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Connor looked at Natalie. "Mommy, has Mr. Shane been busy these past few days? He hasn't come to see us."

Hearing this, Natalie caressed both kids on their heads. "Of course. Mr. Shane is looking after such a huge company. How can he find time to go out every day? That's enough; don't complain anymore. Eat your dinner and go to bed early."

"Sure." The kids nodded.

The next day, Natalie started work officially.

Natalie punched her card and then went to the procurement department to check the fabrics sent by the textile mills three days ago. After confirming that everything was fine, she walked to the CEO's office.

Hearing a knock on the door, Shane called out without raising his head, "Come in!"

When she heard the reply, Natalie pushed open the door and went in. "Mr. Shane."

At the sound of her voice, Shane's eyes flickered and he stopped writing with the pen still in his hand. He looked at her coldly and asked, "What's the matter?"

Natalie stopped at Shane's desk, "Mr. Shane, in order to prevent other designers from misusing Project Rebirth fabrics, I want to request a separate warehouse for which only I have the key."

Other than the reason she cited, she had another reason—Jasmine.

Based on her understanding of Jasmine, she knew this woman would not stand by and watch the fabric being delivered while doing nothing. Jasmine would try anything to drive her out of the Thompson Group, so she had to take precautions. If not, there would be dire consequences.

"Permission granted." Shane agreed without hesitation. His gaze returned to normal and he added, "In the future, for minor issues like this, you do not need to see me. Just approach Silas. He can handle things like that!"

Hearing the indifference in his tone, Natalie was surprised. She nodded. "Yes, I understand."

"You may leave. I'll get someone to bring you the key." With that, Shane dismissed her.

Feeling downcast, Natalie cast him a glance before she obediently turned around and left.

For some reason, she felt that he had become cold towards her.

Have I done something to displease him?

Natalie tilted her head to ponder but was unable to understand why, so she eventually dismissed the thought. She closed Shane's office door and returned to the design department. As soon as she sat down, her cell phone rang.

"Nat, congratulations! You've won first place in the Golden Feather Awards!" Joyce told her joyfully.

Natalie was confused. "Joyce, what are you talking about? What first place?"

"You don't know? Are you kidding?"

Natalie was unsure of how to react. "Seriously, I'm not kidding!"

Joyce seemed to understand that something was going on. She swallowed and replied, "Nat, don't tell me you did not submit an entry for the Golden Feather Awards?"

Natalie grunted in reply, "That's right."

She knew that the Golden Feather Awards was one of the most authoritative fashion design competitions in the country.

From the start, she had wanted to participate but because she had had too many errands to run upon returning from overseas, she missed the registration deadline.

"There must be a mistake!" Joyce frowned. "If you didn't participate, who is this Ms. Smith who won first place?"

"Ms. Smith?" Natalie narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

"That's right." Joyce nodded. "I have seen the winning design before. It was done by you. This picture is the same and it is signed by a 'Ms. Smith', so I thought it was you. I am surprised that you didn't enter the competition. Nat, did someone steal your design and pretend to be you to participate?"

Hearing this, Natalie's expression turned gloomy as the smile left her ruby red lips. "I probably know what's going on. Maybe you're right that someone has stolen my design, but she is not pretending to be me. Besides me, there is indeed another Ms. Smith."

Joyce put two and two together and realized who that person must be. "Nat, are you saying it's your elder half-sister?"

"Well, it should be her, but I have to check on the official website."

With that, Natalie put down the phone and visited the official Golden Feather Awards website. When she saw the winning design in the J City Division, her hand on the mouse stiffened.

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It really was her design!

Plagiarized down to the very last detail.

"How does it look, Nat? Could you confirm anything?" Joyce badgered her over the phone.

Returning to her senses, Natalie turned to check the designer's signature at the lower right corner of the design. She went livid when she saw Jasmine's watermark. She picked up the phone again and held it to her ear, her words as cold as ice as she scowled, "Yes, confirmed. It's definitely her!"

