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It had been a long time since the last time Curt and Ethan had seen each other. They chatted happily at the birthday party, trying to catch up as much as possible.

During this time, there was no one who dared to offend Janet and Ethan again.

At the end of the birthday party, Curt's assistant checked his watch and approached the old man.

"Mr. Benton, it's time to head back to take your medicine. The doctor has instructed me to remind you to take your medicine on time every day," the assistant said in a low voice next to Curt's ear.

"The medicine prescribed by those quack doctors is so bitter that it makes me sick to my stomach. I finally met up with Ethan today and was able to catch up with him. Why do you keep pushing me to go home?" Curt snorted like he was still a child who was told to go to bed early.

Ethan became serious once more. He knew of ways to persuade this stubborn old man. "We've already talked for a long time. If you want to chat some more with me, I'll go out of my way to pay a visit to your house another time."

Curt said farewell to Ethan rather reluctantly, "I have no idea when you'll go to visit me. You'd better keep your promise, Ethan."

After that, he turned to look at Janet and said, "Goodbye."

Startled, Janet nodded in a respectful manner and said, "Bye." She thought that Curt had not noticed her all this time.

Curt talked with Nora some more before he exited the birthday party.

Ethan came to attend the party simply to celebrate Nora's birthday. Seeing that the party was nearly over, he was about to leave too.

"Do you feel tired? Shall we head back?" Ethan patted Janet on her back affectionately. "There was so much good food here and you seemed to have eaten a lot. How about we go for a walk?"

Janet indeed had eaten her fill. Though the Lester family's members were not that nice, the food they had at the party was really delicious.

"All right, it'll be good for digestion." While holding her bag in her hand, Janet got up.

When they were about to head out together, an extremely dignified voice sounded out, "Ethan, wait a minute."

They turned their heads and looked back in the direction of the voice. A middle-aged man in a dark red suit was making his way over and was standing behind them.

He looked over the age of fifty. His black hair was intermingled with gray hair. He was both tall and strong, overflowing with health and spirits.

He was none other than Patrick, Ethan's biological father and the master of the Lester family.

Patrick had watched from the side as Ethan and Curt talked together for a long time at the party. He asked in a serious voice, "Tell me, how do you know Curt?"

People who knew famous people like Curt must be very extraordinary in some aspects, but Patrick thought he was missing something. In his eyes, there was nothing remarkable about his useless son.

"It was sheer luck that we came to know each other," Ethan answered.

Patrick took two steps forward toward his son and said in a serious voice, "We're thinking about collaborating with Curt."

Ethan understood what Patrick meant when he said that. He pretended to be ignorant of his meaning though, and said, "Then I hope you can have a good chat with him about this collaboration. We're heading back first."

With a fierce look plastered all over his face, Patrick said in an impatient voice, "Since you and Curt have such a good relationship, you should help us win the collaboration. You'll also benefit a whole lot from it."

Ethan thought that this conversation was ridiculous. He sneered and lifted his chin ever so slightly. His dark eyes gleamed with a cold and contemptuous light. "You must know very little about me. Based on your relationship with me, why do you think I'll actually help you? What are you giving me in return? Do you plan to give me a job of serving drinks and sweeping the floor? Is this your idea of a joke?"

The members of the Lester family were all stunned by Ethan's blunt remarks.

Was this fierce man in front of them really the same good-for-nothing Ethan?

Regardless of the reaction of the other Lester family members, Ethan grabbed hold of Janet's wrist and said in a whisper, "Let's go now."

After having said that, he directly left with Janet by his side.

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Every member of the Lester family was left stunned as they didn't expect Ethan to speak to them like that. After all, he was usually the quiet type who would endure everything in silence.

Ritchie was so angry that he almost forgot that they were at his grandmother's birthday party. Clenching his fists in rage, he cursed aloud, "Ethan's a loser. How dare he behave so arrogantly?"

Before her straightforward son could say something that would get him into trouble, Elissa quickly stopped him. "Watch your language, Ritchie. We are at your grandmother's birthday party. Behave yourself!"

It was Elissa's fault for spoiling Ritchie as a kid and turning him into a person who lacked emotional intelligence.

Ritchie eventually kept his mouth shut and stood aside after he got scolded.

