

The Mbahsb 301

[Chapter 301](#)

It was Laney.

After seeing Janet get into Ritchie's limousine, Laney quickly hailed a taxi and instructed the driver to follow them.

The luxury car stopped at a restaurant famous for its truffle dishes. Laney rushed out of the taxi and followed the pair inside.

Given Ritchie's prominence in the social circles of Seacisco, it wasn't surprising that his private room was located on the top floor of the restaurant. Not only that, but he also had two burly men in black suits standing guard outside the door.

Laney had heard from the grapevine that the Lester family had their own private security team. This was only a matter of course. As one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the city, the Lester family naturally had a lot of enemies who wanted to bring them down at every possible opportunity. Needless to say, they were very meticulous in selecting men who were exceptional in combat.

Laney made sure to keep her distance from the door. She needed to assess the situation first, and avoid being discovered before she could come up with a plan.

Her gaze had only met Ritchie's once before, but it was enough for her to tell that he would be tricky to deal with.

Around ten minutes later, Laney thought she heard muffled sounds of an argument from inside the private room. Without wasting another second, she lunged forward and knocked out the two bodyguard, storming through the door.

She found Janet trapped in a corner by Ritchie, her eyes filled with tears.

"What are you doing here?" the man roared when he caught sight of Laney. "What happened to my men?"

Laney charged towards him wordlessly. Before Ritchie could even react, she had already grabbed him by the nape. He immediately blacked out and crumpled to the floor.

"Laney!" Janet cried out in fright. "Is he dead?"

Laney held out her hand and helped Janet to her feet. "Don't worry. He's just unconscious."

"Why are you here?" Janet asked as the other woman pulled her out of the room. "Didn't I tell you to go home?"

Laney looked from side to side to see if other guards were coming for them. "I had a feeling that man was up to no good, so I decided to follow you. Stay behind me. His men could be just around the corner."

Janet was at a loss. Everything was happening so fast that her mind was having difficulty catching up. One thought did strike her, though—that no one else had ever been this concerned for her, except for Ethan.

Soon enough, Ritchie's men appeared down the hall, having heard the commotion just now.

"Mr. Lester!" One of the men rushed into the room to check on their boss, while the other four surrounded the women.

"You two, stop right there!"

Left without a choice, Laney let go of Janet's hand. She clenched her fists and braced for a fight.

In one fluid motion, she kicked the man nearest to her and proceeded to punch the guy who was about to pounce on her. Her movements were so swift and smooth that Janet barely caught it.

Janet could only stand back, her eyes wide with shock and disbelief. Was this really the Laney she knew?

"Hey. Focus." Laney grabbed her hand, and then they were running again.

Unfortunately, they hadn't even reached the end of the hallway when more of Ritchie's men arrived.

Ritchie himself had woken up at this point. He glared at the women, looking anything but a gentleman. The veins on his forehead bulged, and his lips were curled in a snarl. He leaned awkwardly against one of his goons, then pointed at Janet and Laney. "Catch them!" he bellowed.

With that, a dozen more men appeared out of nowhere.

Laney gritted her teeth. There were too many enemies, and she could tell by their figures and stance that they were all skilled at fighting. They were probably on par with her colleagues, too. She could take them on a one-on-one duel, but she couldn't possibly deal with everyone all at once.

To make matters worse, she noticed that some of the men were carrying lethal weapons like daggers. Even so, Laney clenched her fists and readied herself. She needed to protect Janet at all costs.

In one fluid motion, she kicked the man nearest to her and proceeded to punch the guy who was about to pounce on her. Her movements were so swift and smooth that Janet barely caught it.

Janet could only stand back, her eyes wide with shock and disbelief. Was this really the Laney she knew?

"Hey. Focus." Laney grabbed her hand, and then they were running again.

Unfortunately, they hadn't even reached the end of the hallway when more of Ritchie's men arrived.

Ritchie himself had woken up at this point. He glared at the women, looking anything but a gentleman. The veins on his forehead bulged, and his lips were curled in a snarl. He leaned awkwardly against one of his goons, then pointed at Janet and Laney. "Catch them!" he bellowed.

With that, a dozen more men appeared out of nowhere.

Laney gritted her teeth. There were too many enemies, and she could tell by their figures and stance that they were all skilled at fighting. They were probably on par with her colleagues, too. She could take them on a one-on-one duel, but she couldn't possibly deal with everyone all at once.

To make matters worse, she noticed that some of the men were carrying lethal weapons like daggers. Even so, Laney clenched her fists and readied herself. She needed to protect Janet at all costs.

[Chapter 302](#)

“Mr. Lester said that we have to catch them alive,” one of the men instructed loudly, shaking the stun baton he was holding in his hand. Janet and Laney could almost make out the sound of electrical buzzing.

As soon as it dawned on Laney that danger was coming their way, she took two steps back with Janet, but several more people immediately had them surrounded.

At the same time, they were about ten meters away from the exit, but Ritchie’s men were everywhere. If they wanted to get away, they would have to play smart.

However, Laney had no time to think up ways of escape now.

As soon as Ritchie issued the order, more than a dozen men charged at them. Laney fought them off to the best of her ability.

She had been an experienced fighter for over ten years. She was adept at fighting, with or without weapons. The guards, who tried to attack her with their stun batons, were quickly blocked by her hands and feet.

Standing behind Laney, Janet hurried to take a ceramic vase and smashed it down heavily onto the head of one of the men that had rushed over.