She had always known that Jasmine was a repeated plagiarist, but she never thought that one day, she would fall victim to that woman's crime. The piece of work, which Jasmine

copied off her, had been assigned to her by her mentor a year ago, with the theme being autumn.

Back then, she had designed about twenty pieces. Her mentor only fancied eight of them, deeming the rest to be behind the times. He had told her to discard them, but she couldn't bear to discard her hard work. So, Natalie registered a secret account on a social media website for the sole purpose of honoring her designs, which she uploaded as a memento.

She did not expect Jasmine to discover her creations!

"Alright, Nat. We have proof that she copied off you. Let's expose her to the competition organizer!" Joyce exclaimed angrily with her fist clenched.

Natalie bit her lower lip, "No, we can't!"

"Why not?" Joyce was confused.

Natalie took a breath in. "Because Jasmine plagiarized Mina's work, not mine. I've promised my mentor that I would not come out as Mina before I could make a name for myself in the local art scene!"

"So we're going to let Jasmine go, just like that?" Joyce pronounced indignantly.

Natalie scoffed, "Do you think I'd do that? The only things I cannot tolerate at all in my life are theft and plagiarism. Since Jasmine dared to commit these crimes, I'll certainly not let her go so easily. She likes copying, doesn't she? Then she can do it to her heart's content!"

"Nat, do you mean..." Joyce began, her eyes glinting with excitement.

The corners of Natalie's lips curled slightly upwards as she smirked, "It's exactly what you're thinking."

Jasmine had little talent for design, to begin with. The only reason she achieved her current status was primarily due to her acts of plagiarism. She won first place in the regionals this time, and she would surely find ways to plagiarize some more in the upcoming elimination round.

In that case, Natalie could upload more designs onto her social media platform, allowing Jasmine to copy. When the Golden Feather Award finals rolled around, Project Rebirth

would have gained great success. Then Natalie would have the reputation she needed to come out as Mina, accuse Jasmine of plagiarism, and ruin that woman's career once and for all!

With that plan in mind, Natalie hung up the phone and went onto the Golden Feather Awards official website to check on the theme for the next session. She was ready to set a trap for Jasmine.

It was at that moment that Jasmine marched into the office, clapping her hands. "Everyone, stop what you're doing!"

The people in the office put their work aside and stared at her.

Natalie did the same too.

Jasmine had a smile on her face and seemed to be feeling quite grand. "Party at eight o'clock tonight at the Rose Booth of Sunrise Hotel. My treat. Anyone who doesn't come is just going to make me look bad."

Naturally, everyone in the room nodded their heads profusely. Some even murmured in surprise. "Ms. Jasmine, do you have any good news to announce?"

"Dummy, didn't you watch the Golden Feather Awards announcement today? Ms. Jasmine won first place in the J City regionals! "

"That's right!" Jasmine cast an appreciative look at the person in the back. "I'm ecstatic to have won first place, so I'm going out of my way to invite all of you to dinner."

Upon hearing that, everyone else quickly stepped forward to congratulate Jasmine. Only Natalie remained in her seat, wryly observing the scene in front of her.

You only got the first place because you copied my work, and here you are proudly showing off without a shred of shame!

While Natalie was immersed in her thoughts, Jasmine suddenly turned to look at her. "Ms. Natalie, it seems you aren't very pleased about my win. Is that right?"

Natalie got to her feet and replied with a straight face, "No, not at all. You've misunderstood me, Ms. Jasmine. I was just thinking about other matters."

“Oh? Then may I know what’s on your mind?” Jasmine looked at her as she stroked her bright, red nails.

Natalie nodded, her eyes fixed on Jasmine. “Of course. I was wondering why your design style varies so much from before. Care to explain, Ms. Jasmine?”

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Upon hearing her words, Jasmine panicked for a brief moment, but she calmed down immediately and responded gloomily, “Natalie, what do you mean by that? You doubt my abilities?”