With a look of disappointment, Ritchie's grandmother pointed at Ritchie and said, "How many times do I have to tell you that you need to control your temper? Why are you always causing trouble?"

“That’s not fair, Grandma. You’re always taking Ethan’s side. He’s just an illegitimate child and he’s not that close to you. Why do you like him so much?” Ritchie’s anger rose to new heights.

After all, he was smart enough to see what was going on.

Although Nora had never defended Ethan in public, she was always good to Ethan in private.

“Shut up, Ritchie!” Elissa glared at Ritchie furiously. After all, she didn’t want to make a scene in front of all the guests in the hall. “Go to your room at once!”

Frustrated, Ritchie snorted and walked upstairs.

Although there was no expression on Elissa’s face, a sense of crisis arose in her heart. Ritchie was right, and it was getting more and more difficult to see through Ethan.

Sylvia Larson was known for her forbearance and perhaps Ethan inherited such a character trait from his mother.

For some reason, the moment she looked at Ethan’s face, she thought of Sylvia.

She never found anything odd about Ethan, even though he was pretty meek in his younger days. Surprisingly, as the years passed, Ethan grew up to be a composed and respectable person, just like his mother, Sylvia.

During all the years that Ethan spent living a humble life in society, Elissa was too busy thinking about the Lester family’s company instead of making things difficult for Ethan.

However, it became clear as day to Elissa that Ethan was no longer the shy boy he used to be.

Elissa feared that Patrick would attach great importance to Ethan after finding that he had great potential. The thought of Ethan returning to the Lester family was intolerable for Elissa because she wanted her two sons to take over the Lester family business.

Elissa walked to Patrick’s side and tentatively said, “It seems that Ethan is all grown up now. He seems to have what it takes to speak with Curt.”

Patrick never paid much attention to Ethan in the past, but now he seemed very keen on him. It had been shocking news that Ethan managed to befriend Curt; after all, they both came from different worlds and they shouldn’t have had crossed paths.

After pausing to think, Patrick fiddled with his thumbs and stared at the backs of Ethan and Janet, who were walking away. “Ethan isn’t the same person anymore. He doesn’t seem to be as shy and cowardly as he used to be,” he finally said.

Elissa gritted her teeth contemptuously. She knew that it was time to take action as Ethan might soon pose a threat to them.

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Ethan and Janet left the party venue and walked to the bus station.

Because the two of them were both well-dressed and good-looking, they attracted many people's attention. Passers-by couldn't help but stare as they walked past.

Suddenly, Janet thought about Ethan's and Curt's conversation. She asked curiously, "How did you know that Curt? You seem to be good friends."

"I liked hiking years ago. One time, Curt had a stroke half way up the mountain and I was the one who rushed him to the hospital. We got to know each other because of that. Later we found that we had a lot in common so we hung out a lot," Ethan explained. In fact, that was only part of the story.

He didn't actually like hiking. All he ever did was work. While it was true that he had joined a hiking club, it was only because he wanted to befriend people like Curt to begin with. But it was true that they had become friends because they shared similar interests and got along well.

"He must be a very influential man. They all seemed to respect him." Janet could tell that all the people at the party were practically in awe of Curt.

"Well, despite his high status, he's very easy-going." Noticing that Janet was rubbing her arms vigorously, Ethan shrugged off his coat and draped it over her shoulders. Then, he pulled her into his arms and asked, "Are you tired? We can take a cab back. Your hands are freezing."

Janet buried her head in his chest, eager to feel his warmth. Looking up, she could only see the sharp angles of his jawline.

Janet could tell from the way Ethan behaved today that he wasn't afraid of the Lester family. To be more precise, he didn't seem to care about them too much.

Ethan was a sophisticated visionary. He and Curt were the same type of people. That was why they became fast friends.

As Janet thought about it, she suddenly had a sinking feeling about this. "What if the Lester family comes after us?"

Ethan raised his hand to hail a taxi and then helped Janet into the car.

"Nothing has happened yet. Worrying too much about the uncertain future brings nothing but trouble." Ethan spoke like a wise sage.

His identity of Brandon was enough to protect him.

