Hence, she decided to get rid of her before it was too late.

As much as she wanted to finish Janet off immediately, she couldn’t do it herself.

Kent had failed her previously. She even colluded with Fiona, but the latter also failed. Her previous attempts were a little easier. But now that Laney was protecting Janet, it would be more difficult to get to her.

Charis was dead sure that the future held doom for her if she didn’t eliminate Janet soon. Time wasn’t on her side now.

She tapped her foot on the floor and racked her brain. After a while, she abruptly stood up from the chair with a sinister smile on her face.

“Oh, you were so stupid, Charis! How could you have forgotten the Lester family? Those people are the ones that can help you now. You must contact them,” she murmured to herself.

After falling in love with Ethan in high school, Charis paid utmost attention to the Lester family. She knew that everyone in that family wasn’t to be messed with. More so, she was aware that Elissa, the real Mrs. Lester, and his two half-brothers hated him so much and they would be more than willing to grab any chance to hurt him.

The Lester Group and the Larson Group were currently rivals in the business industry.

Now that Janet worked for the Larson Group, she saw it as a great opportunity to make the Lesters hate her. She planned to play her cards right, so this wouldn’t cause any problems for the company.

Ritchie seemed to be the best potential ally out of all of them. Hence, she decided to use him.

It had been ages since Charis last saw Ritchie. However, she remembered that in high school, he looked nothing like Ethan even though they had the same father. Ethan was way more handsome than him.

Ritchie had been two grades higher than Charis and Ethan when they got into high school. He didn’t graduate from high school with honors, so he wasn’t granted admission to any top university. But his family bribed the school admission officer at one of the universities and eventually got him in.

Right from childhood, Ritchie had been a school bully and he committed a lot of offenses. However, his family always helped him clean up his mess without bringing him to order. He had slightly grown out of his troublesome behavior, but it was a known fact that he hadn’t changed much. And this was the first reason why Charis thought he was the best person to collude with.

The Lesters weren't people who trusted outsiders easily. She would have to employ a good trick to get any of them on her side. But she was so blinded by her wicked ambition to get rid of Janet that she didn't care anything else.

'Ritchie will crush that bitch like a fly,' Charis thought confidently. Another reason why Ritchie was the perfect candidate was that he wasn't as emphatic and careful as Kent. People like Janet were nothing in his eyes.

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After completing the joint project with the Perkins Group, Janet finally ended her hectic schedule that had been going on for the past two weeks.

The designers gathered early one morning to discuss their prospective portfolios for this season's autumn and winter series.

Without warning, Tiffany pushed through the glass door and strode in, her high heels clacking against the tiled floor. "All right, everyone," she said, clapping her hands to get their full attention. "We are going to launch a high-end series of early spring styles. Brace yourselves because we are going to the Spring Fashion Week in Seacisco! Now, get moving and squeeze your creative juices! I want to see your designs piled up on my desk by the end of the week."

A wave of excitement came over everyone, and they burst into action.

The Fashion Weeks in Seacisco were decidedly a big deal in the industry. Designers needed to adhere to very strict qualifications for a chance to showcase their talents. On top of that, the slots were limited, so they had to make sure that their portfolios stood out even during the screening procedure.

"None of our designs got in last year," a colleague remarked. "But we will definitely qualify this time and get international brands to sign with us!"

"The Seacisco Fashion Week is no joke," Gerda said. "Even if we only get through to the first runway walk, that would be considered a great honor. Unfortunately, beginners and mid-level designers aren't allowed to participate in the event." She sighed before nudging Janet's shoulder. "I don't know about the others, but I really think you stand a chance to get into the preliminary screening. You're a lot more talented than most of us."

Janet shook her head sheepishly. "Thank you, but I suppose there's nothing we can do about it."

Tiffany came over at that moment and gave Janet a big smile. "That's not exactly true. You're perfectly qualified to undergo the screening process. The superiors think so highly of you that they decided to make an exception."

"Really?" Janet exclaimed. "Thank you, Ms. Fisher! I promise, I won't let you down." She glanced at Gerda, who was also grinning with joy. The two women laughed together and let out squeals of excitement.