“I’m just curious. It’s fine if you’d rather not talk about it.” Natalie smirked as she shrugged, neither denying nor affirming the other woman’s allegation.

Jasmine snorted at her, “I have nothing to hide. It’s totally normal for a designer to have a variety of styles. It’s nothing unusual. You, on the other hand, should concentrate on your work rather than questioning me!”

After that, Jasmine strutted away in her high heels, but there was something odd about the way she walked.

Natalie watched her leave before letting loose a sigh.

It’s normal to change styles? Everyone knows that every designer has only one style! Only Jasmine could have spouted such nonsense. Did she not see how everyone’s expressions changed at her words?

Natalie shook her head, directing her gaze back to the computer, and went to work.

When Natalie left the office in the evening, she went to the kindergarten to pick up her kids first. Then, she took them to Joyce, who would be taking care of them for the time being, before hailing a taxi to Sunrise Hotel.

It was ten minutes to eight when she arrived at the Sunrise Hotel.

As soon as Natalie opened the door to the booth, she heard Jasmine call out to her in an airy tone, “Why, Ms. Natalie, you’re late!”

"I'm late?" Natalie walked over to her, pulled out her cell phone, and pointed at the time. "The party starts at eight, right? It's not even time yet. How can I be late?"

Jasmine swirled her glass of red wine as she eyed Natalie with a half-smile. "I did say the party starts at eight in the beginning, but later I changed it to seven. The notice was sent to the group chat. Ms. Natalie, didn't you get the memo?"

Natalie pursed her lips. "Sorry, I'm not in the group chat!"

"Is that so?" Jasmine, pretending to be shocked, turned to ask the other attendees, "Didn't anyone add Ms. Natalie into the group chat?"

"No, we've maxed out the group chat capacity!" Someone answered.

Jasmine smiled coyly at Natalie, "Oh, pardon me. I thought they added you."

Natalie watched Joyce as she kept up the farce, and the corners of her mouth twitched in annoyance. "It's fine!"

Up to that moment, she understood their intentions.

What do they mean the group chat's capacity is full? From the very beginning, they were specifically instructed by Jasmine not to add me. That wretched woman also changed the time of the party on purpose, just so that I would be late. What a way to make things difficult for me!

Sure enough, as soon as Natalie pulled a chair to sit down, Jasmine placed a bottle of red wine in front of her. "Ms. Natalie, it's not your fault you're late, but you still are. Why don't you be a good chap and down a bottle?"

Bingo!

Natalie grumbled silently, then pushed the wine bottle back to Jasmine. "Ms. Jasmine, I'm sorry. I can't drink."

Jasmine did not think Natalie would refuse upfront. Her expression darkened. "What's the meaning of this, Ms. Natalie? Do you intend to make me look bad?"

"Of course not. I'm just not quite well today. I took two antibiotic tablets, so..."

As she spoke, Natalie took out a packet of antibiotics from her bag and placed it on the table.

Jasmine turned blue in the face when she saw the pills.

She had not expected Natalie, that wench, to be taking the same kind of antibiotics as her!

“Ms. Jasmine, as you can see, I can’t possibly drink today. But I’m fine with juice, so why don’t we replace the wine with juice instead?” Natalie said, her eyes on Jasmine.

Jasmine pulled a long face. “Don’t bother!”

Juice? Who makes a fool of themselves from drinking juice? She might as well not drink any!

“That’s so generous of you, Ms. Jasmine. Thank you very much.” Natalie beamed at her as she put away the pills.

The medicine was not specially prepared for the occasion. It was just her habit of always keeping some with her.

In the past, while she was overseas, she would often attend parties with her mentor, where drinking was inevitable. Eventually, the ongoing routine damaged her stomach. Stanley suggested she brought antibiotics along everywhere she went. That way, she would have a reason not to consume alcohol.