But he was still a little hesitant to let her know about that. After all, Brandon and the Lester family were at war. If people found out that Janet was Brandon's wife, she would be in more danger than if she was just Ethan's wife.

But what he didn't expect was that the Lester family would start picking on Ethan, which had dragged Janet into their mess.

Ethan could've exposed his identity as Brandon to Janet, but he was already stuck in his woven web of lies. He couldn't bear to imagine what Janet would say when she found out that he had been lying to her from the beginning.

Ethan closed his eyes and sighed bitterly. There was no going back now. He had no choice but to continue living a lie.

Janet looked at him firmly. "I'm just trying to be careful. You can't just take this situation lightly. I'm worried about you. The Lester family is so powerful. What if Ritchie tries to make things difficult for you again?"

Ethan was taken aback by her worried gaze. He was Brandon Larson, known to everyone as invulnerable. Perhaps Janet was the only one in this world who worried about him.

Ethan reached out to stroke her cheek softly. Then, he suddenly leaned closer to nibble on her lower lip. "Silly girl."

Janet smiled at him sweetly and shook her head. Cupping his face in her hands, she kissed him back.

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Laney was finally about to be discharged from the hospital. It was late winter by now and the first heavy snow fell in Seacisco.

Early that morning, Janet took Ethan to the hospital to pick Laney up. The ground was covered with a thick layer of snow. People sank into the snow with every step.

"How about you stay in the hospital for a few more days? Your wound's still wrapped in gauze." Janet glanced at Laney's injury worriedly. She had many misgivings as she packed up Laney's things. She was a petite girl after all. What if she got hurt again?

Although Laney's wound hadn't completely healed, this didn't stop her from going about her daily activities. Perhaps it was because she practiced martial arts all year round that her body recovered faster than that of ordinary people.

Laney stretched her legs and shook her head firmly. "I've been on leave for a whole week! If I stay any longer, I'll lose all of this month's salary."

She could go back and clock in. After all, her job was to protect Janet.

While they were chatting, they heard a commotion outside the ward.

"It seems I'm the last one to arrive!" Garrett loudly knocked on the door to the ward two times before pushing it open.

He was dressed in a black overcoat, with a few clumps of snow clinging to his broad shoulders. Pushing a pair of silver-rimmed glasses up the bridge of his nose, he looked elegant yet gentle.

Janet looked at him in surprise. "Mr. Harding, what brings you here?"

Upon taking a closer look at Garrett, she felt that he looked a little different today, but she couldn't tell how.

Garrett's eyes landed on the gauze on Laney's arm. "This is my capable secretary. It's only right that I come pick her up from the hospital!"

'Are all the leaders of the Larson Group so concerned with their subordinates? Is this part of their corporate culture?' Janet wondered with a click of her tongue.

Unexpectedly, Laney turned her head aside and snorted coldly.

Janet thought, 'Garrett's the boss. If he came here in person to pick Laney up, it might be impolite of me to refuse his offer.' Out loud, she said, "Mr. Harding, thank you in advance for taking Laney home."

Janet linked arms with Ethan and smiled playfully. "I suppose we'll get going."

After the couple left, Garrett asked his assistant to bring the car around. Then he gathered Laney's luggage and led the way out of the ward. Of course, Garrett wanted to act gallantly. But Laney gave him the cold shoulder the whole time and didn't let him get close to her.

Laney reluctantly followed Garrett out of the hospital and waited for the car.

Glancing at the woman who was pretending to be fine, Garrett asked with concern, "How's your wound?"

Laney shrugged nonchalantly. "It's no big deal. But, for the sake of Janet's safety, I'll wait until I've completely recovered before I resume my duties as her bodyguard."

"Don't worry. Ethan would never let his wife get into any sort of danger. While you were in the hospital, he already made arrangements for another bodyguard to secretly protect Janet."

As he spoke, Garrett looked at Laney's delicate face. Then, he added, "But we all think that your ability is outstanding. It'd be best if you be the one to continue protecting Janet. Ethan said that after you recover, you will continue to be Janet's bodyguard."

"Of course. I'm better than most male bodyguards." Laney was pleased to hear such words of praise and she couldn't help but smile slightly.

But as soon as she finished speaking, her expression suddenly changed as she whipped her head and stared at somewhere intently.

