

The Mbahsb 81

The Mysterious Billionaire and His Substitute Bride - Chapter 81

The dinner party of the Larson Group was held in a private hotel located at the heart of the city.

As Janet got out of the taxi, her eyes widened in astonishment.

Luxury cars were lined up outside the hotel. People stepped out of their cars in branded clothes and jewelry. They were all big shots in the design field who had come along with their dates.

Janet immediately frowned and looked at her dress. Her stomach flipped as she realized her outfit was too simple for the occasion. She faded in comparison to all the big wigs gracing the occasion.

Janet realized that people born with a silver spoon had natural confidence and exuded a majestic aura.

"What's wrong?" Ethan got out of the taxi and closed the door. Seeing that Janet was distracted, he placed his hand on the small of her back.

Janet blinked and looked at him. Ethan was wearing the same suit he had worn at their wedding. She seldom saw him dressed up this formally.

The man looked as majestic as the people attending the party. In fact, he somehow looked more regal than them. Ethan looked calm and composed, exuding effortless confidence. Janet couldn't take her eyes off him.

His handsome countenance and outstanding temperament drew the attention of the people attending the party.

Janet frowned in confusion. Ethan had told her that he didn't even have a decent job. How could a simple man like him emanate such a powerful aura?

"I don't know. I have a strange feeling that I'm like Cinderella. Perhaps I'd be confronted with the truth tonight." Janet sighed with dejection as she nervously shifted her weight between her feet.

The people attending the party were either wealthy or influential. But Janet was just an ordinary woman who was struggling to meet her old maid's medical bills.

Ethan smiled and leaned closer to Janet. "Stop overthinking. These people could be wealthy enough to dress well for the occasion, but I'm sure they, too, have problems in life. Perhaps they are not as happy as you are. Don't let looks deceive you," he whispered into her ear.

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"Oh, come on. Don't joke to cheer me up. I'm not a fool." Janet grinned at the handsome man before her.

She didn't realize her eyes were glinting with joy. Ethan's presence somehow made her feel at ease.

Ethan was a great partner. He would always do or say something to make her happy.

However, today, his handsome countenance seemed to outshine his personality.

He was like a dazzling star, and all eyes were on him.

"All right. Stop frowning. Let's go inside with happy faces." Ethan's eyes shone with tenderness. He leaned closer and planted a soft kiss in the corner of her mouth. The cool night breeze swept across them, and the cicadas chirped.

Janet giggled, oblivious that her curly hair had become messy because of the night breeze.

"Are you kidding me? Are you also here for the dinner party?" A shrill voice of a woman snapped Janet out of her happy bubble.

Janet turned around and saw Jocelyn glowering at her, anger and hatred evident in her eyes.

Jocelyn had witnessed the sweet interaction between the couple.

Janet looked blissfully happy with Ethan, who looked like a Greek God. They looked perfect for each other, and Jocelyn couldn't bear to see that.

She hated Janet with a vengeance and couldn't watch her be happy. To Jocelyn, everyone in the world could be happy except for her.

The smile on Janet's face disappeared in an instant. 'What a small world!'

"Yes." Janet shrugged nonchalantly.

"Are you aware of how important this dinner party is? It's only meant for wealthy and influential people. What the hell are you doing here? You're not qualified to attend such opulent parties." Jocelyn sneered at her.

Janet crossed her arms over her chest and glanced at Ethan.

"Oh, really? But are you qualified to attend this party? Have you forgotten your identity?"

Ethan's face darkened when he saw Jocelyn. He fished out his phone and started texting someone.

Jocelyn was seething, but she had no choice but to hold back her anger.

After all, Ethan believed that Janet was the true heir of the Lind family, while Jocelyn was the adopted daughter.

Fearing that Ethan might find out the truth, Jocelyn remained silent.

She gritted her teeth and glared at Janet.

"I'll deal with you later." Jocelyn rolled her eyes and walked toward the banquet hall of the hotel.

However, the escort at the door stopped her.

"Ma'am, please show us the invitation."

"Why are you stopping me? I have the invitation." Jocelyn angrily opened her bag and threw the invitation at him.

The Larson Group hadn't invited the Lind family. Jocelyn had bought the invitation from a friend.

Jocelyn had been single ever since she broke up with Jason a few days ago. She was used to having boyfriends at her beck and call. An emptiness would reside in her heart as if she had lost her purpose in life if she didn't date anyone. Therefore, Jocelyn decided to attend the party and hook up with a golden bachelor.