“Don’t bother getting your hands dirty. I’ll do my best to protect you.” Sweat poured off of Laney’s forehead. She quickly raised her foot and kicked the man who was about to capture Janet in his arms.

They stood back to back, surrounded by those men out to get them.

Tears welled up in Janet’s eyes when she heard what Laney said. She pursed her lips tightly and glanced over at Laney. “This is all my fault. I didn’t want to drag you down with me, but somehow I got you into this fix.”

Laney was stunned at first and then smiled gently after hearing her words.

‘Janet was such a stubborn and silly girl.’

Seeing that Laney seemed like a professional, the men decided to band together to attack her.

Laney couldn’t deal with so many people all at once. Pretty soon, she found herself outnumbered. However, even at the most critical moment, she did everything she could to protect Janet.

She was doing her duty to protect her employer with all her might.

And she did, in fact, like Janet a lot.

Janet looked around at her surroundings and couldn’t find any weapons to help Laney out. She blamed herself for not being of much help to her and she had no idea how in the world things had turned out like this.

Ethan and Ritchie were brothers by blood and Ethan had never warned her that she should be on guard against the Lester family, so she had never thought this would happen.

Ethan...

All of a sudden, Janet's mind was a mess.

She lowered her gaze to the ground in disappointment. She realized that there were really a lot of things she didn't know about Ethan. The thing was she might have never really known him in the first place.

Ritchie liked to see others struggling desperately for their lives. He had already straightened up his clothes and was sitting in a chair, watching the two try and not get caught by his men. He crossed his legs and sat back in a leisurely manner. It appeared that he could still feel the lingering pain. He touched the back of his neck and cursed furiously, "Bitch, how dare you actually hurt me!"

Laney gasped for breath. She was hurt with several wounds on her arms and legs. Blood seeped out from her clothes. It really seemed that she was badly injured.

Leney felt nearly wiped out. A few more minutes of this beating and she might actually pass out. She turned to look at Janet, licked the bloodstains lingering on her lips, and tried her best to hold the fort.

Janet shook her head in Leney's direction. She was feeling both anxious and worried. She tried to keep herself from crying, but soon, tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Seeing this, the men circled around from behind them, trying to catch Janet while she was distracted.

"Ah! Let go of me at once!" Janet struggled to get away from him.

At this moment, the men were suddenly kicked in the face and immediately fell to the ground as a result.

Someone pulled Janet behind him in order to protect her.

She looked up and in time to see... That it was Ethan. Under his black cap were a pair of eyes full of anger and coldness. He glanced over at the men around, and then looked down at Janet. He said with concern in his voice, "Were you hurt?"

Janet threw herself into his arms and held onto his waist tightly. "I'm fine. Go and help Leney out," she said as she leaned against Ethan's chest.

Ethan nodded wordlessly and did just that.

He had an important client to meet up with after work so he didn't get the chance to see Janet's message until now.

It was too late when he finally did see it. It was his guess that Janet had already left with Ritchie so he rushed over to try and catch them in time.

Looking deeply into Ethan's eyes, Ritchie sneered with contempt in his heart.

Laney felt nearly wiped out. A few more minutes of this beating and she might actually pass out. She turned to look at Janet, licked the bloodstains lingering on her lips, and tried her best to hold the fort.

Janet shook her head in Laney's direction. She was feeling both anxious and worried. She tried to keep herself from crying, but soon, tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Seeing this, a man circled around from behind them, trying to catch Janet while she was distracted.

"Ah! Let go of me at once!" Janet struggled to get away from him.

At this moment, the man was suddenly kicked in the face and immediately fell to the ground as a result.

Someone pulled Janet behind him in order to protect her.

She looked up and in time to see... That it was Ethan. Under his black cap were a pair of eyes full of anger and coldness. He glanced over at the men around, and then looked down at Janet. He said with concern in his voice, "Were you hurt?"

Janet threw herself into his arms and held onto his waist tightly. "I'm fine. Go and help Laney out," she said as she leaned against Ethan's chest.

Ethan nodded wordlessly and did just that.

He had an important client to meet up with after work so he didn't get the chance to see Janet's message until now.

It was too late when he finally did see it. It was his guess that Janet had already left with Ritchie so he rushed over to try and catch them in time.

Looking deeply into Ethan's eyes, Ritchie sneered with contempt in his heart.

[Chapter 303](#)

"Ethan! I haven't seen you in a long time!" Ritchie looked at Ethan with a big smile on his face as the latter slowly walked towards the guards.

'How does this bastard manage to look the same as he did many years ago? He still has that same distant look in his eyes.' Ritchie shook his head as he was amused to see that Ethan hadn't changed at all even though he looked slightly more mature now.

Ritchie always saw Ethan as someone who would sell his body to make ends meet if it ever came to it. As such, he never considered Ethan to be good enough to be his rival. He always looked at Ethan with condescension and casual disdain as if there was no reason for him to feel threatened around him.

"You're still a loser! You should just let your wife go! Give her to me and in return, I will get you a decent job. How does that sound?" Ritchie stood up and raised one leg up on the seat as he propped his elbow on his knee and stared at Janet meaningfully.

Ethan's eyes darkened and he clenched his fists to stifle his anger. Paying no heed to Ritchie's words, he helped up Laney, who was covered in blood after the fight.

When Ritchie noticed Ethan's complete disregard of him, he got offended. "How dare you disrespect your master like that, you loser!"