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Jasmine was very moody throughout dinner. The other attendees were wary of her mood, so they refrained from expressing their feelings, and they dined with repressed emotions. Natalie was the only one who seemed to be having a good time.

When she had more or less eaten her fill, she got up to use the restroom.

She was right outside the door to the restroom when a looming figure sprang out of the men’s side, grabbed her by the wrist, and pushed her against the wall.

The unexpected turn of events startled Natalie. She was just about to scream when the man covered her mouth.

“Shush. Do not make a sound. Help me out here, or I’ll kill you!” The man threatened her in a hoarse voice.

Natalie’s pupils shrank. She dared not to move and nodded incessantly.

The man curled his lips, satisfied with her obedience. He then buried his head into her neck and imitated the gesture of kissing her.

Right then, two sets of footsteps sounded from a short distance away, followed by speaking voices.

“Keep looking! He must still be nearby. You go check the front. I’ll search the restroom.”

“Right!”

The voices fell, and the footsteps dispersed.

Natalie could hear one of the footsteps slowly approaching them. As they got closer and closer, her body stiffened.

The man felt her tension and proceeded to pinch the right side of her neck. “Relax. If I’m discovered because of you, believe it or not, I’ll take you down with me.”

Upon hearing this, Natalie found herself lose the strength in her legs as they went weak.

The man seized the opportunity to hold her tight, letting her lie in his arms.

From an outsider’s point of view, their actions would resemble that of a couple in love flirting outside the restroom.

Because of this, the advancing set of footsteps passed them by and left straight away without interrupting them.

Finally, the man released Natalie.

It was only then Natalie able to take a good look at him.

The man was quite handsome, with an air of nobility about him. The clothes on him bore not a single brand label, but that didn't stop them from looking stylish. It was obvious they were high-end customized goods, which meant that the man wearing them was surely not the average Joe.

While Natalie was busy sizing him up, the man was doing the same to her.

When his eyes fell on her face, the man's light brown pupils sparkled with delight, if only for a fleeting moment.

"Thanks for that. Can I get your name, miss? Allow me to repay you when I get a chance." Sean Thompson extended a hand out to Natalie, seeking acquaintance.

But Natalie merely dusted her clothes, showing no interest in shaking hands with him as she spoke flatly, "No, I don't think we'll be seeing each other anyway."

For someone of his complicated background to be chased down by other people, he must be a security risk. She would be a fool to befriend him.

With that thought, Natalie turned away, walking past Sean, and left the scene.

Sean stroked his chin as he watched her go, eyeing her back like a predator checking out its prey until she disappeared. The woman had aroused his interest.

By the time Natalie returned to the booth, Jasmine was gone. Natalie inquired the designer beside her about Jasmine's disappearance, who told her that Jasmine had left the premises after receiving a call. She looked pale, but no one knew what that was about!

Since the protagonist was no longer around, the rest of the group did not intend to stay long. They quickly filled their stomachs and left the hotel one after another.

The next day, Natalie was summoned to the conference room for a meeting the moment she arrived at the company. She was at the door when she met Shane and Silas, who also came to attend the meeting.

"Mr. Shane," Natalie greeted him.

Shane, too, did not expect to find her here. He was just about to respond when he saw the red mark on her neck. His pupils abruptly shrank, and his mood shifted in an instant.

Who had she spent the night with? Was it Stanley? Or some other guy?

Silas caught Shane staring at Natalie with a ghastly look on his face. Puzzled, the assistant asked, "Mr. Shane, is something the matter?"

Shane did not reply. He looked away and stepped into the conference room, his face dark and brooding.

Silas glanced at Natalie in confusion. His gut was telling him that the woman had something to do with Shane's listlessness. He did not dwell on it and decided to trail after Shane.

At the meeting, Natalie stood in front of the multimedia projector screen, presenting to the senior executives. She talked about her upcoming garment-making process, as well as her ideas for the catwalk.