Tired of feeling bored and lonely, Jocelyn was determined to find a wealthy, handsome boyfriend.

The escort took her invitation and then opened the guest list. He carefully compared the two. "I'm sorry, Ma'am. You're not on the guest list. I'm afraid you're not allowed to attend the party."

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Jocelyn's ears burned with embarrassment.

Everyone who graced this hotel was rich and powerful. They all paused whatever they were doing now to glance at her with contempt.

"I have an invitation. Let me in already!" Jocelyn shouted indignantly, waving the invitation at the doorman's face.

She normally got into these kinds of events like this. The staff never stopped to check the guests carefully before.

In Jocelyn's delusional mind, she thought she was a socialite. Even though she wasn't invited, she thought she deserved to attend the event.

She had even dressed up for the occasion and wore her most expensive accessories. She thought the staff wouldn't dare to question her if she tried to enter the venue like this.

"I'm sorry. Rules are rules. You can't enter using another person's invitation." The staff cast Jocelyn a cold glance and made a gesture, asking her to move out of the way.

Jocelyn had no choice but to step aside dejectedly.

Just as she was about to lose all hope, she caught a glimpse of Ethan walking towards the banquet hall, hand in hand with Janet.

Even Jocelyn had to admit that Ethan looked quite handsome tonight. He had a nice figure and was very tall, standing at least a head above the crowd. He instantly drew the attention of the public, especially with his indescribable aura.

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“Are you here to catch a glimpse of what you can’t have? They won’t let you in without an invitation. Don’t blame me for not giving you a heads up if you’re driven away.” Jocelyn crossed her arms over her chest and sneered at Janet when they came close.

After all, what right did Janet have to be here? She was basically begging to be insulted.

Ethan looked at Jocelyn coldly. His eyes clouded over, as though they had been covered with a thin veil of frost.

This woman had been nothing but rude to Janet. If it weren’t for the fact that she was his wife’s sister and that he wasn’t sure how Janet felt about her, he would’ve taught her a lesson or two by now.

Janet simply ignored Jocelyn and walked past her. With a faint smile on her face, she pulled out an invitation from her bag and handed it to the staff.

Jocelyn’s jaw practically dropped to the floor. How the hell did Janet have an invitation?!

But Jocelyn quickly recovered. She figured that Janet must’ve stolen the invitation. Since the staff here was particularly strict, surely they’d find out that Janet was a fraud and would never let her in. Smirking, Jocelyn was ready to laugh at Janet’s humiliation.

“Oh! Miss Lind, please come in. Allow me to escort you inside.” To Jocelyn’s surprise, the staff didn’t even bother to look at the invitation and respectfully welcomed Janet.

Through gritted teeth, she stopped them angrily. “What the hell?! You didn’t even check her identity!”

“Not here, sis.” Janet shook her head and sighed, as though she was exhausted by Jocelyn’s behavior.

Jocelyn had humiliated the Lind family in public time and time again. Fiona had really spoiled her. How could she not control herself even in public?

“What the hell is that supposed to mean? Why can’t I point out injustice when I see it? And how on earth do you have an invitation? It can’t be yours. You stole it from someone, didn’t you?!” Jocelyn was so furious that her face turned purple.

It wasn’t some third-rate dinner party. This was an event hosted by the Larson Group, a tycoon in the business world. It had taken Jocelyn a great deal of effort to get her hands on an invitation.

So how the fuck did Janet get one?

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Janet didn’t answer her. Instead, she calmly opened the envelope, pulled out the invitation, and held it up in between her slender fingers.

“Here. See for yourself.”

To Jocelyn’s surprise, her name was on the invitation.

“What the hell?! How can this be—?!”

How did Janet get an invitation in her name?

Jocelyn was shocked and green with envy.

Janet had married Ethan under her name. Of course it was Jocelyn's name on the invitation.

But the question still stood: how did Janet get an invitation to such an important occasion? Yes, she was an employee of the Larson Group, but she was a newbie and held no special position. How could a new employee be qualified to attend such a dinner party?

Exasperated and at a loss, Jocelyn could do nothing but look at Janet in disbelief.

Janet looked back at Jocelyn calmly. "There. Satisfied? We'll go inside now."

Jocelyn watched in silent rage as Janet and Ethan walked inside the venue.

She was so angry that she stomped her high heel on the marble floor. The sound of heels clacking echoed across the hotel hall.

Hearing this, Janet turned around and sneered, "Why are you still here? Did you want to stay and get a glimpse of what you can't have?"