Out of the blue, he grabbed a glass from the table and hurled it toward Ethan.

Fortunately, Ethan managed to catch it before it hit him. However, he couldn't hold back his anger at Ritchie and he smashed that glass on the floor.

Without saying so much as a word to Ritchie, Ethan turned around to walk out with Janet and Laney.

Ritchie felt insulted and his face contorted in anger as he shouted, "Stop right there! I'm not finished talking to you!"

Ethan didn't respond.

He had grown tired of letting Ritchie say and do whatever he wanted to him, but things were different now.

"Stop them. So, you think you can just disrespect me and walk away like that? Do you think you're all grown up now?" Ritchie sneered at Ethan.

As soon as he gave them the order, Ritchie's guards stood in Ethan's way.

Just then, another group of men rushed in.

These men were dressed casually, some in plaid shirts and some wearing sports vests. They all looked sweaty and grimy as if they had just gotten out of a gym.

They looked nothing like Ritchie's men who were all dressed in uniforms. At best, they could have passed as amateur fighters.

Glancing at Ethan's men, Ritchie grinned and disdainfully said, "Are these guys with you? You must have hired them randomly on the street. You should know that the Lester family's security guards are all trained in combat. Your men won't stand a chance against them. If you have a brain inside that head of yours, you'll come here and kneel before me."

Ethan didn't say a word. He simply raised his hand at his men, signaling them to not worry about the consequences.

Almost instantly, a vicious fight broke out between the two sides.

Although Ethan's men didn't look professional and they were clearly outnumbered by Ritchie's men, they were better at fighting. Before long, each and every one of Ritchie's men was groaning in pain on the ground.

The only men standing on their side was Ritchie.

They looked nothing like Ritchie's men who were all dressed in uniforms. At best, they could have passed as amateur fighters.

Glancing at Ethan's men, Ritchie grinned and disdainfully said, "Are these guys with you? You must have hired them randomly on the street. You should know that the Lester family's security guards are all trained in combat. Your men won't stand a chance against them. If you have a brain inside that head of yours, you'll come here and kneel before me."

Ethan didn't say a word. He simply raised his hand at his men, signaling them to not worry about the consequences.

Almost instantly, a vicious fight broke out between the two sides.

Although Ethan's men didn't look professional and they were clearly outnumbered by Ritchie's men, they were better at fighting. Before long, each and every one of Ritchie's men was groaning in pain on the ground.

The only man standing on their side was Ritchie.

[Chapter 304](#)

Ritchie took a few steps back in shock. Exasperated, he looked at his men, who were all knocked down to the ground and groaning in pain. "Where did you hire them?" he asked in disbelief.

Ethan's voice was as cold as ice. "They're my friends."

"Your friends? Ha! They must be jobless losers just like you." Although Ritchie was a little scared and flustered, he refused to show it. He stared at Ethan's "friends" condescendingly.

Ethan was a loser after all. It made sense that his friends were all thugs.

Ethan didn't answer. Instead, he asked the man behind him to take care of Laney. Then, he took Janet's hand and said softly, "Let's go home."

Ritchie was even more surprised. Was this really the Ethan he knew? How dare he disrespect him like this?

Ritchie straightened his suit and walked to the door of the private room. He walked past Ethan and bumped into his shoulder deliberately.

He cast a sidelong glance at Ethan, his eyes filled with hatred. Gnashing his teeth, Ritchie said, "You must feel good about yourself, having a group of thugs for friends. Just remember: you're nothing but a poor, powerless loser. I swear I'll make your life more miserable than it is now."

Ethan sneered. Underneath the brim of his cap, his eyes flashed coldly. He had one hand in his pocket while the other held Janet's hand. Ignoring Ritchie, he turned to the others and said, "Let's go."

Laney was helped into the car. She was covered in bloody wounds but her face was pale as a ghost.

"Laney, just hold on a little longer. We're almost at the hospital." With tears in her eyes, Janet quickly tried to press some tissues against Laney's wounds to stop the bleeding.

Even Laney's lips were colorless, but her eyes were bloodshot. She didn't respond to Janet and stared at the ceiling of the car listlessly. She seemed to be in excruciating pain. She winced and frowned, her body trembling slightly.

With a long face, Ethan turned to the driver and said sternly, "Get to Frank's as fast as possible."

Before they arrived at their destination, Laney had passed out in the car from too much blood loss.

Holding Laney in her arms, Janet tried to clean her wounds.

She glanced at Ethan and seemed to want to say something but stopped on second thought. The most important thing right now was for Laney to get treatment as soon as possible. Janet didn't have the time to question Ethan.

Soon, Laney was wheeled into the ER in Frenk's hospital.

After a thorough examination, Frenk shook his head and clicked his tongue as he walked out of the emergency room. "You've been here several times recently. You must have really bad luck, Ethen."

"Enough with the bullshit. How is she?" Truth be told, Ethen wasn't really worried about Laney, but seeing the frightened look on Janet's face made him feel sorry.

"She'll be fine."

Hearing this, Janet finally let out a sigh of relief. "I want to see her."

"Not now. She needs to rest." Frenk shook his head firmly.

Janet had no choice but to sit back down and wait absentmindedly.

As though he could sense the tension in the air, Frenk glanced at Ethen knowingly then left.

This left only Janet and Ethen in the corridor.

Ethen pursed his lips and lowered his head. After thinking for a long time, he looked up at Janet to say something, he found that she was staring at him questioningly.

