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Shane was aware of that as well. He chuckled and replied, "I know. I've already ordered Silas to work on it. I'm sure she'll call you in delight after receiving her gifts."

"Okay," said Natalie with a smile as she nodded.

She didn't ask what present he got for Joyce because, given Shane's wealth, the gift was bound to be extremely luxurious.

After that, the two of them changed topics and avoided discussing that particular matter.

After all, it was a terrible ordeal, and thinking about it would just upset both of them.

Their call lasted for over thirty minutes.

Shane had just put his phone away when someone opened the door to his room. The next moment, Jackson entered and greeted, "Shane."

Shane gave a slight nod.

"Are you feeling better?" asked Jackson as he closed the door.

"Yeah," murmured Shane.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't know that Jacqueline would do something like this," said Jackson as he looked apologetically at Shane.

Shane shifted his gaze to Jackson and said calmly, "I know."

Since Jacqueline wanted to con me, she would not have told Jackson. After all, he would have to be a lunatic not to stop her if he knew that she was going to cheat on him. Hence, she had to keep everything a secret to ensure the success of her plan.

Jackson sighed a breath of relief and said, "I'm glad you're aware of it."

Jackson was worried that Shane would suspect him of playing a role in any of that.

"By the way," said Jackson as if he had just recalled something. "Jacqueline and I broke up."

Shane wasn't surprised by that, merely murmuring a reply.

It would be even more surprising if he stays with her after all that she's done.

Jackson was at a loss for words when he saw how calm Shane was.

He remained quiet for a while before asking, "Shane, how will you deal with Jacqueline?"

That question prompted Shane to narrow his eyes. "Are you asking me to show mercy?"

Jackson lowered his head in embarrassment because Shane's words hit the bull's eye. The former said, "In a way, I guess. Even if we are not in a relationship anymore, she is still my friend, so I can't neglect her completely."

However, Shane merely stared at Jackson wordlessly. At that moment, the latter had no idea what Shane was thinking.

Jackson was intimidated by that stare and started to sweat a little. Only then did Shane speak up in a cold tone, "All I can say is that I won't kill her." Those words stunned Jackson.

But he's not going to let her off the hook either.

The way Shane's eyes gleamed without a hint of emotion indicated that the punishment would be something he could not even imagine.

[&]quot;Shane..."

"It's getting late. Please leave," requested Shane as he waved his hand.

Jackson's lips parted as though he had more to say. However, the distant look on Shane's face dissuaded Jackson from doing so. Letting out a sigh, he turned around and left.

Shane closed his eyes and lay back down after watching Jackson leave.

He was still dizzy due to the effects of the drug and needed to rest for a while.

It wasn't until the next afternoon that he fully recovered. Only then did he leave the hospital and head over to the hotel.

However, he didn't deal with Jacqueline straight away. Instead, he went to the other woman's room.

Being locked up was already terrifying enough for the woman, and when she saw Shane, her face turned as white as a sheet.

"M-Mr. Shane," stammered the woman.

Shane stared at her emotionlessly and interrogated, "How much did Jacqueline Graham give you?"

The woman knew what he was talking about, so she got on her knees right away and begged, "Mr. Shane, I have learned from my mistake. I shouldn't have been greedy and helped Ms. Graham in exchange for that money. I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. I will never do that again."

As she spoke, she crawled to Shane to hug his leg and beg for mercy.

Unfortunately, Shane had already anticipated that, so he kicked her away before she could touch him.

The woman sprawled on the floor like a ragged doll. Fear donned her face as she muttered, "Mr. Shane..."

"Do you not understand what I just asked? How much did Jacqueline give you?" growled Shane as he glared at the woman viciously.

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The woman trembled in fear, but she didn't dare to cry anymore and was quick to reply, "T-Three hundred thousand."

Shane scoffed upon hearing that and mocked, "Three hundred thousand was all it took to get you to drug someone on her behalf? How cheap. Have you ever considered the possibility that not only might you never receive that money, but you could also get killed?"

The woman gasped after hearing that. Scared mindless, she asked, "M-Mr. Shane, are you going to kill me?"

"You schemed against me. Do you really think that I'd let you go?"