Janet smiled smugly. She gave Jocelyn a taste of her own medicine.

Jocelyn's eyes were raging with anger. She glared at Janet murderously, as though she would attack Janet at any moment.

The dinner party was about to begin, but Jocelyn was still standing outside, the cold wind blowing at her.

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She couldn't let Janet get away with this. No matter what, she needed to get inside the banquet hall.

More and more people streamed into the dinner party. A limousine slowly pulled to a stop outside the private hotel. A paunchy rich businessman who seemed to be at his fifties or sixties got off the car, supported by a female companion in her twenties.

It looked like a little kind-hearted girl was helping her frail grandfather cross the road.

"Mr. Sherman, you're here!" With a bright, flirtatious smile on her face, Jocelyn sauntered over to the elderly businessman.

He had tried to hook up with Jocelyn before, but she had rejected his advances because he was old and fat.

But now, she had to put her hopes on him to get inside the venue.

"Jocelyn!" The man was stunned when he saw who had called his name. Then he broke into a wrinkly smile. "Didn't I give you my number last time? Why didn't you call me?"

As he spoke, his eyes roamed over her body hungrily.

When she saw that she still had a chance, Jocelyn walked to his side and slipped her arm into his. "Mr. Sherman, I'm sorry. I wanted to call you, but I lost your card."

Nobody cared that she was lying.

The man smiled knowingly and put his wrinkled hand on Jocelyn's waist. He had been interested in Jocelyn ever since the beginning. His gaze landed on her bulging cleavage, lust filling his eyes. "Why haven't you gone inside yet?"

"My friend couldn't make it and give me her invitation, but the staff didn't let me in." Jocelyn stuck out her lower lip, batting her eyelashes at the old man coquettishly.

"In that case, you can come in with me. But you have to be with me tonight." The man's eyes stared into hers hungrily.

While he didn't think that Jocelyn was that pretty, he couldn't get over her because he hadn't gotten her yet.

Then, he looked at his young female companion and said in a low voice, "You can go now. I'll have my secretary transfer the money to your account."

Hearing this, the girl glanced at Jocelyn indifferently. She didn't know why Jocelyn was so eager to have this old man. Oh well, life was difficult for everyone, the girl supposed. It didn't matter. Anyway, she'd still get the money, and that was all that mattered.

With a smile, the girl nodded and left.

The man brought Jocelyn to the dinner party as his plus one.

When they entered the banquet hall, Jocelyn heard glasses clinking everywhere. The magnificent hall was brightly illuminated, while the sound of saxophones and pianos playing stimulated her senses.

The Larson Group wasn't playing around. The dinner party reeked of extreme luxury. There were even gambling tables and billiard tables by the side, for when guests got bored.

Jocelyn studied the crowd seemingly nonchalantly, keeping an eye open for her prey tonight.

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The second Janet entered the banquet hall, she felt like she had stepped foot inside a movie about the rich and powerful.

It was already dark out, but the brightly lit hall was even livelier than a sunny room.

But there was more to it than she thought. Everyone seemed to be hell-bent on meeting some invisible goal, hopping from table to table and exchanging tactful greetings.

Ethan stopped a waiter and took a glass of red wine for himself and a glass of orange juice from his tray.

He handed the orange juice to Janet. "What are you looking at?"

Following the woman's gaze, he saw that she was staring at several independent designers in a huddle, chattering happily.

"Wow! I can't believe the Larson Group actually invited those design masters. They're constants at international fashion shows. I didn't think I'd see them here." Janet sipped at her orange juice absentmindedly, her eyes filled with shock and awe.

"Why don't you go and say hi?" Ethan put his hand on her back and took another sip of wine, looking relaxed and at home.

Janet burst into laughter. "I'm just a nobody from the Larson Group. I haven't even been regularized yet. How could I possibly talk to those masters?"

Ethan casually put down his glass and glanced at Garrett from across the room.

Garrett caught his gaze and immediately sprang into action. As if he had just received an urgent order, he deserted the crowd he had been talking to and walked towards Ethan.

"Lind." Janet turned around to see Garrett in a white suit standing behind her.

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"Lind." Janet turned around to see Garrett in a white suit standing behind her.

What was he doing here?

Wasn't he trying to avoid her? Why did he take the initiative to talk to her here?

"Good evening, Mr. Harding." Janet smiled awkwardly and tilted her head slightly.