With clenched fists, Janet demanded, "Ethen, what happened between you and Ritchie exactly?"

Soon, Laney was wheeled into the ER in Frank's hospital.

After a thorough examination, Frank shook his head and clicked his tongue as he walked out of the emergency room. "You've been here several times recently. You must have really bad luck, Ethan."

"Enough with the bullshit. How is she?" Truth be told, Ethan wasn't really worried about Laney, but seeing the frightened look on Janet's face made him feel sorry.

"She'll be fine."

Hearing this, Janet finally let out a sigh of relief. "I want to see her."

"Not now. She needs to rest." Frank shook his head firmly.

Janet had no choice but to sit back down and wait absentmindedly.

As though he could sense the tension in the air, Frank glanced at Ethan knowingly then left.

This left only Janet and Ethan in the corridor.

Ethan pursed his lips and lowered his head. After thinking for a long time, he looked up at Janet to say something, he found that she was staring at him questioningly.

With clenched fists, Janet demanded, "Ethan, what happened between you and Ritchie exactly?"

[Chapter 305](#)

The atmosphere was tense for obvious reasons. But Ethan felt unnecessarily annoyed as he stared at Janet.

It was as if Janet was ready to pester him for answers today. He could see the decisiveness and stubbornness in her eyes. As a result, he felt uneasy. He had a hunch that if he continued to keep her in the dark, the gap between them would get wider.

“What can’t you tell me?” Janet was on the verge of breaking down when she noticed that Ethan was hesitating. When he didn’t answer her question, she finally cried hysterically, “Ethan! Why are you doing this to me? I’m sick and tired of knowing very little about you. Why did this happen? What happened between you and Ritchie? I thought we would just have dinner! Then all of a sudden he just snapped and started talking about horrible things. Although I know you don’t have a good relationship with your family, I thought unfriendly words were the only thing I had to suffer in their hands. But it was nothing like that! How come this happened?”

‘He wanted me to leave Ethan and be his mistress? How ridiculous and disgusting! He also injured Laney to this extent. I won’t let this slide!’ Janet was shocked and furious.

Anger settled like a boulder in Ethan’s gut. He almost reached out his hand to hold Janet, but her glare made him restrain himself. He just said in a choked voice, “I’m sorry.”

“No, I don’t want to hear that. You keep saying you are sorry, but nothing changes!” Tears welled up in Janet’s eyes. She held Ethan’s hand and continued, “Our marriage made us one, Ethan. We only have each other. How do you think it makes me feel whenever I realize you are keeping secrets from me? I’m your wife! Why are you shutting me out?”

“No, don’t put it that way. I’m not shutting you out!” With mixed feelings, Ethan stroked her hair and added seriously, “I don’t like keeping secrets from you. It’s just that I thought you will be in danger if you know too much about me and the Lesters. You mean so much to me, Janet. You might not believe me, but I love you more than life itself.”

Janet threw herself into his arms and sobbed.

It was already winter in Seacisco, so there was not much sunlight. The cool wind caused the bare trees to sway. From the look of things, the city would get snowy very soon.

This current weather was very similar to the time when Ethan’s mother died.

“Since you insist, I will tell you. It all began more than twenty years ago. The Lester family was a noble one in Seacisco, while the Larson family was down and out. Patrick Lester happened to meet my mother in a hotel one day. Like a savage, he raped her there. He didn’t want his family name to be dragged into the mud, so he slandered my mother and made her the center of ridicule. He alleged that she seduced him first and that it was consensual sex. The media hounded her and no one believed her. My mother was extremely poor by then, so she had no money or connections to legally fight against him. Patrick gave her some money for her to shut up forever. In this way, he went scot-free. I lived with my mother until tragedy struck when I was nine years old. She suddenly passed away, leaving me in this cruel world. It was also a cold winter at that time. After my mother’s death, I was forced to go to the Lester family’s villa and Patrick agreed to take me in. He couldn’t turn his back to me because I was his biological son.

No matter how cruel rich people were, they valued their offspring. But Elissa, his wife, strongly opposed my coming into that household. She made a scene and ordered that I be thrown out. Patrick had to send me back to the house I used to live with my mother which was located in the suburb. That day marked the beginning of hell on earth for me. It wasn't bad enough that Elissa sent me back. She and her two sons still hated me. They spoke ill of my mother and bullied me at any given opportunity. My beast of a father never did anything much to stop the oppression. Later on, I attended the same high school as Ritchie. He was a senior and he picked on me every single day. It wasn't until after graduation that Elissa and my half-brothers finally stopped bullying me, because they had found out that my life was so miserable."

A huge ball of sadness erupted in Jenet's heart by the time Ethen was done with his story. Tears streamed down her face and she hugged him tightly. Ethen had a miserable past. In her mind's eye, she pictured how a little boy of that age had to suffer such a cruel fate from his so-called family.

After crying for some time, Jenet wiped her tears and said, "They are horrible people. I'm sorry that you had to go through all that as a child!"

Ethen patted her back as he fought back tears. He then wiped off the remaining tears on her face. A second later, his eyes darkened and his eyebrows knitted. "Ritchie is an arrogant devil. For him, it's a slap in the face that my friends defeated his men today. I'm sure that he won't let us go easily. However, you don't have to worry. I'm no longer that young and naive pushover. I'll stand up to him."