Tiffany turned on her heel, and left the room with a spring in her step.

"Oh, my God!" Gerda gushed. "You are so going to defeat all the other designers! I'm putting my money on it!"

The next few days saw the company's senior designers working overtime to perfect their final output.

Five days later, it was game time.

The panel in charge of the preliminary selection consisted of the big shots in Larson Group's Design Department. They were all experts in the field, whose designs had been featured in various Fashion Weeks around the world.

"Their current designs are much better than the ones submitted in the last few years. These drafts are very unique; it's quite difficult picking out a handful from this brilliant body of work." This came from the chief editor of a fashion magazine. She leafed through the rest of the drafts until she came upon a portfolio. Her eyes immediately lit up. "This girl's work is fantastic! I must say, I'm very impressed."

Charis was also part of the panel. The Turner family had started their business in the entertainment world, so she had a distinctly uncommon approach when it came to design.

She looked over the praised draft and saw the name on the bottom of the page—Janet Lind.

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"It's excellent," Charis finally exclaimed after observing Janet's drawing. "The color combinations seem perfect, and every layer is designed to perfection. I can tell the designer has a great sense of fashion. This design is outstanding — clear winner," Charis voted for Janet's draft.

Since Charis had praised the design, the others looked at the draft with great interest and curiosity.

"What do you think?" Charis looked up and glanced around haughtily.

She held the highest status on the panel, so her opinion naturally influenced the other people's decisions.

"It's indeed good."

"Ms. Turner always has good taste. This design is indeed professional and impressive," the other assessors chimed in.

"Well, it's really good." Tiffany nodded in appreciation.

Ultimately, Janet's design draft was chosen.

Tiffany didn't have a problem with the decision because Janet's design was indeed outstanding. All the senior designers participating in the competition were good, but Janet was a natural talent. Her design was superior to theirs.

The news about Janet's outstanding performance in the preliminary selection soon spread among the design department.

"Everyone spoke highly of you in the primary election. And one of the senior executives was constantly praising you," Tiffany said, shrugging nonchalantly.

Janet was both happy and surprised. She didn't expect to impress the senior designers or earn their praise. She had only intended to participate in the competition and give her best shot.

“Ms. Fisher, I have seen the designs of some senior designers. They are more professional than mine.

“Oh, come on. Stop belittling yourself, Janet. Your design was excellent. I think those senior executives prefer your style. After all, everyone has different tastes and preferences. As you said, some of their designs were more professional and wholesome. But they all seem to lack something.” Noticing the unease on Janet’s face, Tiffany patted her shoulder reassuringly and returned to her office.

Meanwhile, Janet heard three senior designers complaining about her getting selected.

“What’s going on? Lind was not qualified to participate in the competition in the first place, but she not only managed to take part in it but also won the god damn competition,” one of the senior designers snorted with disdain.

“That’s right. What the hell? I thought she just made up the numbers, so I didn’t take her seriously. It looks like they had made up their minds to select her even before looking at our drafts,” another designer grunted with disdain. “Fucking hierarchy!”

“You know what? I heard that she has an affair with a top-level senior executive of our company. That’s why she is getting special treatment,” the third designer added.

“Well, I’m aware of that. I heard it had caused quite a scene before. Someone was fired because of her. Well, let’s not discuss it further. She is right here. We’ve got to be careful. Otherwise, she will complain about us as well, and we’ll end up losing our jobs. After all, we are decent people. We can’t compete with that bitch who has her way with everything by playing dirty tricks.” The first designer elbowed the other designers, and the two winked in return.

Janet frowned. She had already guessed some people in the design department would be unhappy with the decision and bitch about her.

Never had she thought things would escalate this soon.

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Once the three senior designers saw the sullen look on Janet’s face, they quickly went back to their respective desks and pretended like they hadn’t been gossiping a while back.

“It’s almost as if they think their job here is to gossip. They are always chatting incessantly. This time, they have gone too far. More than anything, I’m sure you are relying on your strength here. How could they say such a thing? Humph!” Gerda stared at them angrily. She felt bad for Janet and wished she could give the rumormongers a tongue-lashing.