Glancing at Ethan's face carefully from time to time, Garrett broke into a big smile and told Janet, "Mr. Larson told me to take care of you tonight. Are you free? The Larson Group has invited some well-known designers here. Do you want to meet them?"

Janet's jaw dropped to the floor in shock, as though she was just informed that she had won the lottery.

"What—? Can I? Mr. Harding, are you sure? I'm just a nobody—"

"Of course. Mr. Larson needed to deal with some things tonight, so he told me to introduce you to the top designers in your field. They seldom come back. They all just happen to be here this time because of a fashion show. It's a rare opportunity to meet them all in one place." Garrett pushed his glasses up his nose and smiled politely.

Janet pursed her lips, her eyes blinking a lot more than usual. Whenever she was nervous, this was her body's physical response.

She looked at Ethan, who nodded at her encouragingly.

"Okay then." She pinched herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming.

She followed Garrett to the group of designers. Garrett cleared his throat and said, "Sorry to disturb you, everyone. Allow me to introduce to you our newest and most promising designer, Lind."

Since someone like Garrett had gone out of his way to introduce her, the designers all looked at Janet with great interest.

"You must be very talented!" One of the designers gave Janet a thumbs up and smiled, which made Janet feel welcome.

From local to international design trends, the conversation between the designers could've kept going forever.

But after a while, Garrett wanted Janet to meet other important guests—business partners from clothing companies who had also attended the dinner party.

Hours passed and the party was coming to a close.

Ethan had been sitting on the sofa in silence, sipping from his wine occasionally. Multiple women tried to accost him, but they all shrank back whenever the cold man looked at them sharply.

It wasn't until Janet wove through the crowd and came back that he finally broke into a smile. "Why don't you talk to them some more? You came back so soon."

Garrett had just suggested that Janet go back to chat with the designers, but she had worried that Ethan would be bored to death, so she came back to him.

Janet smiled gently and was about to sit down next to Ethan. She wanted to hang out with him, not the designers.

"I met them already. But now, I want to talk to—"

Before she could finish her sentence, Janet jolted in shock.

Somebody had spilled a glass of wine on her from behind. Red wine stained her light blue dress and dripped at her feet, forming a red puddle.

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Janet turned around and saw who it was.

Jocelyn was standing beside her. She looked apologetic, but it somehow seemed exaggerated as she fought a complacent smile.

"Oh, I'm sorry. A waiter bumped against me now."

She clamped her mouth with one hand and held the glass with the other, pretending to feel sorry for her.

Her apology didn't seem sincere, for her every word dripped with contempt. "I didn't mean it."

Janet tugged at her wet dress that was clinging to her legs.

The sweet scent of roses from the wine wafted in the air.

Janet immediately moved back from Jocelyn and glared at her. "You did it on purpose! You didn't have an invitation, right? How did you get in?"

Jocelyn smirked at her. "Of course, I walked in. I have my ways. I can get into parties even without the invitation."

She crossed her arms over her chest and raked her eyes across Janet — back to her arrogant self. "I accidentally stained your dress. How about I compensate for it? How much is this dress? Is it even a hundred dollars?"

Jocelyn took out three hundred dollar bills from her handbag and threw them at Jocelyn's face. "I'll compensate you three times the price. You don't have to thank me."

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Ethan put down the glass and stood up, his face taut with anger.

He grabbed some tissues from the table and tried wiping the stain from Janet's dress, which was dripping with wine.

Then, he glared at Jocelyn as if he wanted to burn her alive.

"I'm fine. It's between her and me. Please don't get involved in this." Janet felt the coldness emanating from him. She quickly grabbed the tissues from his hand, trying to calm him down.

She feared that Ethan might end up beating up Jocelyn until she passed out.

Moreover, her dress indeed wasn't expensive.

Jocelyn had perhaps already figured that out. How could a poor woman like Janet afford an expensive dress? She didn't even have decent clothes to wear for opulent dinner parties. After all, she struggled to make ends meet.

Jocelyn threw the money on the floor and sneered. "Do you know what kind of occasion it is? Don't you have any sense of aesthetics? How could you come here wearing a cheap dress? Don't you have money to even afford a decent dress, or are you too stingy to spend money on it? You are indeed just a bumpkin that hasn't seen the world. You should feel ashamed of yourself for attending such a party."

Janet ignored the money that Jocelyn had thrown on the floor. She smiled and picked up a plate of stewed beef from a waiter walking past her and turned it over on Jocelyn's head.

"Argh! What the hell are you doing?"