A huge ball of sadness erupted in Janet's heart by the time Ethan was done with his story. Tears streamed down her face and she hugged him tightly. Ethan had a miserable past. In her mind's eye, she pictured how a little boy of that age had to suffer such a cruel fate from his so-called family.

After crying for some time, Janet wiped her tears and said, "They are horrible people. I'm sorry that you had to go through all that as a child!"

Ethan patted her back as he fought back tears. He then wiped off the remaining tears on her face. A second later, his eyes darkened and his eyebrows knitted. "Ritchie is an arrogant devil. For him, it's a slap in the face that my friends defeated his men today. I'm sure that he won't let us go easily. However, you don't have to worry. I'm no longer that young and naive pushover. I'll stand up to him."

[Chapter 306](#)

The doctor who pronounced Ethan's mother dead had said she had died a natural death. But the events surrounding her death made Ethan suspect that someone had a hand in it.

The first person he suspected was Elissa. For fear of getting harmed, he decided to go to Patrick—the man who raped his mother. Elissa couldn't harm Ethan, at least not openly, after he was recognized by the Lester family. She badly wanted to get rid of him, but she couldn't do so without arousing suspicion. Even though he had to bear the name of being the bastard son of his father, he had a substantial amount of protection.

Ethan always wanted to get to the root of his mother's sudden death. This was why he put up with a lot in the Lester household. To avoid alerting his enemy, he hid his identity as Brandon Larson and kept a low profile. He had been secretly investigating the case for many years.

As a child, he was forced to suffer Ritchie's constant bullying in silence. But he couldn't tolerate him anymore now that he had tried to harm Janet. He could put up with anything, but not an attack on his wife.

"How do you intend to deal with him? I wish we could do something, but he's the second son of the Lester family. We are nobodies. He will crush us before we can act against him," Janet said worriedly as she leaned against his chest.

Ethan stroked her hair and promised assuredly, "It doesn't matter who he is. We will find a way."

"I think it's best we don't confront him at all. On my part, I will stay away from any member of your family. I will run away if I ever bump into any of them. Ritchie was so horrendous when he got mad. He looked like a devil." A cold shiver ran down Janet's spine as she recalled Ritchie's face. The handsomeness of his face was still there at that time, but there was no denying the fact that he looked like a personification of Satan.

"Sorry that you had to go through all that. I didn't see your message on time because I was very busy. It won't happen again. I'll be quick to save you next time." Ethan stroked her face absentmindedly. He was staring blankly with dim eyes. His mind was filled with thoughts at this time.

"I trust you." Janet hugged him tighter and inhaled his scent. This was the only way she could get solace and a sense of security now that she was afraid. Ethan was her rock and she felt safe with him.

"Dearie, you have been through a lot today. You look so tired. How about I take you home so you can rest?" Ethan didn't like seeing her in this weary state, so he wanted to take her home.

Janet immediately sat up and looked in the direction of the ward. Shaking her head, she refused, "I don't want to leave now. There's nobody by Laney's side, so I want to stay. At least, until she wakes up."

"Okay, that's fine." Ethan kissed her forehead and rested his chin on her head. He decided to respect her decision.

Janet was indebted to Laney. She thought, 'Laney saved my life again today. The least I can do is to stay here until she regains consciousness.'

After staring at the closed door of Laney's ward for a while, Janet buried herself in her husband's warm embrace again.

A few seconds later, Ethan felt wet moisture on his chest. He then heard a very faint sobbing. Janet was crying. "I was so useless today. I could do nothing but watch in horror as those men beat Laney. I don't want to be in such a situation again. Ethan, do you think I should start taking self-defense classes? At least, I will be able to throw some punches if anyone attacks me in the future."

In Ethan's eyes, Janet was the smartest woman in the world. But he couldn't help but think she was silly sometimes.

"You have a busy job, so you won't have time for defense classes. Don't beat up yourself over what happened today. I'm sure Laney understands why you couldn't help her. I will pay for her medical bills and hire the best caretaker for her. You heard when the doctor said she would be fine, didn't you? So, don't worry."

Ethen comforted her affectionately. Hiring Laney cost a great sum of money. She was the best bodyguard in Seacisco and she had been in many tough fights in her line of work. Ethen knew that today's beating couldn't be compared to what she had faced in the past, so he was sure she would pull through.

Janet looked up at him for a while. She then nodded and wiped her tears.

It wasn't until the next morning that Laney finally woke up.

Janet had stayed by her bedside throughout the night. She was so happy when Laney woke up that tears welled up in her eyes. She held Laney's hand tightly and said excitedly, "Finally! You are awake. Oh, Laney! You saved my life again. How can I ever repay you?"

Laney forced a smile despite the immense pain she was feeling. "Don't be silly, Janet. We are friends. And friends look out for each other. I'll always have your back. So, stop talking about payment."

In Ethan's eyes, Janet was the smartest woman in the world. But he couldn't help but think she was silly sometimes.

"You have a busy job, so you won't have time for defense classes. Don't beat up yourself over what happened today. I'm sure Laney understands why you couldn't help her. I will pay for her medical bills and hire the best caretaker for her. You heard when the doctor said she would be fine, didn't you? So, don't worry."

Ethan comforted her affectionately. Hiring Laney cost a great sum of money. She was the best bodyguard in Seacisco and she had been in many tough fights in her line of work. Ethan knew that today's beating couldn't be compared to what she had faced in the past, so he was sure she would pull through.

Janet looked up at him for a while. She then nodded and wiped her tears.

It wasn't until the next morning that Laney finally woke up.