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Her novel ideas managed to capture their interest, for they proceeded to ask about the feasibility of her plans.

Shane was the only one who kept looking at her without saying a word, a storm brewing in his eyes.

Jasmine, who sat next to him, took note of his strange behavior.

Following his gaze, she was brought to attention the red mark on Natalie's neck. Her eyes widened, sensing a massive crisis at hand. Even her breathing had quickened.

As a bystander, she could read his body language very clearly. Shane was staring at Natalie's neck, clearly out of jealousy!

How long has it been since Natalie started working here? And yet, Shane had already set his sights on that woman. Meanwhile, I have been by his side for five years, and he hasn't even

looked me in the eye! No! This can't go on any longer! I need to drive her away fast, or I'll never feel at ease!

As she kept to her thoughts, Jasmine squeezed her hands tightly and began to hatch a plan in her mind.

Before long, the meeting ended.

The attendees dispersed in twos and threes, and soon only the three of them were left in the conference room.

Natalie got to her feet, wanting to discuss with Shane about the models for the catwalk when the door of the conference room was flung open suddenly. A towering figure came stalking into the room.

"Shane! It's been a while!" The visitor greeted Shane, grinning from ear to ear.

Shane squinted his eyes, giving the man a cold stare before uttering his name, "Sean Thompson!"

Thompson? Wasn't that Shane's surname as well? Are they brothers?

Natalie looked over at the visitor curiously, only for her mouth to fall open in surprise when she registered his face.

It's him!

Jasmine managed to catch Natalie's reaction. An idea clicked in her mind, and she deliberately raised her voice as she spoke, "Ms. Natalie, are you acquainted with Sean?"

Hearing that, Shane instantly shifted his gaze to Natalie as though seeking confirmation of Jasmine's statement.

Under his scrutiny, Natalie nodded but then quickly shook her head, "No, not exactly. We've just met once..."

Before she could finish, Sean interjected and feigned sadness as he grieved, "Oh, how terrible of you to say that. I came here today just to see you."

"To see me?" Natalie, somewhat befuddled, pointed at herself.

"Yes, I specifically asked about you, and it turns out that you work here. And so I came," Sean added as he walked towards her.

Natalie was gravely unfamiliar with the man, and so she was reluctant to get close to him. Subconsciously, she stepped back in the direction that happened to be behind Shane, but she had barely retreated a few steps when Sean grabbed her hand.

Sean shot her a devilish smirk, "Why are you avoiding me? Am I that scary? You certainly weren't avoiding me last night!"

Last night?

Shane was about to reach out to Natalie when he heard Sean's casual statement. Startled, his hand stopped in mid-air, and it took him a while to regain his sense. He retracted his clenched fist with a sullen look on his face.

So, Sean was the one who planted that hickey on her neck!

Whatever Shane had been thinking about naturally crossed Jasmine's mind as well. Sean's ambiguous choice of words was certainly not doing anyone any favors.

"Sean, what's your relationship with Ms. Natalie?" Jasmine pretended to ask out of curiosity as she suppressed her struggling emotions.

Shane's ears twitched ever so slightly. He was apparently concerned about the matter as well.

Sean noticed that brief movement from the corner of his eye and curled his lips into a smirk. "Can't you tell?"

Natalie's eyes widened, and she stared at him in astonishment. Her face flushed with anger from hearing his intentions of deliberately making others misinterpret their relationship.

Before she could rebut, however, Jasmine beat her to talk, "Of course I can. I just wanted to make sure."

She did not understand. Why is God so unfair? Why does Natalie always seem to attract such good men? First, Shane has taken an interest in her, and now Sean... But this could be a good thing. If Natalie and Sean were to become an official couple, then Shane would have to give up on Natalie, right?

While entertaining the idea, Jasmine tugged on Shane's arm, feigning surprise as she said, "Shane, I didn't expect Ms. Natalie and Sean to be a couple."