Jocelyn bellowed. She never thought Jocelyn would do something like this.

The thick sauce splashed on her face, ruining her makeup. Lumps of beef were stuck on her head, and the sauce dripped from her head, staining her dress and dribbling down her body.

Jocelyn's face distorted, and her eyes almost popped out of her sockets. "You bitch!" she shouted like a maniac. "How dare you..."

In the past, only she bullied Janet. Jocelyn was the spoiled princess, while Janet endured everything without fighting back.

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"Why not? Fortunately, this dish was not boiling hot. Otherwise, it would have burned your artificial face for which you had spent a lot of money."

Janet smiled calmly as she put the plate back on the table. Then, she picked up the three hundred dollars from the floor and threw them at Jocelyn's face. "Take back your three hundred dollars. You ruined my dress, and I did the same to you. We're even. How much is your dress? I'll pay for it."

"Do you think you can afford it? You *** bitch! I'll teach you a lesson today!" Jocelyn quickly wiped the sauce off her face and darted toward Janet.

Ethan quickly stood in front of Janet to protect her. His face darkened in an instant.

All the staff and security guards at the party were trained and experienced. Before Ethan could do anything, one of the staff dragged Jocelyn away and threw her to the floor.

Garrett had been gone only for a while and didn't expect something like this to happen. Hearing the commotion, he rushed over and walked through the crowd. His eyes widened when he saw Janet's stained dress and Jocelyn's disheveled hair. The carpet was covered in red wine and sauce.

"What happened? Who is making trouble?" Garrett asked, his jaw tense with rage.

Jocelyn had met this man before. He was the one who had driven her out of the Larson Group the previous time. Later, she learned that he was Garrett Harding, the deputy CEO of the Larson Group and

the son of the famous Harding family.

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The men she had dated so far faded in comparison to Garrett.

Jocelyn pointed at Janet, who was standing behind Ethan. "It's her!" she pouted, trying to sound pitiful. "I accidentally spilled wine on her dress, but she unreasonably threw this dish on me. Why would you let such a crazy woman into the party?"

Jocelyn knew that her makeup and clothes were ruined, and she looked terrible at the moment.

Therefore, her hatred for Janet intensified. The woman had ruined her night and her chances for seducing Garrett.

Janet lowered her eyes and fell silent. Ethan pulled her closer into his arms and sneered. "You should have hit her harder. Look at the way she is talking about you now."

Janet's eyes narrowed. She shouldn't have attacked Jocelyn, but she just couldn't take it anymore.

Growing up together, she found out about Jocelyn's true nature long ago.

Ethan smiled tenderly and stroked Janet's hair as he secretly winked at Garrett.

Sensing the warning in his eyes, Garrett pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose and looked at Ethan. The coldness of his gaze sent a shiver down Garrett's spine.

He understood what the man meant and beckoned at the waiter. "Go and get a new evening gown here, now."

Hearing that, Jocelyn's face suddenly lit up, and her lips curled up into an arrogant smile.

She assumed the evening gown was for her, which meant Garrett was on her side. 'Janet is doomed!'

"The Larson Group is indeed a big enterprise. I won't hold you accountable for what happened to me at your dinner party today," Jocelyn said arrogantly.

The corners of Garrett's mouth twitched in embarrassment.

'Who let this mad woman in?' he thought.

Thinking that Garrett cared about her, Jocelyn assumed she had a good chance with him. She winked at him seductively in front of all the people.

Garrett seemed like the perfect guy for her. He was from a wealthy family and held a high position in a reputable company. Moreover, he was tall, well-built, and handsome. Jocelyn felt it would be great if she hooked up with him. Her future would dazzle if she got married to him.

Seeing that Garrett was still silent, she walked up to him and smiled sweetly. "Thank you, Mr. Harding."

The gravy mingled with her perfume and makeup exuded a disgusting smell. Garrett clamped his mouth, for the scent made him sick. However, Jocelyn continued to walk toward him.

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Garrett stepped back in disgust and wiped his shoulder where Jocelyn had just touched him.

Moments later, the waiter returned with a clothing bag.

Inside was an opulent evening dress from a luxury brand.

Three men followed him with a makeup kit and jewelry to match the dress.

"Mr. Harding, here is the evening dress."

Jocelyn's eyes lit up. The dress and the jewelry looked expensive.

"Thank you." She pretended to remain calm and walked toward the man carrying the dress. Just as she reached out to take the dress, the staff unexpectedly walked past her.