The woman trembled as she insisted, "Mr. Shane, it wasn't my doing. Ms. Graham was the one who drugged you. All I did was show up and let slip that I was the culprit while trying to take you to the lounge. She hired me to do that so that you wouldn't suspect her of being the mastermind. In truth, she is the one behind everything. I had nothing to do with it, Mr. Shane!"

"Although you did not drug me, what you did could've destroyed my family! That is why I will not show you any mercy," roared Shane before he turned and left.

Scared out of her wits, the woman sat there in a daze as tears rolled down her cheeks.

At that moment, she truly regretted her decision. Why did I let myself get blinded by the money? How did I forget that the target is the CEO of Thompson Group?

He is known as Lucifer among the tycoons in J City, and being caught meant either death or torture. Why the f*ck did I trust Jacqueline when she said that I could get out of it in one piece?

She even promised that she would save me on the off chance that Mr. Shane captures me. Yet, she is nowhere to be seen.

The thought of that made the woman laugh and cry simultaneously at the thought of her future. She knew that everything would be bleak from then on.

Meanwhile, Shane walked out of the room that the woman was in and went straight to the elevator.

Silas followed closely behind and asked, "How should we deal with that woman, Mr. Shane?"

"Have you figured out who she is?" asked Shane.

Silas nodded and replied, "Yes. She is an escort who is quite famous in her field. Some time ago, the Potters got into a heated battle because of her."

"Really?" said Shane with his brows raised. "What happened?"

Silas pressed the elevator button and answered, "That woman used to be Mr. Potter's mistress. She faked her pregnancy and went to his house to make a scene. Mrs. Potter got so upset that she almost jumped from a building to commit suicide. Even then, Mr. Potter sided with that woman. In the end, Mrs. Potter's parents showed up and forced Mr. Potter to resolve the matter."

Shane's narrowed eyes gleamed with disgust. He said, "Looks like this woman is vile in nature. In that case, send her off to a third-world country and let Mrs. Potter know about it."

"Understood," replied Silas while pushing his glasses up and nodding.

A third-world country is the last place you'd want to live in as wars break out there all the time.

That woman's destiny is sealed once she gets there. She'd either get infected with some disease in the wild or get killed by the natives.

I guess she had it coming, though. That is what one gets for crossing Mr. Shane.

The woman's fate was decided then and there.

By then, Shane had arrived outside the room where Jacqueline was locked in, which was the lounge he was in yesterday.

Shane shot a look at Silas, who then stepped forward and got a card out to open the door.

As he did so, the lights inside the room turned on.

When Shane walked in, he saw that a pale-looking Jacqueline who was sitting on the bed.

In the past, he would've been worried and asked her what had happened upon seeing her in that state.

At that moment, however, he acted like he didn't notice how terrible she looked.

Shane walked into the room and stood in front of Jacqueline before saying, "I used to think that you are a kind and innocent woman."

Hearing those words got Jacqueline to grin in a self-mocking way and reply, "So are you disappointed in me now, Shane?"

Shane pursed his lips. "No. Your lack of innocence is not the reason I'm disappointed."

Hearing that prompted Jacqueline to look at him in puzzlement. It seemed like she had no idea what he was talking about.

Shane stared at her calmly while he explained, "It is rare to see someone remain kind and innocent when living in an environment like ours. However, being selfish and scheming isn't necessarily a

bad thing because it's how we protect ourselves in order to survive."

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"Then why are you disappointed?" asked Jacqueline in confusion.

Shane massaged his temples and answered, "I'm disappointed with what you did."

Jacqueline gritted her teeth and demanded, "Was I wrong for doing that?"

"Weren't you?" challenged Shane as he looked at her.

Jacqueline looked up and replied stubbornly, "There's nothing wrong with what I did. I was simply pursuing the person I love and my own happiness."

"But I don't love you," said Shane mercilessly.

Jacqueline suppressed the sting in her heart. Tears swirled in her reddened eyes as she replied, "I know, and it's fine that you don't love me, Shane. All that matters is that I love you. I fell for you when I was a kid, and I have dreamed of being with you ever since. I thought that I had a shot at that, but Natalie wrecked my dream when she showed up out of nowhere."

At the mention of Natalie, Jacqueline's face contorted with hatred.

Seeing that prompted Shane to ask, "You hate her, don't you?"