Janet had stayed by her bedside throughout the night. She was so happy when Laney woke up that tears welled up in her eyes. She held Laney's hand tightly and said excitedly, "Finally! You are awake. Oh, Laney! You saved my life again. How can I ever repay you?"

Laney forced a smile despite the immense pain she was feeling. "Don't be silly, Janet. We are friends. And friends look out for each other. I'll always have your back. So, stop talking about payment."

[Chapter 307](#)

Laney glanced at Garrett indifferently. "I'm very grateful for your visit, Mr. Harding," she said, her tone dry. "You're always so busy, so I'm honored to receive even a moment of your time. Well, I dare not waste another second of it though. Drive safely on your way back, Mr. Harding."

Garrett frowned. He hadn't intended to stay long in the first place, but he changed his mind after noting how eager this woman was to send him away. She had piqued his interest.

He slowly took off his coat and tossed it on a nearby chair before pulling another one to sit by the bed. "You want me to leave as soon as I arrive, huh? Tell me why you dislike me so much, Miss Garcia. Do you think that I will hurt you?"

A shiver ran down Laney's spine. She was inexplicably unsettled by the man's piercing gaze.

She told herself that it was only because he had very attractive, deep-set eyes. His eyelashes were thick and naturally curled. In addition to that, there was a faint, red mole under the corner of his eye that seemed to beguile people to look more closely. Laney found herself thinking that if Garrett had been a woman, he would undoubtedly be a gorgeous one.

Realizing that she had wandered far into her own thoughts, she cleared her throat and changed the subject. "Actually, Mr. Harding, it's just that I need to use the bathroom."

"Then go and take care of your business. It doesn't matter whether I'm here or not, does it? Don't worry. I won't peep on you." Nonplussed, Garrett reached for the tea set on the side table and poured himself a cup.

Laney couldn't help but glare at him. It looked like he had no plans to leave any time soon.

After a few seconds of hesitation, she gingerly got off the bed. She gritted her teeth the entire time, frustrated that he had to see her in such an embarrassing situation.

She didn't see the way Garrett narrowed his eyes when he heard her suck her breath from exertion. He strode over in a flash and held out his arm. "Here, let me help you."

"No, thanks. I can take care of myself." Despite her brave words, Laney struggled to get on her feet. When she finally did, she couldn't stifle a gasp of pain. She might have pulled on her wound just now.

Garrett's frown deepened. "Laney," he said, unaware that his voice had turned gentle. "You don't have to pretend to be strong, okay?"

She raised her eyes then, and was stunned to see the tender expression on his face. Laney looked away in a hurry. When she spoke, her tone was gruff. "You shouldn't underestimate us female bodyguards, Mr. Harding. This kind of injury is nothing. If I'm unable to handle this much, then I should have just quit a long time ago. Don't forget that I can single-handedly throw you over my shoulder like a sack of potatoes."

"I wouldn't dare. I meant no offense, Miss Gercie. I just went to help you. Do you really want to keep arguing with me on this?" Garrett's hands clenched into fists. He knew this was a losing battle; the woman was just too stubborn. He had to retreat for now if he wanted another chance to advance in the future.

Laney felt her face burn, knowing that she was being unreasonable. For some reason, she always turned into a shrew whenever Garrett was concerned.

In the end, she did allow him to help her into the bathroom.

Garrett waited outside the door and mulled over her words.

The way she had spoken about her injuries... Did that mean that she had been in worse conditions in the past? That was probably normal, given her line of work. But she looked just like a typical young woman, small and weak. He couldn't even begin to imagine what horrors she had suffered before he met her.

Garrett felt a pang of regret on her behalf.

Laney was different from all the women who had surrounded him all his life. Unlike her, they were meek and cute, and almost always spoiled.

Usually, when he developed an interest in a woman, it would start with a crush. This time, however, he only felt deeply sorry for Laney. And it had never happened before.

"I wouldn't dare. I meant no offense, Miss Garcia. I just want to help you. Do you really want to keep arguing with me on this?" Garrett's hands clenched into fists. He knew this was a losing battle; the woman was just too stubborn. He had to retreat for now if he wanted another chance to advance in the future.

Laney felt her face burn, knowing that she was being unreasonable. For some reason, she always turned into a shrew whenever Garrett was concerned.

In the end, she did allow him to help her into the bathroom.

Garrett waited outside the door and mulled over her words.

The way she had spoken about her injuries... Did that mean that she had been in worse conditions in the past? That was probably normal, given her line of work. But she looked just like a typical young woman, small and weak. He couldn't even begin to imagine what horrors she had suffered before he met her.

Garrett felt a pang of regret on her behalf.

Laney was different from all the women who had surrounded him all his life. Unlike her, they were meek and cute, and almost always spoiled.

Usually, when he developed an interest in a woman, it would start with a crush. This time, however, he only felt deeply sorry for Laney. And it had never happened before.

[Chapter 308](#)

Laney hobbled out of the bathroom, every inch of her body sore.

Garrett saw the sweat gathered on her forehead and that she clutched onto the door frame of the bathroom with her fingers, seemingly not knowing what to do next. She seemed to be hesitating at the bathroom door about how to walk back awkwardly.

This was indeed very inconvenient for her and she would feel even more uncomfortable if Garrett continued to stay there.

Garrett picked up his suit jacket from the chair and uttered these words, "I have a meeting to attend to later, so I'm heading out now. I'll call the nurse over later. If you need anything, she can help you. Feel

free to spend Ethan's money as you please. Your injury was a result of you protecting his woman after all. You can also call me if anything else comes up."

