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The Mysterious Billionaire and His Substitute Bride Chapter 61

It was July now, and the first wave of scorching summer heat rolled over Seacisco. The days were longer and the sun set later.

Janet came home one day just as the sun was sinking in the horizon. The warm yellow light flooded the apartment, illuminating everything in a hazy glow. In the kitchen, the man was cooking something that smelled delicious.

"Why are you home so early?" Janet hid her surprise and walked to the kitchen slowly.

Piping hot dumplings bounded on the pot as Ethan flipped them over with the light flick of his wrist. Afterwards, he turned off the gas and transferred the dumplings to a plate, then fetched a pair of bowls and chopsticks. "Have dinner with me. Why are you just standing there?"

"Okay," Janet said without protest. As Ethan set the table, she sat down hesitantly. Staring at the steaming dumplings in her bowl, she commented in surprise, "You can even make dumplings?"

Ethan pulled out a chair and sat down opposite her. In the setting sun, his usually sharp features looked gentle and soft. Even his eyes were full of affection. "Why? Is it so strange that I can make dumplings? My mother forced me to learn how to cook. She didn't like cooking alone, so she often asked me to help her."

In the end, Ethan had taken Garrett's advice.

But now that he had to make an apology, he needed to show his sincerity. He would not do that in a perfunctory way.

"Oh, I see. Anyway, I'm starving. Let's eat." Janet lowered her gaze, unable to meet his. She couldn't bear to look at the thin scars on Ethan's face. It made her remember what had happened last night.

She picked up her chopsticks and began to eat the dumplings in her bowl slowly. A little while later, she put her bowl down, exposing three lone dumplings.

Ethan raised his hand and took her bowl, pouring her leftover dumplings into his bowl. "We can't let them go to waste."

"Sorry, I really can't eat another," Janet said softly, looking down guiltily.

After a pause, Ethan smiled and asked gently, "What's the matter? I was just making up some excuse to eat your leftover dumplings."

"Oh?" Realizing that she misunderstood him yet again, Janet found herself unable to meet his eyes. She was still very sensitive about what other people thought of her. After all, she used to be the outcast, excluded from many school activities.

"Look, I know I was wrong about the ring. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have doubted you. Don't think too much. I trust you now." Ethan brought up what had happened the other day, scratching his head embarrassedly.

He really wasn't used to this whole "apology" thing. He hadn't needed to humble himself in years.

"It's in the past. Never mind." Janet wrung her fingers nervously.

So many days had passed. She had nearly put this matter to rest.

After thinking about it, she realized it wasn't entirely Ethan's fault for judging her. It was her carelessness that led to the ring getting lost. Besides, she was supposed to be Jocelyn, who had a reputation for being extravagant. It was only natural that Ethan suspected her.

"Are you sure?" Ethan raised his head to look at her, his dark eyes filled with skepticism.

He had a stress reaction to what she had said a few days ago, and now it was hard to tell whether she meant what she said now or not.

Finally, she gave him a small smile. "I'm sure. I was ignorant and made many mistakes before, but people change. You've lived with me for a while now, so you should know what I'm like now."

In fact, she was talking about Jocelyn. But she wanted Ethan to understand her now.

"Okay." After wolfing down the rest of the dumplings, Ethan fished the emerald ring out of his pocket and handed it to Janet. "Since you're not angry anymore, put it on."

Janet took the ring and held it tightly. She shook her head and said, "I'll hold onto it, but I won't wear it. I had no idea this ring was so precious, and it'll make me anxious if I have to wear it every day. If you really want others to know that I'm married, we can buy another ordinary ring."

Ethan eyed her pensively for a while before finally agreeing. "Okay. I'll buy you another ring."

The following morning, as Janet was brushing her teeth, she suddenly felt a pair of thick arms wrap around her waist from behind.

The man's morning stubble rubbed against her bare shoulder. With groggy eyes, he said in a low voice, "What lotion do you use? It smells so good. Anyway, look at what I got you!"

"Hey! Stop it." Janet shrank away from his touch, feeling itchy from his stubbles.

As she continued to brush her teeth, she eyed the wine red velvet box that the man had laid on the counter in front of her. After rinsing her mouth, she opened the box. Inside lay a diamond ring that glistened under the morning light. Nestled in the center was a huge blue diamond—a beautiful eye-catcher.

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"Wow," Janet said breathlessly. "It's beautiful... and it looks expensive." All of a sudden, she sighed. "Don't tell me you spent a fortune on me again."

"Don't worry. It didn't cost much. I got it from my friend." Ethan said affectionately, lying as easily as breathing. As he spoke, he ran his fingers across the woman's slender waist restlessly.