Confused by her strange behavior, Garrett followed her gaze curiously and asked, "What's wrong?"

Laney eyed the wide-view mirror in the parking lot and murmured, "I just heard something. It sounded like it was behind us."

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Garrett looked around the empty basement parking lot and saw nothing unusual, other than the neatly parked cars. Moreover, he hadn't heard anything.

"Laney, it's not funny. Don't joke like that." Garrett's eyes darted all over the place and he took two steps closer to Laney.

Laney didn't want to waste her breath talking to him. While keenly observing her surroundings, she dragged him to an empty parking space.

Although Garrett didn't see anything strange, he obediently followed Laney and allowed her to pull him to the rear.

"I don't have time to joke around. We'd better leave as soon as possible. Maybe it's the Lester family's thugs."

Laney had been a professional bodyguard since she was sixteen years old. She had grown sensitive to her surroundings. Nothing could escape her. While she was talking with Garrett just now, she caught a glimpse of a furtive figure in the reflection of the wide-angle mirror.

If it really was someone sent by the Lester family, then she doubted he was alone. She had just been discharged from the hospital and hadn't fully recovered yet. It would be difficult for her to fight off more than one person.

Thinking of this, Laney told Garrett, "Call your assistant and tell him that we'll wait for him outside the parking lot."

However, as soon as she finished speaking, a woman in a hospital gown suddenly jumped out from behind a car. With a fruit knife in her hand, she hysterically rushed towards Garrett.

"You fucking bastard! I'm going to hell and you're coming with me!" she screamed like a rabid dog and swung the knife madly towards Garrett.

Laney immediately pushed Garrett out of the way. "Run!"

When Garrett saw that woman, he was stunned. He recognized that woman.

Garrett was stuck in a trance and wasn't able to react in time. The woman had closed the distance between them in the blink of an eye.

Seeing that it was too late for Garrett to get out of the way, Laney had to run in front of him. She caught the woman's wrist with one hand, while the other tried to grab the fruit knife.

"Fuck off, bitch! This is between me and that son of a bitch!" the woman shouted. Her hair was disheveled and her eyes were wide and bloodshot.

Anyone with a knife was dangerous. The woman, in this crazed state, was unprecedentedly powerful. Moreover, Laney's wound hadn't completely healed. She could do nothing but hold the woman in place as the two struggled on the ground.

"Miss, please calm down!" Laney wrapped her legs around the woman's waist and desperately gripped the woman's wrist.

The woman screamed uncontrollably and kept swinging the knife. During the altercation, Laney suddenly cried out in pain as her shoulder was slashed, leaving a dazzling bloodstain.

The woman was taken aback when she saw the bright red blood.

"Ah!" she shrieked even louder. Laney seized this opportunity and yanked the fruit knife out of the woman's hand. Then, she kicked the woman away.

The woman collapsed to the ground and burst into tears.

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Laney tucked the knife away and pressed her hand against her bleeding shoulder. Gritting her teeth, she shot a murderous glare at Garret.

Seeing that Laney was injured, Garrett finally came to his senses. He ran to her and helped her stand up. "I'm sorry. I was too slow. Come on. I'll take you back to the hospital."

Laney sighed and shook her head wryly. "I just got out of the hospital. Now I have to go back there again?"

Staring at her bleeding wound, Garrett frowned and his expression darkened. He picked up his phone and dialed a number. "Don't worry about that now."

In Laney's eyes, it was best to solve the problem in front of them first. Cradling her wound, she said through gritted teeth, "I'm fine. Call the police. Let's sort this out first."

Judging from what had just happened, the woman's original target was Garrett.

After mulling over it for a while, Laney asked Garrett seriously, "Who is this woman? Why did she try to stab you?"

Just then, the woman on the ground suddenly exploded into tears. She thrashed her arms angrily and raised her head, revealing her pretty face. "I'm this scumbag's girlfriend!"

She glared at Garrett with resentment, and then her hateful gaze shifted to Laney. "Garrett, you changed your type? She's a fucking tomboy! I can't believe this."

"Why did you leave the hospital?" Garrett asked, pulling Laney behind his back cautiously.