But on the other hand, Janet wasn’t that angry. This wasn’t the first time she was hearing such a rumor, so she had developed a thick skin over time.

“It doesn’t matter, Gerda. Leave them. Please don’t get yourself into trouble because of me. When Pamela spread false rumors about me in the past, I retorted because I caught her red-handed.” Janet turned on the computer and began to work. Staring at the design drawings, she added, “None of them dares to gossip about me in my presence. They always backbite. I don’t take such people seriously. If they are bold enough, they will say it to my face.”

“Does this mean you will allow them to continue gossiping about you? Won’t you take any action against them?” Gerda was amazed by Janet’s nonchalance despite the severity of the matter.

“Hmm!” Janet sighed. She stood up from her seat and looked at her colleagues. “A clear conscience fears no accusation. I didn’t do anything wrong, so I’m not bothered at all. Only those who are up to no good should be bothered!”

Janet didn’t have time for any frivolities. She wanted to invest most of her time and energy into the upcoming spring fashion week. It was very important to her.

However, things didn’t go as she had planned. Most of her colleagues turned against her. They always looked at her strangely and gave her the cold shoulder. Janet also noticed that they gossiped about her more frequently. They did very little to hide their distaste for her, so it was difficult for her to ignore them.

This was different from the last time when Pamela spread rumors about Janet sleeping with her direct superior, where she could easily prove herself. This time, she found it hard to properly deal with it. She didn’t know whether to shut down the rumor or just ignore it.

All she knew was that it was said that a designer whose surname is Lind had an affair with a senior executive of the Larson Group. Janet’s name wasn’t specifically mentioned, so it would be awkward if she confronted the rumormongers.

They would think she decided to shut down the rumor because her guilty conscience was eating her up.

In a state of confusion, Janet decided to speak to Tiffany after much hesitation. “Ms. Fisher, you have heard of the recent rumor, right?”

“Yes, I have. Is it true?” Tiffany responded and asked her naturally. She had her customary smile on at this moment.

“Of course not!” Janet instantly looked aggrieved and helpless after answering sharply.

“Cheer up, Janet. Since the rumor isn’t true, I advise that you turn a deaf ear to everything they are saying. Focus on your work. Make sure your designs are selected for the first show. Your success will be a good response to all your haters. It will also prove that you are innocent of the accusations.” Tiffany put down the documents and patted the back of Janet’s hand. After pursing her lips, she continued, “You had better invest the time you are using to think about that rumor on the design drawings instead. Thinking will get you nowhere. But designing will shoot you to the peak of your career in no time. Everyone’s eyes are on you. Most of them are earnestly waiting for your downfall. I want you to put all of them to shame!”

The powerful glint in Tiffany’s eyes pierced through Janet’s soul. Those words also reset her brain. At that moment, a strange feeling enveloped her. The worry in her heart was immediately replaced with the zeal to strive and get out of the dark land of thorns she was trapped in. She wanted to move to the bright light that was shining ahead.

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Meanwhile, the outrageous rumor got to Ethan’s ears. And he was displeased, to say the least.

He immediately ordered Garrett to investigate the source of the rumor.

"I have tried everything, but my efforts proved abortive. Even after interrogating many of the employees in the design department, I couldn't get tangible information that will lead to the source. They all heard it from rumormongers. The source remains unknown. It's like a never-ending circle!" Garrett revealed helplessly. His inability to find out the source of the rumor made him more curious.

"The originator of this rumor is an employee in the company. How is it possible that the person is untraceable?" Conflicting emotions swirled in Ethan's dark eyes. All of a sudden, he narrowed his eyes and said, "You know what? Stop the investigation for now. Don't alert the enemy. If the culprit finds out about the investigation, he or she will become extra cautious."

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"From the look of things, I'm certain that Janet's colleagues are spreading the rumor because of her success on the job. They are jealous and intimidated by her. She is being too lenient with them. And that makes it more difficult to investigate," Ethan stated, his head teeming with different thoughts.