"Yes, I hate her! I hate her with every fiber of my being," roared Jacqueline. "I was the one who met you first, but you ended up with her. How can I be okay with that? How can I not hate her?"

"Is that why you targeted her and drugged me?" asked Shane in his usual cold tone.

With a tear-streaked face, Jacqueline said, "I am jealous of her. She is always all lovey-dovey with you, so how can I not target her? I thought that the two of you would get a divorce after your last argument, and I waited. Yet, all I got in return for my patience was the news that you two got back together. That was why I decided to stop waiting around. I needed to be proactive."

Suddenly, Jacqueline laughed maniacally as she added, "Since I couldn't break the two of you up, I could only try to keep you by my side by using underhanded methods. However, my plan failed because I was too kind."

"Kind?" blurted Shane as he narrowed his eyes. It was obvious that he found her choice of words appalling. He certainly didn't see any signs of kindness in her.

Jacqueline looked at him and replied, "Yes, I was too kind. I should've given you a date rape drug, but you were on Jackie's medication, and I worried that you'd have an allergic reaction if I gave you that drug. That was why I used a sedative instead. If I hadn't, we would've already slept together by the time Joyce showed up."

That was why she regretted her decision.

Shane didn't understand why Jacqueline hadn't used a date rape drug until she explained everything. Ah, so that's why.

However, Shane wasn't touched at all.

It didn't matter what drug she used. She was still guilty of drugging him.

"I have never loved you. Do you really think that I'd marry you even if we slept together?" said Shane mercilessly.

Jacqueline's heart skipped a beat. A bad feeling crept up on her and prompted her to ask, "Wouldn't you?"

"No. Why would I marry someone who schemed against me?" said Shane as he looked at her.

Jacqueline shuddered as she demanded, "Why not? I got the paparazzi involved. If we slept together and the paparazzi spread the news, everyone would think that you raped me. Wouldn't you be worried that Thompson Group...?"

"I would rather give Thompson Group up than marry you," said Shane without hesitation.

Jacqueline was instantly lost. She refuted, "Give Thompson Group up? Stop lying, Shane. Your grandpa fought endlessly to give you that company, and you promised him that you would do right by the company. Why would...?"

"You're right. I promised Grandpa that I would develop Thompson Group, but that was before I learned how he covered up for Sean. He helped the murderer who killed my parents! Now that I have learned the truth, what makes you think I will remain loyal to Thompson Group?" said Shane.

Jacqueline was flabbergasted.

That's true. To Shane, his grandpa is an accomplice for covering up for Sean, who murdered his parents. Hence, why would he honor a promise he made to that man?

By then, Jacqueline's face was as white as a sheet, and her entire body had turned cold.

If Shane doesn't care about Thompson Group, what is the point in me doing all this?

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This is humiliating.

A scornful laugh escaped her lips, and tears started to fall from her eyes.

However, Jacqueline wasn't ready to give up yet. She continued to argue, "Even so, do you really not care about the Thompson Group

at all? You've been managing the company for so many years, so I don't believe that you don't have even a hint of attachment to it."

"I don't," Shane answered without hesitation. "Whatever attachment I had for Thompson Group was gone the moment I found out about the truth. That's why it's fine for me even if the company goes bankrupt. With my capabilities, it's not a problem for me to start a company that's better than Thompson Group."

That's true.

And Jacqueline had nothing to say about it.

So he's really willing to watch Thompson Group go bankrupt instead of marrying me.

"Haha..." She let out a scornful laugh because she knew that all her efforts were for nothing.

"What are you going to do to me now, Shane?" she asked as tears streamed down her face.

"Don't worry. I won't be doing anything for now because I don't have sufficient evidence regarding some matters. So in the meantime, I'll have you locked up somewhere. I'll only decide what to do with you once I have all the evidence I need," he replied.

"Some matters? Such as?" Jacqueline asked.

Is it about Natalie or his parents?

She couldn't tell what was on his mind, and it sent her into a panic.

However, Shane did not answer her question. "I'll have Silas bring you somewhere after this. You'll be spending your time there until we gather enough evidence."

"You're going to lock me up?" The woman hopped off the bed and added, "You can't do this to me, Shane. My great-grandpa wouldn't agree to this."