It never occurred to Janet that the gem in front of her was a genuine diamond. And how could it be real? If it was, Ethan had to be extremely rich.

Eyeing the twinkling gemstone, she said in awe, "Technology these days must be amazing. It looks like a real diamond!"

Ethan looked at her cute face and had to hold back a smile that kept tugging at the corner of his lips. Lowering his head so that she couldn't see his face, he took the diamond ring out of the box and slipped it onto her index finger. Her fair, slender finger made the diamond pop out even more.

Delighted, he nibbled her neck and whispered, "You're right. It does look real."

"Ouch! Hey!" Janet shot him a glare, rubbing the spot he bit. Raising her hand, she stared at the diamond under the light. Each facet glistened and twinkled.

Even she couldn't help but nod with satisfaction. Now, no one would try to rob her with such a big diamond ring on her finger, because it looked way too big. It was obviously fake.

"Oh, that hurts already? Then what should you do when we get down to real business someday?" Looking at the faint teeth marks he left on her neck, Ethan snickered.

"What're you talking about?" Hearing his naughty words, Janet blushed, her ears burning bright red. She quickly yanked at a towel to wipe her face. Pushing him, she barked, "Get out of my way. I'm going to be late for work."

But Ethan's hands still lingered on her waist, unwilling to let her go. "I'll let you go if you kiss me."

"Ethan, stop it. I'm going to be late!" Janet quickly turned her face away stubbornly. It was as red as an apple.

"It's not like we've never kissed before. Why are you so scared?" Ethan whispered in her ear teasingly.

But in the end, he let her go. He patted her on the head and murmured, "You win."

Janet looked at him, bewildered. She had thought that he'd force her to kiss him, but he didn't. Ethan turned around and walked away. She stared at his back blankly, lost in thought.

When she arrived at the office, she found the design department bustling busily.

The new director, Tiffany Fisher, was quite strict. She required everyone to submit an independent design within two weeks, and all the designers running around like headless chickens to meet the deadline.

"Why did Mr. Harding give us such a difficult director? She's worse than Ike," a male colleague complained under his breath as he made revisions to his design drawing.

Fortunately, Tiffany's office was far from here, so they could afford a moment to slack off.

"Tiffany's a typical twenty-first century iron lady. She's good with office work and housework." Suddenly, a female colleague sitting next to Janet poked her head out. "Hey, is she married? How old is she anyway?"

"I don't know how old she is, but I'm willing to bet she doesn't have a boyfriend." The male colleague gnawed one end of his pen, lost in thought as he stared at his drawing.

Janet commented lightheartedly, "I think she's good for this department. She might be cold and strict, but she's just and will get the job done. We could learn a lot from her."

As everyone chattered on excitedly, they suddenly heard a knock on the glass. Tiffany was standing by the door in a black dress, her lips pursed unhappily. "Since you all have so much free time on your hands, let's have a meeting at ten o'clock. All you designers are required to attend."

A hush fell over the office. Everyone knew they were doomed. The male colleague subtly made a gesture of slitting his throat.

"The design department just received an important project. We'll be cooperating with another company to design the spring collection. Every designer has to submit their plan by the end of this week."

As Tiffany spoke, she flipped through a PowerPoint presentation concisely. Then, glancing at all the designers before her, she finished assigning tasks and left the room, like a teacher leaving her students to answer their test.

The atmosphere in the design department dropped several hundred degrees.

Janet and the other designers all worked overtime that week, sketching drafts seriously, as if they were in the middle of an intense exam.

Surprisingly, when the designs were submitted a week later, Janet's design was selected.

She thought the battle had come to an end. But one morning, Tiffany suddenly called her into her office.

"You have to start over and design a new plan."

Janet frowned, tilting her head to the side in confusion.

Tiffany looked at her indifferently. "Don't be anxious. Listen to me first. When we handed over your draft to the client, it was rejected and your designs were criticized thoroughly. They said they wanted something more serious."

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Janet picked up the design draft she had submitted and carefully examined it.

"This design is in complete accordance with their requirements. I'm surprised they had rejected it. Maybe it's because I'm too inexperienced to understand where I had gone wrong. Ms. Fisher, please give me some advice, or perhaps just choose someone else's designer."

Not only Janet, but Tiffany was also equally confused and surprised.

She looked at the design draft and shook her head. "I can't give you any advice. I think this design draft is good. That's why I chose it and presented it to the client. Well, frankly, if a client is not happy with our design, they never reject it right away. They usually ask us to modify it based on their requirements. I can't believe they just rejected our design without giving a proper explanation this time."

"Then, what do we do now?" Janet asked hesitantly.