"How else would I have seen your new lover? Garrett, you abandoned me and left me in the hospital. What kind of man are you? I hope you rot in hell, you bastard!" The woman gnashed her teeth and pointed a trembling finger at Garrett.

Garrett frowned. After some slight hesitation, his voice softened somewhat. "I'll call the police first, and then I'll inform your parents. No more messing around. You know why we broke up."

Hearing this, the woman stared daggers at Garrett. She got up and rushed over to slap him.

Fortunately, the security guards in the area had overheard the commotion and had rushed over to stop the woman.

Just then, Garrett's assistant brought the car over.

They were all shocked when they saw the puddle of blood on the ground, Laney's wounded shoulder, and her paper-white face.

Garrett explained the situation briefly and then turned to the guards, "Restrain this woman and call the police."

Before leaving, he said to his assistant, "Stay here and see it through. I have to take Laney to have her wound treated first. We'll talk about the rest later."

After that, he helped Laney towards the elevator and they went back to the hospital.

Inside the elevator, Laney sighed heavily. She was really unlucky. The knife had cut into one of her old wounds, and it hurt so much.

Staring at her expressionless face for a long time, Garrett finally broke the silence. "If it hurts, just tell me. You don't have to act tough here."

Somehow, Garrett's heart broke when he saw the stubborn look on Laney's face.

Laney gritted her teeth and applied more pressure on her wound. "Yes, it hurts. But it's better to appear invulnerable than to let them think they can defeat me easily. Now they'll have to think twice before they decide to hurt me next time."

"I'm not one of them, Miss Garcia." Garrett sighed helplessly.

Laney stiffened. Was it just her or was Garrett... flirting with her? At this time?

Laney rolled her eyes secretly and changed the topic. "Cut the crap. Was that woman your ex-girlfriend?"

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Garrett wasn't expecting Laney to brush off his question, much less mention the one embarrassing thing he didn't want to talk about.

He held on to her arm and hesitated for a moment before speaking. "Well... She is an ex-girlfriend of mine. She was spoiled all her life, so she's quite used to doing things without thinking about the possible consequences. I must admit that I am partly at fault here. I should have been more firm when I broke up with her; she wouldn't have fostered any false hopes that we might get back together again."

True enough, his ex-girlfriend was a very stubborn brat. When he had first tried to break up with her, she was adamant with her refusal. They had broken up eventually, but it seemed like she had turned her love for him into some sinister obsession that prompted her to do horrible things like attacking him with a weapon.

Garrett hung his head and said nothing more. He wasn't the type to gossip about his exes, regardless of whether he was in good terms with them or not.

Laney narrowed her eyes at him. Clearly, she didn't believe a word he had just said. "Are you sure the fault isn't entirely yours? Maybe you trampled on her heart too much."

If the tabloids were to be believed, Garrett had supposedly dated several women at the same time. He was notorious for having a messy love life.

He looked at Laney now, caught between crying and laughing. He was painfully aware of his awful reputation, as well as the fact that most people believed the stories to be a true.

However, Garrett wasn't a womanizer at all. Or at least, he didn't think so. Contrary to popular claims, he was always serious about every relationship he got into. He had never played with a partner's feelings.

When he was in love, he would give his girlfriend his all. And once he broke up with someone, he would draw a clear line and never contact the other party again. Perhaps the problem was that he was rarely single. The media had simply latched on to the number of relationships under his belt and built up his image as a playboy and a heartbreaker.

Garrett was silent for a couple of seconds as pulled himself out of his musings. "I can only say that you don't know me, Miss Garcia," he said with a wry smile.

When he looked down at her wound again, he realized that Laney was bleeding profusely. "Why do you ask so many questions, anyway?" he grumbled. "Can't you just worry about yourself for once? Look, your clothes are practically dyed with blood."

It wasn't the first time he had wondered—genuinely wondered—if this woman was made of steel.

Something clicked in her mind at his words, and Laney realized that the pain on her shoulder had indeed worsened.

"It's not a serious injury," she said lightly, even as she tightened the makeshift bandages around her arm. "We're in a hospital. It's not like I would die from this."

Garrett sighed helplessly and shook his head. All he could do for now was to assist her as they rushed through the hallways.

"Does your girlfriend have a problem with her eyesight?" Laney asked all of a sudden.