"The Gunn family are being oppressed by the Garcia family. So they won't have the time to care about you," he answered indifferently.

As if she had lost all her energy, Jacqueline fell onto the floor with a thud as she said, "How is that possible? Why would the Garcia family do that to the Gunn family?"

Still, Shane didn't answer her question and merely stared at her with cold eyes. "You better watch out from now on."

With that, he turned and left.

At the sight of him leaving, she quickly chased after him and begged, "Please don't go, Shane. I was wrong. I admit to my mistakes now. Please, Shane..."

Yet, Shane ignored her and told Silas to close the door once he was out.

Her shouts and pleas were then blocked off by the door.

"Send her to the Graham family's villa and arrange a few men to watch the place. Call me if anything happens," he said as he rubbed his temples.

"Alright." Silas nodded.

After he left the place, Shane drove to the kindergarten.

"Daddy!" He had just arrived when the two children saw him and ran toward him cheerfully.

The man bent down and picked Sharon up. "Have you been a good girl today?"

"Yep. I even got awarded a sticker." As she spoke, she took out her sticker and showed it to him.

Shane's glumness was swept away in an instant, and a smile appeared on his face. "That's great, Sharon."

The girl started to giggle after being praised.

Of course, Shane hadn't forgotten about Connor and asked him a few questions as well.

However, the questions he asked were about the high school curriculum instead of the boy's performance in kindergarten.

Seeing that Connor could answer his questions with ease, Shane nodded in satisfaction.

"Daddy, I'm hungry," Sharon said as she rubbed her belly.

"Then I'll bring you both to get something to eat," he said while carrying Sharon in one arm and holding Connor's hand. After they got into the car, he drove to the nearest restaurant.

The little girl seemed unhappy after their meal.

After fastening the seat belt for her, Shane asked as he caressed her hair, "What's wrong?"

"She misses Mommy," Connor answered. "She's always like that when she misses Mommy."

Upon hearing that, Shane started to estimate the time overseas and smiled after a moment. He then pulled out his phone and invited Natalie to a video call.

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It was a morning where Natalie was, and she heard her phone ringing the moment she stepped out of the bathroom.

Her lips curled into a smile when she saw who it was, and she quickly answered, "Hi, Darling."

The man's handsome face appeared on the screen. "Awake already?"

"I just got up. Why did you call so early in the morning?" Natalie asked as she took off the shower cap and started to comb through her hair.

Shane's eyes darkened as he stared at her fair neck. His voice became slightly hoarse as he said, "The kids miss you."

With that said, he handed his phone to his children, who were staring at him in anticipation.

Their faces popped up on the screen together as they shouted, "Mommy!"

Natalie's heart melted at the sight of them being so excited. "Yes, I'm here."

"I miss you so much, Mommy," Sharon said with a pout.

Even though Connor said nothing, it was evident that he was feeling the same as it was written all over his face.

Tears welled up in Natalie's eyes as she said, "I miss the both of you too."

"I'll bring them to you during the weekend," Shane said suddenly.

"The weekend?" she asked dumbfoundedly.

"Yes. I have time this weekend," he answered.

Natalie wasn't sure how she should react as she said, "Didn't we talk about this previously and agree that you'd only come once every fortnight? I've only been here for three days!"

"It's fine. They miss you, and so do I. That's why we're going to visit you." As he spoke, Shane leaned closer to his children and stared at her with loving eyes. Her face flushed red, and after seeing the excited look in her children's eyes, she couldn't bring herself to refuse. So she nodded and said, "Alright then."

"Yay!" Sharon shouted as she raised her hands in celebration.

Connor, too, broke into a grin.

Even Shane could not help but let out a smile.

The family continued to talk for a while before the call finally ended.

"Are you done, Nat? The preliminary round's starting in half an hour," Sally suddenly knocked on the door and urged.

Natalie quickly put down her phone and answered, "In a second."

"Okay. Hurry up. I'll go arrange for a driver," Sally said, her voice getting further away as she spoke.

Grunting in acknowledgment, Natalie quickly went back into her room and got changed.

After half an hour, both of them finally arrived.

It was the first day of the competition, and they would be competing in the preliminary round.

The preliminary round held this time was very different from the previous ones. In the past, the competitions held were all conducted using the elimination method. Just like any other competition, the weakest participants were eliminated. This would continue for four more rounds until the champion was determined.