"Miss, could you please get out of our way?" Jocelyn's eyes widened as she involuntarily stepped back.

The staff smiled and handed the evening dress to Janet.

Jocelyn's face flushed with embarrassment.

'What the hell is going on? I thought it was for me. Why are they giving it to Janet? Janet has ruined my dress, but they get a new one for her? This is just ridiculous!'

"Thank you, but please take it back. This dress is too expensive. I'll just go home and get changed," Jane said, nervously looking at the dress. It looked beautiful, but she couldn't accept it because it was too expensive.

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"Thank you, but please take it back. This dress is too expensive. I'll just go home and get changed," Janet said, nervously looking at the dress. It looked beautiful, but she couldn't accept it because it was too expensive.

"Mr. Larson has asked us to take care of you and make sure nothing bad happens to you at the dinner party. You can't wear your dress now. We had prepared some extra dresses in case of emergencies, and this is one of them. You can borrow it tonight. After all, it's a matter of our company's reputation." Garrett smiled calmly even though his heart was racing in his chest.

He knew that Ethan would punish him if Janet didn't take the dress.

After a moment's hesitation, Janet finally took the dress.

"Miss, this way, please."

Janet nodded and went to the dressing room with the staff.

"Miss, let me help you with your makeup. You are a natural beauty, and makeup will accentuate your features." The make-up artist picked up the eye shadow palette and carefully examined Janet's face.

"I have already worn mild makeup." Janet frowned and covered her face.

Despite being a designer, she didn't like dressing up. She seldom wore makeup and had never tried any heavy, dramatic look.

"What do you mean by you're wearing makeup? You have just worn a little foundation. I promise you will look gorgeous. You won't know unless you try. I have worked with many celebrities in the past. I'm sure you will dazzle tonight." The make-up artist smiled and waved the brush in her hand, as if it were a magical wand.

Soon, the makeup artist finished her work, and the assistants helped Janet with the dress.

After checking that everything was in place, they finally led her out.

The noisy banquet hall dropped silent.

All eyes were on Janet.

The sudden attention made her uncomfortable. She squirmed on the spot and didn't know where to put her hands.

'Gosh, why are they staring at me? Do I look ugly?'

Her stomach flipped with anxiety. Just then, Janet let out a startled gasp as her gaze fell on the glass door.

She was amazed to see her reflection.

The woman on the glass looked nothing like her but seemed like a regal princess.

Her face looked flawless, and the makeup seemed to accentuate her features. Her bright red lips lit up her entire face.

The black velvet strapless dress revealed her milky skin. The dazzling neckpiece made her look like royalty.

Janet was the most beautiful woman at the party tonight. It looked like the makeup artist had brought out Janet's inner beauty that she had been hiding all this while.

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The way a person carried themselves was an important factor in earning people's respect.

Janet walked past the people watching her with rapt attention, gently lifting her dress. From the corner of her eyes, she could feel the people's burning gazes.

Her racing heart slowed down when she saw Ethan. She quickly grabbed his arm and hid behind him. Her curled lashes and the neat sweep of eyeliner made her eyes look bigger and more seductive. "Thank you, Mr. Harding. I'll return the dress tomorrow."

Garrett coughed awkwardly. Unable to meet Janet's gaze, he looked away. "Okay, okay."

After all, Janet looked incredible after dressing up.

Ethan used the opportunity to hold Janet in his arms. He raked his eyes across her beautiful face as he gently stroked her cheek with his thumb as if she were a piece of art. "Have you worn makeup?" he asked softly.

"Don't I look good?" Janet looked at him through her lashes.

Ethan chuckled. He pressed his lips against her ear and whispered, "God, you are beautiful! You look like a real princess."

Janet shivered and shrank into his arms. "Ethan, stop! It tickles."

Ethan's Adam's apple bobbed, and his eyes darkened. He couldn't take his eyes off her alluring face.

Jocelyn burned with jealousy when she saw the intimate couple.

Her hatred for Janet reached its peak. She felt the woman was a slut who effortlessly seduced men. The way a person carried themselves was an important factor in earning people's respect.

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Ever since they were children, Janet had been more attractive than her. Even though Janet wore the simplest outfit, she would garner the attention of the people around her. Now that Janet was dressed like royalty, Jocelyn felt she faded in comparison to her.

"Be careful about the dress. Otherwise, you'll have to sell yourself to pay it back." Jocelyn sneered and walked past Janet, deliberately bumping against her shoulder.