“Since we can’t figure out the reason, let’s go to their company and ask them why they rejected it. It would be better to talk to them in person. Bring your design drafts and laptop with you so that we can modify it on the spot.” As Tiffany spoke, she stood up and took her coat.

Tiffany’s decisiveness shocked Janet.

She thought Tiffany would ask her to modify the design until the client was satisfied.

But Tiffany had other plans.

She took Janet to the Color Company.

This company belonged to a clothing group, and it ran a women’s fashion brand that had gained popularity over the years.

As soon as they arrived at the reception, Janet met an old acquaintance.

“Sorry for keeping you waiting. I am in charge of the project. You can talk to me directly.” Jocelyn walked in haughtily with a cup of coffee in her hand.

She became more arrogant and complacent after seeing Janet.

Seeing the astonishment on Janet’s face, Tiffany frowned. “You two know each other?”

Before Janet could say anything, Jocelyn answered with a smile, “No, we don’t. This woman has come to our house to collect second-hand goods several times. So she works as a designer in your company? Well, it looks like you’re lethargic when it comes to recruiting employees.”

“That’s very rude of you. We all know the design department of the Larson Group has a name of its own. Besides, you opted for our company to meet your design needs,” Tiffany said politely, suppressing her anger.

Jocelyn snorted and skimmed through the design draft on the table. “Your drafts seem very amateur. What are you still doing here?”

At that moment, a man came to the reception. He was Jason Gentry, the CEO of the Color Company and Jocelyn’s current boyfriend.

“Why are you all standing here? Please sit down so we can talk.” Jason sat down on the sofa. “Here is the thing. My girlfriend doesn’t like the design, so I would have to ask you to come up with a different draft.”

Jason was happy with the design. However, Jocelyn saw the draft at his place last night. After knowing that Janet had designed it, she immediately asked him to reject the design.

She held Jason’s arm and looked at Janet, a complacent smile tugging at the corner of her lips. “I’m responsible for evaluating the design drafts of this project now. I think Miss Lind’s design is not good enough to meet our requirements. You better replace her with a better designer.”

“Our company has selected this draft among the other designs submitted because it was the best. Some other designer’s plan might not be as good as this,” Tiffany said calmly.

Janet was surprised to see Tiffany speak for her. She leaned closer to her and whispered, "This is our company's project. We should prioritize the interests of the company."

"Of course, we should prioritize the company's interest. I am just explaining the pros and cons to them." Tiffany smiled.

Jason picked up the coffee and took a sip. He glanced at Janet and back at the design draft. Then, he turned to look at Jocelyn without saying anything.

"I don't like this designer's work. I have the final say in this project. If you don't change the designer, I have no other choice but to cancel our collaboration. The choice is yours." Jocelyn didn't give in. Her makeup-laden eyes turned to Janet.

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Tiffany pursed her ruddy lips, feeling helpless. She put away the design draft, stood up, and nodded. "Okay, we'll go back and discuss it again. Sorry for bothering you two."

When they entered the elevator, Tiffany turned to look at Janet. "What happened? Did you offend that woman?"

Janet didn't know what to say. The feud between her and the Lind family was complicated. "Well, that was a long time ago," she said, letting out a weary sigh.

Tiffany rubbed her temples and nodded. She looked effortlessly beautiful when she arched her eyebrows. "I didn't expect you to offend someone. After all, considering your kind nature, I didn't think you were capable of rubbing people the wrong way."

A smile stretched across Janet's lips. "Ms. Fisher, since they don't want mine, why don't we use someone else's design?"

"Yeah. That's the only solution. We have no other choice." Tiffany rubbed her sore shoulder and said, "We are so unlucky to have met such a vindictive client who couldn't draw a line between their professional and personal life. Well, you go back to the company first. I'll go to meet another client."

Janet nodded, thinking about how hard Tiffany worked every day.

The elevator door opened, and the two walked out, one after the other.

However, before Janet left the building, she saw Jocelyn walking toward her with an evil smile on her face.

Janet's face turned cold.

"Are you angry? I haven't barred you from the entire industry yet." Jocelyn scoffed. "The success or failure of a woman depends on whether she has found the right man or not. As you can see, Jason is a handsome guy. But he is also the CEO of this company. A lowly woman like you only deserves a poor illegitimate child. You have to obey others all your life and aren't destined to make any achievements."

Janet smiled and looked at Jocelyn. She was amused to hear her childish remarks. “Bar me from the industry? We’ll see when that happens. By the way, is something wrong with your previous boyfriend? Is that why you’ve shifted to a new guy?”