Before leaving, Garrett placed his fingertip on the cake box and tapped on it. "Since it's not going in the fridge, you'd better finish it up soon."

Watching Garrett walk out the door, Laney staggered from the bathroom in the direction of the bed. She looked at the pink bear-like cake and hesitated for some time. After that, she slowly made her way over to the cake box and opened it. She dipped her fingers into the pink cream and placed it into her mouth.

The cream was very sweet, much sweeter than she originally thought. But it was not very greasy.

Looking at the door that Garrett had gone out of, Laney thought that he was not that bad after all.

...

As soon as Janet snuck back to the company, Tiffany asked her to meet her in her office.

"Why haven't you shown up the whole morning? Where did you head off to?" There was anxiety evident in Tiffany's voice. She was dressed up very gracefully today. She had on a long pink off-the-shoulder dress, appearing very elegant.

Usually, she liked to wear suits of black and white colors, which made her appearance seem very shrewd and capable.

"What's the matter? What happened?" Rubbing her fingers together in a nervous manner, Janet appeared a little confused. Tiffany wouldn't be looking for her if there wasn't anything important.

Tiffany shook her head with a look of disappointment on her face. She took the coat hanging from the hanger and rapped Janet's forehead with her knuckles. "You are really forgetful. This afternoon happens to be the opening of Fashion Week in Seacisco."

All of a sudden, it dawned on Janet that the clothes she designed would be the first one to be on display.

"What are you doing still standing here? Let's go now!" Tiffany uttered after she opened the door and turned around to give Janet a look.

...

On the venue of the Fashion Week at Seacisco.

Janet and Tiffany sat at the seats under the runway which happened to be set up in a maple forest.

Janet was the youngest person among the designers of the first show and this would be her first time taking part in such an activity, so she was attracting a whole lot of attention.

Tiffany was familiar with a bunch of people in the designer circle since she was once also a designer like a dark horse with a bright future. Tiffany led Janet to meet with many famous designers. After several rounds of chit-chat, Janet got acquainted with a bunch of designers in the city.

The fashion show started at approximately four o'clock in the afternoon.

Pretty soon, Janet's work was on display onstage. This time, the materials she used were soft silk fabric and silver threads to the silk cloth. At this moment in time, a breeze blew the dress designed by Janet, making it outshine all the other dresses.

Like the others present in the showroom, Tiffany pulled out her cell phone and began to take pictures of the models wearing the dresses. Some exclamations sounded out from time to time.

"Even the wind happens to support you this afternoon." Tiffany smiled and activated the shutter on her phone screen.

With a shy smile on her face, Janet quietly turned her head around to look at the people who were apparently thoroughly impressed by her design. She felt a special sense of satisfaction and accomplishment flow through her heart. Her initial intention of being a designer was not to be famous but to be appreciated and liked by the others around her.

Just as everyone was admiring her designs on the stage, a woman suddenly rushed onto the catwalk, trying to catch her breath. She stopped all the models, angrily pointed her finger at Janet, and shouted out loud, "Janet Lind, you're such a shameless plagiarist! How could you actually plagiarize my work openly in this way?"

[Chapter 309](#)

Janet held her chest and looked at the woman with her mouth agape.

The security guards immediately rushed up to stop the woman. One of them snatched the microphone from her and the others tried to drag her away from the stage. "Miss, you need to be careful with your words. You are at the Seacisco Fashion Week and it's a live show."

"Ha-ha! That makes it even better. I want everyone to see who Janet is. They must know that she's an intellectual property thief. Good day, everyone. My name is Luna McCoy and I'm a designer from Lester Silk Fabric. Just now, I noticed that her designs are very similar to the designs that I did some time back. The resemblance is so uncanny that I'm sure she plagiarized my work," the woman uttered arrogantly.

"What? She stole the designs? Unbelievable!" There was an uproar at the venue after the crowd heard Luna's words.

Sparing her no time to continue, the security guards carried her off the stage. But she was stubborn. She struggled with them and continued to shout at the top of her lungs. "Plagiarism is a taboo for all designers! You aren't supposed to steal someone else's work. Janet, aren't you ashamed of yourself? You claim to be original and creative, but you stand here and pass off my work as yours. You also pretend as if you did nothing wrong. Don't you have any conscience?"

The news soon got to the sponsor of the Seacisco Fashion Week.

A member of the staff rushed over and said assuredly, "Miss, please calm down. We frown at plagiarism and attach great importance to the originality of the designs displayed on this show. We will surely look into this matter. But you need to tender some evidence to back up your claim."

"Humph! Of course I have evidence!" Luna broke free from the security guards' hold.

The uproar became even louder when the crowd heard that she had evidence.

Meanwhile, Janet was utterly confused. She pondered, 'What's going on? And why is this woman making such accusations? I didn't plagiarize anyone's work! I did everything myself!'

Tiffany was also surprised. She wanted to get to the root of the matter immediately. "Janet, the Seacisco Fashion Week is a big deal around the world. Headlining the show is supposed to take our company to the peak of the clothing industry. We can't let this ruin our chances. You need to clear up this misunderstanding as soon as possible. Let's go there!"

Plagiarism wasn't a joking matter. Such an accusation could destroy Janet's career and the company's reputation in the blink of an eye.