Ethan's face darkened, his cold eyes blazing with rage.

Seeing that, Garrett immediately waved at the security. "Throw this woman out!"

Several security guards surrounded Jocelyn and grabbed her arms to take her away.

Jocelyn thrashed and screamed, trying to free herself. "Why the hell are you driving me away? I'm here as Mr. Sherman's date. How dare you drive me away?"

"All right. I'll ask Mr. Sherman to deal with you."

Garrett looked around the banquet hall and saw a plump, timid-middle-aged man. "Mr. Sherman, don't be shy. What do you say?" he demanded.

Sherman had been a loser in his early years. Later, he gained wealth after selling antiques. However, by then he had become too old to have fun in life. He didn't dare to offend the deputy CEO of the Larson Group.

Sherman was frightened out of his wits that he didn't dare to even look at Jocelyn. "It's up to you, Mr. Harding." He waved his hand. "I just brought her to accompany me tonight. Besides that, we don't share any relationship. You can do whatever you want."

With that, Sherman turned around and began talking with the others as if nothing had happened.

"Do you know who I am?" Jocelyn bellowed. "I'm the daughter of the Lind family. My parents won't spare you."

Garrett glanced at her coldly. Then, he picked up a glass of wine from the tray, took a sip, and smacked its lips. "I don't care who you are and which family you belong. I'm ready to deal with them at any time."

Jocelyn struggled desperately and refused to leave. Finally, the guards dragged her out of the hotel.

The commotion had already garnered the people's attention. Several men were staring at Janet.

They all seemed to ogle her with lustful eyes, their gazes drinking every inch of her body.

"It's all right now. Let's go back to our seats." When Janet raised her head, she saw Ethan staring into the distance. His jaw was tense, and his eyes narrowed as if faced with a dangerous enemy.

Janet sensed that he was angry.

"What's wrong with you?" she asked quizzically.

Ethan took a deep breath and looked at her. Then, he took off his suit jacket and draped it around Janet's shoulders. "Nothing. Put on my coat."

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Ethan's enormous suit jacket seemed to cover every inch of Janet's body, revealing only her face. "It feels strange to wear a jacket. It completely covers the dress."

Ethan dragged her onto the sofa, gently pulled her hair out of the jacket, and placed his palm on the small of her back. "It's alright. The party is about to end anyway."

Then, he turned around and scowled at Garrett, who was watching them from a distance.

He was annoyed that Garrett had arranged such a revealing dress for Janet. Garrett almost choked on his drink when he met Ethan's fiery gaze.

His cheeks turned red from the coughing. Garrett couldn't fathom why Ethan was staring at him.

He had specially arranged for his people to prepare a beautiful dress for Janet. But Ethan's disapproving look made him question his decision.

It was past midnight when the party was over. Janet and Ethan returned home together.

Janet sensed something was wrong. Ethan hadn't taken his eyes off her on their way back home. Unable to take it anymore, Janet turned around and looked at him.

"What's wrong with you tonight? Why are you constantly staring at me?"

Ethan remained silent. Janet shook her head and took the key from her bag. As soon as they entered the house, he grabbed her arm.

"Because you are beautiful."

Ethan slammed the door shut and pressed Janet against it.

He cupped her cheeks and gently nibbled at her bottom lip. As Janet's lips parted, he slid his tongue into her mouth, deepening the kiss. Their tongues danced in rhythm, and they soon got breathless.

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Janet pulled back and leaned against Ethan's shoulder, panting for breath. Ethan smiled and trailed his tongue across her earlobe.

"Put me down. The dress is already wrinkled. What if we end up tearing it?" Janet whimpered as she tried pushing him away.

Her ears were sensitive to the kiss, and she shivered under his touch.

“Hmm...” Ethan finally let go of Janet and gently stroked her hair. “I’m going to take a shower. You go to bed early.”

With that, he turned around and walked into the bathroom.

Frustrated, Janet leaned against the door and covered her flaming face.

They had been getting intimate at every given opportunity, and Janet’s will seemed to crumble with every passing day. ‘What if we both lost self-control someday?’ she wondered.

...

The next day, Janet carefully packed the dress and jewelry and went to the company. However, she had no idea where to return them.

Seeing that Garrett was walking past the design department, Janet hurriedly stopped him. “Mr. Harding, I brought the dress and accessories.”

“Well, give it to Mr. Larson. They are his, not mine.” Garrett shrugged and went straight to the elevator.

Janet sighed and sent Brandon a message again.