He turned to her abruptly and found her brows furrowed in the most adorable way. Now, why would she ask something like that?

"I'm not a tomboy, am I?" Laney added before he could say anything. She sounded pretty miffed.

Garrett suppressed the urge to chuckle and settled for a smile. "She was just trying to goad you," he said patiently. "Don't take her comments to heart. You're a lovely little woman."

They carried on with some mindless chatter as they made their way to the nearest empty ward, as if to distract themselves from the severity of the situation.

Frank arrived shortly after. His jaw dropped at the sight of the bleeding woman on the hospital bed. "Why are you back already?" he demanded. "And you've got a new cut on your shoulder! Don't you have any respect for the sanctity of life?"

Out of all the problematic patients he had had to deal with, what Frank hated the most were those who were reckless with the matter of life and death.

Garrett looked away guiltily and scratched the back of his head. He cleared his throat and took Frank aside to recount the incident that brought them here.

Not that Frank was any happier for the explanation. Shaking his head, he called for a nurse to help him sew Laney up.

His already glum face only grew darker as he inspected the gash. "I don't really care what you do, Laney, but you're courting death at this point. Your previous injuries haven't even fully healed yet! What were you thinking, going against an armed person with your bare fists?"

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Laney shivered ever so slightly under Frank's scolding.

It wasn't like he was roaring at her in fury; if anything, he sounded frustrating.

But the look of reproach and disappointment in his eyes were somehow more ominous than outright anger. There was a quality to his gaze that made people feel vulnerable, as though he had the power to read their thoughts.

Like a petulant child who had been caught red-handed, Laney ducked her head. "It was getting dangerous," she insisted. "Garrett was about to get seriously hurt. I couldn't just stand by and do nothing. I may be small and injured, but I'm certainly a better fighter compared to a young master who's been sheltered all his life."

She didn't hold back on her words at all.

Garrett winced and ran a hand over his face, confused yet again on whether he should laugh or cry.

He was learning quickly that he was no match for this tiny woman, especially when it came to clever banter. At least in this regard, he was willing to concede to Laney. Besides, she was indeed, like she said, a better fighter.

He glanced down at Laney, noting how pale she was. Garrett reached out and patted the other man's shoulder. "What happened, happened, Frank. It's all in the past now. Just deal with her wound instead of berating her about the incident."

Frank heaved a long sigh and began to stitch Laney's wound.

Contrary to her claims, it was actually quite serious. If she had foregone treatment and continued her careless ways, this would become another lasting mark on her skin.

"In all my years of practice, I've never seen a woman with so many scars on her body," Frank mused out loud.

"Well, then, you're welcome!" Laney retorted. "I'm just another one of your patients. Please stop talking nonsense and do what you have to do."

She sat back against the pillows with a sullen expression, clearly annoyed by Frank's remarks.

Garrett, who sported an equally morose face, leaned over and covered Laney's mouth with his hand. "You're talking far too much for an injured patient."

Then he turned to Frank and said, "Use the best surgical thread there is so that her wound won't scar."

Laney swatted Garrett's hand away. "Forget it; that's too expensive. I'm fine with the ordinary ones."

"I'll pay for it," Garrett countered in a voice that brooked no argument.

“That’s totally unnecessary,” Laney said, rolling her eyes at him.

Garrett didn’t take the bait. Instead, he drew closer and stared at her open wound. “Of course it’s necessary; you’re a woman. Not having a scar will always be the better choice.”

Laney paused then, looking startled. Oddly enough, she didn’t make any further protests.

Right after Frank snipped the thread from the last stitch, Laney made to leave the bed. Garrett’s hand quickly shot out to stop her.

“Do you honestly think of yourself as a superhero or something?” He pushed her back on the bed and pulled the covers over her legs. “Lie down and rest for a bit. Just because you’re all sewn up doesn’t mean that your wound is already healed.”

“I haven’t even dealt with your ex-girlfriend yet. I need to go to the police station.” Laney tried to get up again, but Garrett wouldn’t let her.

“I will handle it.” This feisty little woman seemed to have a penchant for worrying the people around her. He couldn’t help but wonder if she was doing it on purpose.