Jocelyn looked at her beautiful painted fingernails and gently blew at them. “Well, his company isn’t doing well. I guess it will go bankrupt soon. That’s why I dumped him. You see, only a perfect man deserves to be with me.”

“Uh-oh! I think your current boyfriend should be more careful. You’ve had a history of boyfriends. Your first boyfriend’s family went bankrupt, and you dumped him. Your second boyfriend had a serious ailment, and you dumped him. Your third boyfriend’s parents were arrested, and you dumped him. It seems to me that you’re bad luck — anyone who dates you falls into deep shit.” Janet smiled before pushing Jocelyn away and walking out.

“You mean to say I’m a bane?” Jocelyn shouted, regardless of being in a public place.

“Yes.” Janet didn’t have the time to argue with her. Ignoring the woman’s screams, she walked out of the building, hailed a taxi, and left.

In the evening, the setting sun painted the sky red.

Janet was standing on the balcony with a mug of coffee in her hand. She hadn’t moved ever since she returned home.

Ethan opened the glass door to the balcony and walked to her side. “What’s up? Is everything all right?” He rested his hand on the railing and stared into the distance.

Janet turned to look at him, her face softening with appreciation as if he were a beautiful oil painting. “It’s just some work stuff.”

Seeing that she didn’t want to say anything more, Ethan shook his head and smiled. “Well, it looks like you still regard me as an outsider. You don’t want to share anything with me.”

“No. I...”

After a moment’s hesitation, Janet finally told Ethan about how and why Jocelyn had rejected her design draft.

Ethan listened to it carefully and looked into the distance. His brows knitted together as if he had decided what to do.

“She won’t be arrogant for long. Don’t worry.”

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“Well... Thank you.” Janet ran the tip of her finger along the rim of her mug before taking a sip of coffee. Her lips were upturned ever so slightly. She thought that Ethan had only said it to give her some comfort, though, so she decided not to take his words seriously.

In any case, she was in a terrible situation. Jocelyn definitely had more in store for her in the future, but for now, Janet just wanted to focus on keeping her job.

When they had returned from Color Company last time, Tiffany had proceeded to choose another designer's drafts for submission.

The next day, Tiffany called for a meeting and made the announcement. "Color Company has approved the drafts of another designer. Good job everyone. You've been working hard, so coffee and desserts are on me. Order whatever you like. Also, another conference will be held tomorrow, and a representative from Color Company will be coming to discuss the detailed plans for this project. You are all required to attend. Make sure you come on time."

"Whoever makes the decision over at Color Company must have awful taste," a colleague whispered to Janet once the meeting was dismissed. "I think your designs are so much better."

But Janet had more or less expected this outcome. That didn't mean that she was glad to see her hard work go to waste. Even so, she hid her disappointment and mustered a smile. "Maybe they just don't like my style."

"How unfortunate," the other woman sighed. "I really thought you would catch a big break this time."

The meeting with the people from Color Company commenced as scheduled.

Naturally, Jocelyn came to the Larson Group in person on behalf of the company.

"Are you satisfied with the designs this time?" Tiffany asked calmly, her eyes fixed on Jocelyn.

"Yes, I'm very pleased with it. That this designer is surely going to make a name in the industry. I want to meet her, by the way. I intend to further our cooperation in the future."

Jocelyn perused through the portfolio, picking up sheets to study the drafts. As she did this, the massive diamond ring on her finger glinted in the sunlight.

"Thank you for your kind words." The young designer in question tucked her hair behind her ear and stood up.

Though immensely gratified, she couldn't help the pang of guilt that tightened her chest. Even she had always thought that Janet's designs were outstanding, and far better than hers.

"Why are you thanking me? You achieved this with your talents. The previous design that was presented to me was a far cry from this. That one was out of date and boring. There was nothing special about it at all. I couldn't believe someone had wasted ink and paper on such pathetic scribbles. In fact, I don't understand why your department had taken in such a person in the first place."

Jocelyn tossed the papers back to the folder and took a sip of coffee. Her movements caused her Chanel bracelet to clink against her Cartier watch.

Everyone turned silent and threw surreptitious glances at Janet. It was clear to them that Jocelyn was purposely insulting her.

Janet only clutched her skirt and lowered her eyes, saying nothing.

She was painfully aware of the fact that Jocelyn was here to humiliate her in front of other people.

But she was now their client, and if Janet defended herself, it would only make things worse.

She could feel her cheeks grow hot, but she did her best to keep her temper.

"I'm talking about you, Miss Lind," Jocelyn snapped all of a sudden.

Her tone was sharp and biting, especially after seeing that Janet wasn't reacting to her barbs.

Jocelyn wanted the woman to be humiliated in public and flee the design business for good.

Just then, a knock came at the door.