"Ms. Fisher, I put this on everything I love, I didn't plagiarize anyone's work. All my designs are the products of my creativity and several sleepless nights. You have to believe me." Janet held up her right hand as she swore solemnly.

Not only was Janet naturally an incorrupt person, but she also understood that plagiarism was taboo. She had even deliberately avoided using similar elements while putting together her designs.

"Of course, I believe you. But that doesn't mean that everyone here feels the same way. Let's go and see what's going on. This is not only about you now; it's also about the reputation of the Larson Group." The calm and innocent look on Janet's face further proved to Tiffany that this accusation was just a big mistake.

"Thanks for believing me. Don't worry. I will handle it." With inexplicable boldness, Janet walked over to where Luna was and asked, "What's going on exactly?"

Luna had been dying to hear that question. She sneered at Janet and took out her tablet from her backpack. After tapping the screen, she said to everyone present, "I designed a series of colorful spring styles last year, but the design department of the Lester Silk Fabric didn't select it, so none of the designs were made into a finished product. But I was shocked to see Janet's works on stage just now. They are very similar to mine. I'm a hundred percent sure that she got her hands on my designs and decided to pass them off as her own. She's a thief!"

The entire show was halted because of this sudden accusation. The audience's attention was on them.

One of the attendees who saw Luna's designs said in a hushed tone, "Wow! Their works are indeed similar. I think she actually stole the designs."

"Yes, the similarities are too obvious to overlook. The colors and styles are very much like," another one concurred.

"Shush! Don't jump to conclusions just yet. Let's hear what Miss Lind has to say about the accusation. It's unwise to judge only by listening to one side!" A guest disagreed vehemently.

[Chapter 310](#)

Unfazed by all that Luna said, Janet swiped and zoomed in on the drawings on the PC tablet. She observed them closely for a while. She then said, "Yeah, they are similar, but that doesn't make them the same. Are you calling me a plagiarist because of these similarities? Besides, no one knows when you made these design drafts!"

Luna had prepared well for this confrontation, so she had expected Janet to say such a thing. She retorted fearlessly, "As I said earlier, I made these designs some time back. I decided to put the entire collection on a fashion design exchange platform since it wasn't selected by the design team. It was a way of putting my work out there and building my portfolio. From the website, you can see that it was uploaded a year ago. Have a look, everyone!"

As Luna spoke, she opened the fashion design exchange platform where she claimed to have uploaded her designs.

The date stamp indeed showed that the collection of designs was uploaded on the platform a year ago.

A slight frown appeared on the organizer's face after Luna pointed out the date stamp. "Miss Lind, what do you have to say about that?"

The tempo of the uproar also increased. Janet saw that some of the attendees were looking at her with disdainful expressions. Many dignified designers were also coming over.

Tiffany's mind-blowing introduction of Janet before the show began painted her in a good light. Most of them had good first impressions of her, so they were supportive of her. "People often get similar inspirations. It's possible that both women have similar interests and saw the same set of past designs that inspired them. After all, even experienced designers like us occasionally have such problems."

"It's true that people can take inspiration from the same things, but it is impossible for two creative minds to come up with the same designs. Similarities can happen. However, the styles and colors of Janet's designs are exactly the same as mine. Even a blind man could see that the resemblance is uncanny. How is it possible that she made these designs without looking at mine?" Luna insisted confidently.

The other designers were forced to admit that she had a point. Both designs had the slip style and silk fabric, among other similarities. From their experience, they knew that such coincidences hardly ever happened.

This seemed to be enough evidence. As a result, the organizers and designers couldn't speak for Janet anymore. One of them eventually spoke for the rest, "Miss Lind, you have to explain why your work is the same as hers. It's best that you own up to it if you indeed plagiarized her work. Otherwise, you would make matters worse for yourself."

This statement indicated that they were convinced that this was a clear case of plagiarism.

Despite being on the hot seat with little or no support, Janet was hell-bent on sticking to her truth. She wasn't intimidated by their lack of trust. She said calmly, "You said that even a blind man could see that I plagiarized your work. Now tell me, how is it possible that I blatantly plagiarized without changing any detail? I am a smart woman. If I wanted to copy someone's work, I would make plenty of changes so that the owner won't notice the similarities. Do you think I'm a fool that would just copy and paste without tweaking anything? Which intellectual property thief would want others to find out about his or her shady business?"

There was no trace of shame or fear on Janet's face. It didn't matter to her that no one supported her now. She was just ready to prove her innocence.

Folding her arms over her chest, Luna fired back, "Spare me that crap, Janet. Now is not the time to flatter yourself. Only a thief would know how a thief thinks. I'm not a plagiarist, so there's no way I would know how people like you think. I have brought out evidence that you stole my work. Everyone has seen it. As a designer, I can't just stand by and watch someone else take credit for my hard work. With my designs, Janet successfully entered the fashion show of Seacisco Fashion Week. I demand that all of her works be withdrawn and that she apologizes to me publicly."

Janet frowned deeply.

She couldn't take the insults, let alone apologize to her. "You are making a baseless claim. I didn't plagiarize your work. I have never logged on to the fashion design sharing platform you spoke about. More so, I have never seen any designs that are similar to mine anywhere before. You just want to tarnish my image!"

Luna held her chest and pretended to be hurt by Janet's words. "How could you say that I'm making a baseless claim? You are just being a big bully. I've never seen anyone as shameless and wicked as you. The evidence is right here. Why are you still denying it? Anyway, let's wait and see!"