"Jeez! You never let an opportunity to praise your wife pass you by. Now I know how protective you are." Garrett shook his head. Staring at Ethan, he put down his crossed long legs and took another comfortable position.

'Wow, this guy has changed so much!' he thought. He had noticed some major changes in Ethan's behavior these past few months. The previously cold and uptight Ethan was now warm and caring.

Lost in thought, Ethan leaned his back on the chair and stared blankly at Garrett. He suddenly snapped his fingers and said, "I have an idea. Since we can't find the source of the rumor, we should try our best to provide Janet with all the resources she would need. Her works must be excellent so they will be selected to be displayed at the fashion show."

Garrett was pleasantly surprised to hear this idea. He abruptly stood up and his eyes lit up. With his shoulder lifted, he asked, "Wait, does this mean you are going to strike the Lester family again?"

There was a subsidiary company under the auspices of the Lester Group. It was called the Lester Silk Fabric. Producing high-end clothes was its specialty. As a result, it was one of the biggest rivals of the Larson Group.

The major reason why the Larson Group came into the clothing business was to compete with the Lester Group. For the past few consecutive seasons of the Seacisco Fashion Week, the Lester Silk Fabric had come out first. Ethan thought that it would be a huge blow for the Lesters if the Larson Group clinched the first-place title this year.

Ethan leaned forward, rested his elbows on the table, and clasped his fingers. He stared outside through the French window and said, "The Larson Group has developed rapidly in the past few years. Let's give those folks a run for their money. It's time we win that show."

On the other side.

Janet had buried herself in work day and night. Tiffany's advice had charged her up. She wanted to blind her haters with her success and show them that she wasn't someone who depended on a backer. Her mockers were the very last people she wanted to lose to.

On D-Day, many people gathered at the selection site for the Seacisco Fashion Week's haute couture.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it's time for Larson Group and the Lester Group to compete for first place!" With this announcement, the judges began to look at the design drafts carefully. They occasionally glanced at each other and joked about some designs.

The Lester Group and the Larson Group always went head-to-head every year. Their designs were often so excellent. But the designs of the Lester Group were always a little better than that of their rival. It wasn't surprising because they had been in the business for longer and had a good reputation in the industry.

"This design is concise and at the same time, innovative. The designer must have put in a lot of work." As the judges looked at the Lester Group's design, they praised confidently, "It seems the Lester Group will be selected for the opening show again."

The judges were about to make their final decision. But they were interrupted by a senior judge at the table. His eyes suddenly lit up as he stared at the design drafts sent by Larson Group. A bright smile also appeared on his face. "Wait, I find this design from the Larson Group very interesting."

'What is he talking about?' the other judges thought and fixed their eyes on Janet's work again.

Their opinion at first glance was that the design was a little tacky and naive. They didn't think it was fashion show material at all. But when they looked at it more carefully, their opinions changed. They saw that the design had many hidden meanings and it evoked thoughts. This surprised all of them. It became a masterpiece in their eyes.

After a heated deliberation between the judges, the chief judge took the microphone and announced, "For the first time in so many years, we had to take a look at the designs carefully. It was a stiff competition between both designs. We have decided that the Lester Silk Fabric's design can only be showcased during the second show. While the Larson Group's design will headline the first show!"

This announcement caused quite a stir in the Larson Group.

Such a thing had never happened in the years of the competition. This victory shut up all of Janet's haters. It proved that she was indeed excellent at her job. Soon, the rumors drastically reduced.

Janet's colleagues no longer looked down on her or gave her the cold shoulder. Some of them even sucked up to her.

"The design department of the Larson Group defeated the archenemy for the first time in many years! We are so proud! Good job, Lind!" Tiffany gave Janet a hug. The victory filled her with so much vigor and vitality. She also became more confident.

Janet chuckled and covered her mouth to control her excitement. Waving her hand, she said humbly, "I just tried my best. Thanks for the praise, anyway."

“All right, all right! Your best has done us good. Woo-hoo! This calls for celebration. Listen up everyone, the entire design department will be going out for a get-together! It’s Mr. Larson’s treat!”

“Yay!” A cry of jubilation went up in the department when the employees heard that the boss was treating them.