Before anyone could do or say anything, Garrett opened the door and walked into the room.

"Ah. Excuse me, but who are you?" he asked Jocelyn coldly. "I'm pretty sure that you're not the person in charge of the design department over at Color Company. What are you doing in this meeting?"

Jocelyn's nostrils flared. "I am the girlfriend of Jason Gentry, the CEO of Color Company," she declared haughtily.

Garrett only raised an eyebrow before striding to the head of the table. When he sat down, his demeanor had turned serious. "And what position do you hold at Color Company, exactly?"

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Embarrassed, Jocelyn put down her coffee cup and said, "I hold no position for the time being."

Her goal was to marry into a rich and powerful family. Why would she work for any company? The only reason why she was involved in this project in the first place, was because she had seduced Jason into letting her do so.

Garrett pushed his glasses against the bridge of his nose. "Your relationship with Mr. Gentry is your private matter, but this collaboration project is a business affair between two companies. You're just his girlfriend. You are in no position to determine which designs are going to be used, let alone slander our employees and our company."

Jocelyn flushed, humiliated.

Who the hell was this man? How could he insult her in public like this?

The more she looked at him, the more he seemed familiar. Jocelyn thought that she had seen him in a magazine before, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

Nevertheless, she shot up to her feet and glowered at him. "You have offended me greatly. You can rest assured that I will be telling Jason about this. You can say goodbye to this damn collaboration once and for all."

Garrett sneered at her, unfazed. "Be my guest."

He had to admit that he was quite taken aback by this woman's arrogance and profound stupidity. He couldn't believe that Jason Gentry, who was a reputable CEO by his own right, had such terrible taste in paramours.

Gritting her teeth, Jocelyn grabbed her purse and stormed out of the conference room.

Just as she said, she headed directly to Jason's place.

Where else would she go? She had complaints to air out.

"Jason! Are you aware that the people at Larson Group are nothing but bullies? They actually kicked me out! And that man wearing glasses actually dared to yell at me in front of everyone! Color Company is one of the best clothing companies in the country, but it looks like they don't take you seriously, honey."

Jocelyn was scantily clad at this point, having shed most of her clothes when she had thrown herself at Jason. She clung to his arm now, pressing her breasts against him as she whined coquettishly.

Jason was busy playing games on his phone and didn't even turn to look at her. "Hmm? The man with glasses? Are you talking about Garrett?"

"You know that guy? Do you think you can make the Larson Group fire him?"

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The chairman's question shocked Jason. He walked to the sofa and slumped down, feeling helpless.

"Sir, please listen to my explanation. I did ask my girlfriend to evaluate the design drafts. But..."

He had involved Jocelyn in the decision-making process, just to please her, thinking it wouldn't be a big deal. However, he didn't expect the chairman of the company to find out about it. Jason broke into a cold sweat and didn't dare to deny his mistake.

"Jason, how could you make a mistake at this critical moment? After a lot of hard work, our company has finally managed to collaborate with the Larson Group. Don't you know the design resources of the Larson Group have been outstanding in recent years? I had planned to take advantage of the collaboration this time to develop the Color Company into a domestic preeminent modest luxury brand. We can't make any mistakes. Do you understand?" The chairman was furious.

Jason took a deep breath and said, "Please give me one last chance. I will undo all the mistakes."

"What can you do? I saw the design drafts the Larson Group had submitted. The first design was obviously better, but your girlfriend rejected it. Pleasing your girlfriend had clouded your decision. You were stupid. Our collaboration with the Larson Group is more important than anything else. How dare you allow her to make the decision?"

The chairman reprimanded Jason. Jason bit his lip and didn't dare to retort. All he could do was apologize over and over again. After all, it was indeed his fault.

"I'm sorry, sir. It's all my fault. I was too stupid... What has the Larson Group decided?"

Jason had an inkling the chairman wouldn't easily let go of him because of the magnitude of his mistake.

The chairman was so angry that he shouted, "They asked us to deal with it and get back to them by the end of the day. The Larson Group is not to be trifled with. I don't know if Mr. Larson himself has heard about it or not. I've already told Mr. Harding that you should be demoted first for putting us in such a situation."

With that, the chairman hung up the phone.

Jason clenched the phone, gritting his teeth.

Reaching his current position hadn't been easy. He had worked hard day and night. Now, he had lost everything he had worked hard to achieve just because of a woman.

Jocelyn was sitting aside, dumbfounded.

The chairman had been practically screaming over the phone, and she had heard every word of their conversation.

Jason was getting demoted.

"Did you hear that? You idiot, what did you do in the Larson Group today? How did you offend Garrett?" Jason was so furious that he slammed the phone on the table.