“Mr. Larson, whom should I return the dress I borrowed last night for the dinner party?”

“You don’t have to return it. We don’t reuse custom-designed dresses. It’s yours now.”

That was when it dawned on Janet that wealthy people didn’t wear second-hand clothes. However, she was too embarrassed to accept it. “It’s too expensive, Mr. Larson. How can I accept it?”

“Well, you can save it for the future. Considering the Larson Group’s unshakable position in the fashion industry, how can an employee wear cheap clothes for dinner parties and ruin our company’s image?”

Janet couldn’t argue with that. She had no choice but to take back the dress and jewelry. She carefully wrapped them up in a bag and hid them in her closet.

The next day when Janet went back to work, Garrett called her to meet him.

“Mr. Larson wants you to have these,” he said, holding out several enormous bags. “Well, our company has collaborations with several fashion brands and enterprises. These are all complimentary gifts they have sent to us. You can take them.”

Janet’s eyes widened when she saw the expensive clothes and shoes lying in front of her.

They were all from the biggest fashion houses. The clothes and shoes were in trend. Considering the demand, many of the pieces were out of stock, and most importantly, every single garment was expensive.

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“These... These are too expensive and invaluable. Has Mr. Larson given clothes to the other employees as well?” Janet asked, her face pale with horror.

"That's not your concern," replied Garrett.

Judging from his tone, it seemed obvious that no one else had received such expensive things.

Janet's stomach churned with unease, and her palms grew sweaty.

These were not just ordinary gifts. She couldn't bring herself to accept them.

"Well, I only follow Mr. Larson's orders. If you have any questions, feel free to ask him." Garrett smiled as he continued to read the document.

Janet left Garrett's office and quickly sent a message to Brandon.

Thousands of people worked for the company. How could she be the only one to receive such expensive gifts?

The design department was indeed the most crucial component of the Larson Group. However, Tiffany was Janet's superior. Janet was confused as to why she was the first one to get such expensive gifts instead of Tiffany.

"Mr. Larson, thank you for the clothes and shoes, but I'm afraid I can't accept them. I'm not used to wearing expensive clothes, so why don't you give them to other employees?" Janet didn't care if the message sounded rude. All she wanted was for him to know that she couldn't accept expensive gifts for no reason.

It looked like Brandon was way too nice to her that it got real creepy.

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Janet had never seen the mysterious CEO, and perhaps Brandon hadn't seen her in person either.

Although she tried not to overanalyze the situation, her intuition told her that something was wrong.

The day passed in a blur. Hours later, Janet finally received a message from him.

"You may have to get involved in more collaborative projects in the future. As a designer of the Larson Group, you don't seem to pay attention to the way you dress. It's a matter of our company's image. I don't want people questioning the Larson Group's design abilities. Wearing the right outfit is also an advertising strategy. As a designer, you have to carry yourself well."

It was a long, reasonable, irrefutable speech.

Brandon was smart enough to persuade Janet to accept the clothes even though she didn't think it was appropriate for her to take them.

Janet stared at the long message on her phone and took a deep breath.

She had no choice but to accept the clothes and shoes in the end.

She quickly sent, 'thank you' and turned off her phone.

After work, she received another message from Brandon.

"If you face any problems in life, you can also come to me any time. I will help you solve it so that it doesn't affect your work."

Janet put her phone down as her stomach clenched with unease.

'Why would a CEO worry so much about the work of an ordinary employee like me?'

They only chatted online. Therefore, Janet couldn't conclude that he had an ulterior motive.

She wanted to figure out what Brandon wanted from her.

"What's up? You're always on the phone. Who have you been texting all day? You said you don't have a boyfriend. Then, who is it?" Janet's colleague, Gerda, turned around and winked at her.

"Not my boyfriend." She couldn't tell who she was texting.

After all, it was the CEO, and people might gossip about it.

Janet propped her chin on her palm and thought for a while.

"Mr. Larson seems like an excellent man. He must be married, right?" she asked, hoping for her friend to say yes.

“I don’t know. Maybe he has a girlfriend. But who cares? Wealthy people like him will have several girlfriends and mistresses at the same time. We should never probe into their personal lives.” Gerda elbowed Janet and arched an eyebrow. “By the way, since when did you start gossiping?”

Gerda felt that Janet was a quiet person who never gossiped about anyone. So she was surprised to see her ask questions about their CEO’s personal life.

Janet forced a smile and shrugged. However, the worry on her face didn’t fade away.