Garrett made quick work of calling the police, and soon, a couple of officers came to the hospital to take a statement. They were also informed that Garrett’s ex-girlfriend had already been apprehended.

The ward grew quiet after the police left.

Garrett and Laney both sat facing the window, watching the snowflakes falling slowly from above. It looked like it was going to snow for a while.

Moments passed. Garrett withdrew his gaze from the window and looked at Laney. He stared at her delicate profile, and was pleasantly surprised to realize that he found her rather attractive.

“You saved me back there. I’d like to express my sincerest thanks.”

Laney didn’t move. “There’s no need for that, Mr. Harding,” she said in a cool voice. “I only did what was right.”

Garrett turned back to the window, a soft smile playing on his lips. “You received a reward for saving Janet’s life, didn’t you? And that was when you were under duty. On the other hand, you protected me even though you weren’t paid to do it. That means I owe you my life.”

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Laney narrowed her eyes at Garrett, who returned her stare with a quizzical one of his own.

She didn’t want him to feel indebted to her, for anything. “You can just pay me in cash, and we’ll call it quits.”

He flashed her a lopsided grin. “No way. You should know that the life of the Harding family’s precious son cannot be measured by money. You have managed to preserve a priceless treasure.”

His gaze turned serious then. "I owe you my life, and that is that. If you need help in the future, don't hesitate to come to me. The Harding family will see to it that you don't encounter any difficulty in Seacisco."

Laney raised an eyebrow and rolled her eyes. What an arrogant man!

She decided to ignore his gallant declarations and shifted her focus back on the falling snow outside.

After another moment of silence, Garrett got up from his seat and walked over to Laney's bed. He knocked his knuckles lightly against the top of her head. "Come on, Miss Garcia, don't be rude to me. Fine, you can ignore me if you like, but you'd better stay here and recuperate properly. You can't go back to work in your current condition."

Laney didn't want to give in to him, but she knew he was right. She had no choice but to grumble in agreement.

When Ethan later found out that Laney was hospitalized yet again, he immediately canceled Garrett's application for a vacation.

The other man naturally felt aggrieved by this.

"It's your fault that Laney has to take time off work," Ethan explained casually. "All things considered, this punishment isn't as severe as it should be."

"But I'm not the one to blame," Garrett argued. "That's the thing. You know my ex-girlfriend's temper very well."

Ethan was having none of it, though. "Of course, you're to blame. You keep messing around with the wrong women."

Garrett had nothing to say to that.

Janet didn't learn about the incident until she got off work that day. They were supposed to go home together, but Laney was nowhere in sight, so Janet went to Garrett to ask where she was.

Once informed about her friend's situation, Janet headed straight to the hospital and stormed into Laney's ward. "Can you rein in your sense of justice for once?" Janet huffed. "Mr. Harding is a grown man! Why did you feel the need to block his assailant with your own body?"

She was visibly angry when she had first arrived, but her expression instantly softened when she caught sight of Laney's bandaged shoulder.

Laney didn't know how to explain herself. As a matter of fact, she had acted out of instinct. "I wasn't really thinking at the time," she said sheepishly. "Don't worry; it's just a minor injury."

"Well, I suppose it's a good thing that Mr. Harding is your boss. He wouldn't complain even if you asked for additional days off. I just don't understand why you would go to such lengths..." Now that Janet had looked at her closely, she realized that Laney had lost a lot of weight after the two successive encounters.

Something clicked in her mind. “Oh!” Janet explained, her face lighting up. “Is Mr. Harding pursuing you?”

Laney physically recoiled at the suggestion, as if the mere thought of it frightened her.

“That’s ridiculous! You have a very wild imagination, Janet, but I’m not sure that I appreciate it.”

Since Laney stayed in the hospital, Janet had to travel back and forth between work and home by herself.

Winter in Seacisco was a magical sight to behold. The whole city was draped in snow, and the air practically sparkled as more snowflakes fell and glistened in the sunlight. It could be pretty brutal, too, however. Some days, it would be too foggy to see anything a few meters away.

On one such day, Janet found herself trudging through the snow. A thick scarf was wound around her neck, and an equally thick hat covered her head and ears. She was bundled in heavy clothing, with only her tiny, flushed face exposed to the cold winds.