He picked up the clothes on the floor and threw them at Jocelyn's face. "It's all your fault. You are the bane of my life! Let's break up! Get out of here!"

"What did you say?" Jocelyn's face reddened with rage. "When I said I wanted to see the design, you agreed. But now, you're blaming me for everything. Man up, you *** loser!"

She was used to dumping men — not once has anyone dumped her. It was a matter of her prestige.

"Fuck off!" Looking at the woman sprawled on the bed, Jason stood up and opened the door.

"Jason, you bastard! How dare you dump me?!" Jocelyn screamed.

"What the hell? You're not going to leave? Well, I won't be polite to you anymore." Jason sneered at her. Then, he grabbed Jocelyn's arm and dragged her out of the bed.

"Fuck! It hurts! Let go of me, Jason! This is not done! When I find a better boyfriend, I will take my revenge on you. I will..."

Before Jocelyn could finish her words, Jason pushed her out of the door.

He threw the clothes on her and sneered. "You bitch! I don't give a damn. You've been with countless men in the past. No one will take you seriously. They just want to fuck you!"

With that, he slammed the door shut.

Jocelyn was half-naked when Jason pushed her out of the door. She hurriedly put on her clothes as people looked her up and down, whispering to each other, pointing at her.

This was the biggest humiliation in Jocelyn's life. She put on her crumpled dress and angrily kicked the door. "Jason! Remember what you said today!"

Then, she turned around and stomped out in a huff.

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The next day, as soon as Janet walked into the company, Tiffany called her into her office.

Janet swallowed nervously. She couldn't tell if Tiffany believed what Jocelyn had said yesterday.

“Lind, your design was approved by the Color Company. Go ahead and prepare for the project with them.” Tiffany spoke briskly, not even glancing up at Janet when she entered her office.

“What? But they criticized me and my work yesterday. How could they change their mind overnight?” Janet’s jaw nearly dropped to the ground.

Plus, what with the arrogant way Jocelyn acted yesterday, Janet was under the impression that Tiffany had called her into her office to fire her.

“Why are you so surprised? They’re not blind. Anyone could see that your design was way better than the second proposal. It’s obvious that the representative from the Color Company didn’t know what they were talking about and only rejected your design because she holds a grudge against you. Anyway, Mr. Harding contacted their chairman and now, their CEO has been demoted. So your design plan has been re-adopted and the cooperation between us two parties can proceed smoothly. Any more questions?” Finally, Tiffany looked up from the document she was reading and smiled at Janet encouragingly.

Dumbfounded, Janet shook her head slowly.

“Oh, no, no. I’m just surprised. Thanks for telling me, Ms. Fisher. I’ll go back to my work.” When Janet came to her senses, she smiled sheepishly and excused herself.

Truth be told, she wasn’t happy per se. She just felt confused. In her eyes, the cooperation wasn’t that crucial, so why did Garrett need to interfere?

Seeing that she was about to leave, Tiffany raised her eyebrows and seemed to have read her mind. “I didn’t think that Mr. Harding would get involved in this matter. You two seem to be... on good terms. Did you know him before you joined the company?”

So, it turned out that it wasn’t just Janet who felt that something was off.

“Oh, no. Actually, I’ve only met Mr. Harding twice.” Janet shook her head and waved her hands dismissively.

When she got back to her desk, she couldn’t seem to concentrate on her work.

It was really unorthodox—unreasonable even—for a deputy CEO like Garrett to keep standing up for her.

Things didn’t happen for no reason in this world.

Could it be that Garrett was interested in her just like Ike?

“Lind, why the long face? Did Fisher give you an earful?” A colleague sitting next to Janet poked her arm with a pen.

“Huh? Oh, no. I just have a stomachache... Gerda, would you know if Mr. Harding has a girlfriend?” Janet whispered in her colleague’s ear.

Gerda knew everything that went on in the company, since she was the most gossipy one and was always kept in the loop.

"Well, I guess you could say that. Mr. Harding might be very good to us employees, but I can't say I respect his private life. You know how rich men are with open relationships. He probably has a girlfriend, but most likely has more than one. At least, that's what those gossip magazines say," Gerda whispered back, her eyes twinkling with interest. "Why? Do you have a crush on him? Oh, my dear, this kind of man doesn't suit you."

"No! I mean, I was just curious. You're overthinking." Janet adamantly shook her head. She was a married woman after all.

She was just worried that she'd be ***ually harassed again, like what had happened with Ike back then.

After mulling it over, Janet decided she needed to get to the bottom of this.

If it turned out that Garrett liked her, she'd have no choice but to leave the Larson Group.

After all, she couldn't afford to offend someone as powerful as Garrett.

She plucked up the courage and sent him a private message through the work chat group.

"Mr. Harding, are you free to talk? There was something I wanted to ask you."

"Of course. What is it, Lind?" Garrett replied in a friendly tone.

For some reason, Janet got goose bumps when she read his reply. She quickly gathered her design drawings and went up to the thirty-first floor.

From such a height, the scenery down was breathtaking. One could easily see the entirety of the city from the floor-to-ceiling windows. There were two meeting rooms and two offices on this floor. The door to the largest room was covered by a white curtain. A sign that said "Brandon Larson" in grand, gold lettering hung outside the door. As she walked past it, Janet heard a faint, low voice from inside.

Finally, she made it to Garrett's door. She raised her hand and knocked politely.

"Come in," Garrett's voice sounded promptly.

"Good morning, Mr. Harding."

When Garrett saw her come in, he immediately stood up and smiled. "Lind! Welcome. Come and take a seat. What can I do for you?"

After a moment's hesitation, Janet sat down stiffly. "Mr. Harding, I heard that my design was re-adopted by the Color Company. Thank you for your help."

"No need to thank me. It was no big deal." Garrett waved his hand dismissively then proceeded to pour piping hot tea into a cup.

Unbeknownst to Janet, it was her husband who pulled the strings. This matter actually had nothing to do with Garrett.

"Hmm, there is one more thing I wanted to talk to you about..."

"What's up? You can talk to me about anything." Seeing how uneasy she looked, Garrett tried to coax it out of her gently.

Closing her eyes, Janet plucked up her courage and finally blurted, "Mr. Harding, do you have a crush on me?"

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"What?" Garrett was scared out of his wits.

His hands trembled, and the teacup fell to the floor. He sprang up from the sofa and peeked out of the room to see if Ethan was outside.

Then, he looked at Janet and shook his head vehemently, "No, I absolutely do not have a crush on you. Don't talk nonsense! I did everything for the company. And for Mr. Larson!"

"Well... Mr. Harding, it was just a casual question. I..." Startled by his reaction, Janet quickly stood up too. "Are you okay, Mr. Harding?"

Garrett quickly stepped back to keep a safe distance from her as if she were a dreadful monster. Sweat beaded his forehead.

"I'm fine. Don't come near me. Stay away! Although only the two of us are in this room, there's a third pair of eyes watching us."

With that, he opened the door and stormed out of the room. He didn't dare to stay in the same room with Janet anymore.

Garrett completely forgot that this was his own office.

Janet frowned, her eyes still fixed on the door, dumbfounded by his reaction.

She had thought about it a lot before coming here but didn't expect Garrett would react this way.

Even if her guess was wrong, he should have either yelled at her or laughed at her for being stupid. But he was strangely scared, which seemed to confuse Janet.

'What did he mean? Is there something scary and horrible about me?'

she wondered, rubbing her hair. Not knowing what else to do, Janet let out a weary sigh and walked out of the office in confusion.

She couldn't understand what was going on.

After Garrett left his office, he rushed out to see Ethan.

"Did she come to your office? I thought I heard her voice now." Ethan asked in his usual magnetic voice. The sunlight cast a soft glow on his body, outlining his features. His face looked stern.

Garrett looked at Ethan, who was wearing a suit, leaning against the black leather sofa, reading the documents. A shiver ran down his spine.

"Buddy, I have to tell you something."

Ethan was aware of everything happening in the company. Therefore, Garrett felt he'd rather tell the truth before he found out himself.

Garrett took off his glasses and rubbed his eyebrows, choosing his words.

Ethan stopped reading, and his sharp gaze fell on Garrett. "Well?"

"Your wife just came in and asked me if I had a crush on her," Garrett hissed through his teeth, clenching his fists as if someone was going to kill him.

Ethan's face darkened in an instant. He leaned against the sofa and studied Garrett's face. "What did you do to her?"

"What can I do to her? I'm innocent." Garrett lifted his hands, shaking his head. Then, he quickly walked up to the sofa and sat beside Ethan. "I only did what you asked me to do. I didn't expect her to misunderstand me. Trust me, I have nothing to do with her. But think about it; I've been helping her time and again. It's only natural for her to think I'm interested in her."

Ethan closed the file in his hand and sneered. "Wow! That's great! I did everything, but you got the credit."

"That's because she has never seen you here. I have been standing up for her every time she has encountered a problem. Look, I don't want things to be this way either." Garrett shook his head and put on his glass.

"Don't put me through anything like this again. Even if I'm required to help her, I have to do it on behalf of Mr. Larson. Otherwise, she will continue to misunderstand me."