She suddenly stopped in her tracks and whirled around. She had felt another presence behind her.

“Who’s there?” Janet surveyed her surroundings, wary and alert. Soon, she spotted a short figure standing beside a tree just a few feet away.

The man was wearing a green and padded military jacket, and a black, knitted wool hat over his brow. He looked to be in his fifties, and was smoking a cheap cigarette despite his already gaunt stature.

When their eyes met, he flicked the cigarette to the ground. He pocketed his hands and walked up to Janet with a big smile on his face. “Are you Janet Lind?”

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Janet was only able to see the man’s face clearly when he walked closer to her.

At a glance, she noticed the overflowing greed in his eyes. He had a cunning expression on his face. His chapped lips and ragged stubble only made him look scarier.

Janet stared at his face for a long time, but she couldn’t recall seeing him before.

“Yes, I’m Janet. And you are?” This man was still a stranger even if he knew her name, so Janet was on guard against him. She put a safe distance between them as they spoke.

“Janet, it’s really you! I was afraid that I have mistaken someone else for you. We haven’t met for ages and you have changed a lot. I have to admit that you’ve become a lot more beautiful.” The man’s eyes lit up in excitement as he studied Janet’s face.

Coming back to his senses, he cleared his throat and asked, “You don’t remember me? It’s me, Tyler Wilde, Hannah’s son.”

The name did ring a bell. Janet remembered hearing about him from Hannah.

As far as she knew, Hannah's son left the city around eight years ago. There had been no news about him since then. Janet also knew that Tyler was addicted to gambling. For the same reason, he had abandoned his own mother many years ago.

When Janet reached the right age, Hannah mentioned Tyler to her. Every time she talked about her son, she looked sad and worried. But as time went by, Hannah just pretended she didn't have such an ungrateful son.

Tyler waved his hand in front of Janet's face and smiled apologetically. "Now you remember me, right? I've made a lot of mistakes in the past that I now regret. But don't worry. I'm a changed man now. Otherwise, how can I have the guts to face my mother?"

There was one thing that was on Janet's mind at this moment: she didn't like Tyler. So she said while adjusting her scarf, "Well, good for you. Anyway, if you have nothing else to say, I got to go home now."

'This guy is weird. The world is full of weird people.'

"Wait, Janet! I bought something for my mother. Could you please give it to her on my behalf?" To Janet's surprise, Tyler hurriedly stopped her and handed two large boxes of nutritional supplements.

Frowning, she asked, "Why don't you give it to her yourself? You haven't been back to your hometown for so many years. Hannah would be happy to see you."

Tyler scratched his head. His eyes dimmed as he answered, "I tried. But my mother didn't want to see me. She said she didn't want a son like me. Alas, it was all my fault. I let her down before. She has all the right to hate me. I deserve it. Anyway, I've heard about you from our neighbors. They said my mother treated you like her own granddaughter. I also found out from them that you work for Larson Group, so I waited here, hoping to see you."

There was a trace of sincerity in Tyler's eyes, almost making Janet fall for it.

However, she returned the boxes to him and rubbed her cold fingers. "You should try again. Prove your sincerity to her. You're still Hannah's biological son. As long as you show her that you've changed, she will accept you. She talked tough, but I believe that deep inside, she misses you too."

"Could you please go with me, then? She's fond of you. I believe you can convince her to forgive me." As if he was desperate, Tyler acted like he was about to kneel down.

But Janet quickly stopped him. "Don't do this."

Hesitation was evident in her eyes. She couldn't tell whether Tyler genuinely changed or not. But he was Hannah's only son. It was best if they reconciled.

After hesitating for a long time, Janet finally agreed. "Okay, I'll accompany you. Anyway, tomorrow is Saturday. I don't need to work. And I haven't visited Hannah for a long time."

"Really? Thank you, Janet! Thank you so much!"

The next day, Tyler and Janet went to the bus station together. During winter, the road was always covered with snow. The bus back to the village came every two hours. They were lucky to get on the bus shortly after they arrived at the station.

While on the road, Tyler kept asking questions about Hannah's life in the past years. Janet politely answered all his questions with a faint smile, not noticing the glint of wickedness in his eyes.