Ethan pursed his lips and stared into the distance. After a moment's thought, he realized Garrett was right. Things couldn't go on this way. He had been Janet's secret savior and helped her every time she encountered a problem, but he didn't get any gratitude from her in return. She always thought someone else had helped her.

Ethan had to find a solution.

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In a daze, Janet trudged back to her desk.

"Gerda, Mr. Harding wouldn't make a huge fuss out of us employees, would he?" Janet whispered to her colleague, her voice riddled with anxiety.

"Nah, I don't think so. After all, a boss should be open-minded. But maybe he's capable of making mountains out of molehills. Who knows? I can't read minds."

Gerda's cryptic answer only served to make Janet even more uneasy. What if she had offended Garrett?

The next day, when Janet rushed to work, she ran into Garrett at the gate of the company.

Eyes darting around nervously, she managed to pluck up the courage to approach him to apologize. "Mr. Harding, excuse me. About what happened yesterday..."

But before she could finish her sentence, when Garrett saw her approaching, he immediately turned around and rushed back inside the car. He shouted at the driver anxiously, "Go! Get me out of here! Hurry!"

Janet's steps faltered as she watched the car zoom off. She was speechless.

When she sat down at her desk, Janet felt so dejected that she lowered her head to her table and muttered, "Gerda, I think my career's over."

Garrett didn't even want to see her. He was probably so offended.

With a sandwich in her mouth, Gerda handed Janet a bottle of milk. "Don't talk like that. Ms. Fisher might hear you and give you an earful."

"Oh, thanks." Janet gratefully accepted the milk. "You're too mean. I think Ms. Fisher's a good person."

As Janet turned on her computer and checked her inbox, a notification suddenly popped up in the work group chat.

"Brandon Larson sent you a friend request."

What the hell?!

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Startled, Janet nearly choked on the milk she was drinking.

Brandon was the ever-elusive CEO of the Larson Group.

How the heck did she fall under his radar? Brandon's position was even higher than that of Garrett!

Worse yet was the fact that the request was sent last night.

Mind whirling, Janet cautiously accepted Brandon's request. It had been hours since he had sent the request. Would the CEO think that she was arrogant?

Janet hurriedly typed, "Good morning, Mr. Larson. I'm sorry. I went to bed early last night, so I didn't see your request until just now."

As Ethan was pouring over the financial statements of the new quarter, his phone suddenly buzzed.

When he saw the text, he couldn't help but smile and started typing out a reply.

"I see. The company is currently running an investigation on its senior executives. Has Garrett Harding harassed you in any way?"

When Janet read this, alarms went off in her mind.

Did Brandon know that she had gone to Garrett's office yesterday?

But Garrett had done the opposite of harassment. At the mere sight of her, Garrett had turned around and ran just now, as if he had seen a ghost.

Frowning slightly, Janet answered, "No, I rarely interact with Mr. Harding."

Brandon then asked, "You've been working in the Larson Group for a while now. How's the experience? If you encounter any problems, just tell me. I've seen your designs, and I think you have great potential."

Janet's heart skipped a beat. This was the Brandon Larson of the Larson Group. The CEO had noticed her, a faceless employee amidst a hundred others.

She replied obsequiously, "Thank you for your praise, Mr. Larson. I will do my best for the sake of the company."

"What's your plan for the future in terms of your career?"

Janet hastily replied to express her loyalty to the company. "I enjoy it here with the Larson Group and would be honored if I could grow here. If I can, I'd like to spearhead projects in the future. That way, I can learn a lot more."

"Okay. I won't disturb you anymore."

After that, Brandon didn't say anything more. Minutes ticked by, but Janet didn't receive any more notifications, so she closed the chat window.

The CEO's words were so concise yet impactful, which made him look unprecedentedly cool.

“Hey, are you chatting with your boyfriend?” Janet nearly jumped in her seat when Gerda’s voice suddenly sounded right next to her ear.

“What—? Of course not!” she immediately refuted, slapping her laptop shut. After a moment of thought, she asked in a low voice, “Have you ever seen Mr. Larson?”

Their CEO was so mysterious that, although he was a well-known public figure, nobody knew what he even looked like. There were no pictures of him anywhere.

“Not exactly... But one time, I went downstairs to buy breakfast and I saw Mr. Harding with a tall, buff guy. I figured the other man was Mr. Larson. I mean, his back alone had an incredibly domineering aura. Why’d you ask? Have you seen him?” Gerda asked curiously, as to be expected from the most gossipy employee in the company.

“No,” Janet sighed helplessly.

Shaking her head, she decided to drop the subject and proceeded to work. Perhaps the CEO chatted up random employees as part of his routine...