However, the system was different this year, whereby the participants would be arranged in groups and compete together instead of individually.

This meant that the capability of the participants would be tested during the first round, and they would then be grouped according to that. Thereafter, they would compete in groups. Once there were only two participants left, another competition system would be adopted.

The rules for the final round had yet to be announced, so the participants would only find out about it later on.

"Are you nervous, Nat?" Sally asked softly as she stood behind Natalie.

The latter shook her head and replied, "No."

It's just a competition. There's nothing to feel nervous about.

"What about you? Are you nervous?" she asked.

Sally's eyes gleamed while she shook her head excitedly. "Nope. I feel so happy just thinking about standing on the same stage as the senior supermodels."

"Is that so? I'm glad you're feeling that way." Natalie nodded and heaved a sigh of relief.

She was worried that her friend would feel nervous since it was the first time the latter was participating in an international event. If that was the case, she would be prone to making mistakes, which would leave a bad impression.

Luckily, Sally didn't disappoint her at all.

"Woah, isn't this Natalie? Are you finally out of the hospital?" Just then, Hannah's sarcastic words were heard.

Sally rolled her eyes and said, "D*mn it. Why is she here?"

Natalie was starting to get a headache. Does Hannah even have a brain? She always ends up embarrassing herself whenever she tries to pick a fight with us, but she'd still come back every time.

It's like she's a masochist!

Hannah didn't know what both of them were thinking. She walked toward them and stared at Natalie with eyes full of mockery. "I heard you were admitted to the hospital because of a miscarriage. Is it true?"

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A grim look crossed Natalie's face as she said, "Apologize now."

"What?" Hannah pretended not to hear her.

Natalie glared at her with icy eyes and demanded, "I said apologize!"

Taken aback by her gaze, Hannah stiffened involuntarily. However, she seemed to have thought of something the next moment as a smile appeared on her face. "Alright, alright. I'll apologize. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that you had a miscarriage. Will that do?"

"What kind of apology is that?" Sally bellowed while glaring at her.

Hannah then retorted in dissatisfaction, "What? You're the ones who demanded that I apologize, yet you're not satisfied with it now? What do you want then?"

"Have you seen how you apologized earlier? Who would do that?" Sally said with a flushed face.

"What's wrong with that? Anyway, I've already apologized. I don't care if you don't accept it. Hmph!"

She rolled her eyes at them and left.

Sally was about to chase after her, but Natalie stopped her.

"Forget it. It won't do us any good if we make a scene here."

"But how can we let her off the hook just like that? I can't accept it. This is just so infuriating," she grumbled angrily.

Her friend then said with narrowed eyes, "Don't worry. I'll get my revenge sooner or later, and I'll strike her once I get the chance."

Sally's eyes brightened as she asked, "What are you planning to do?"

Natalie smiled in response but said nothing.

Meanwhile, Hannah was back at Jessie's side. "Ms. Syke, I've angered Natalie as per your instruction."

The latter's lips curled into a smile as she said, "Good."

"But I don't understand. Why did you make me use Natalie's miscarriage as an excuse to anger her?"

Jessie's eyes darkened as she said, "It's simple. Didn't you see what happened yesterday? I don't know what she saw, but something infuriated her, and it affected her baby. I want that to continue, and if we don't succeed this time, we'll do it again. I want her to have a miscarriage for real."

If it weren't for the organizers of the competition who installed surveillance cameras everywhere because they wanted to protect the participants, she wouldn't have resorted to such an idiotic way. She would have killed the child in Natalie's belly directly if she could.

However, this was the only way if she didn't want to be caught on one of the cameras. In other words, Jessie would never let Natalie give birth to Shane's child. There wasn't anything she could do about the two children since they were already so old, but she could never tolerate the child who wasn't born yet.

Hannah inhaled sharply as she stared at the woman in fear. "Ms. Syke, do you have a grudge against Natalie?"

I can't believe she wants to get rid of the baby.

Even though she didn't like Natalie, she never wished for her to have a miscarriage. All she would do was gloat if the latter were to miscarry. After all, all Hannah felt toward her was just jealousy.

Yet, Jessie was thinking of doing something so extreme.

"That's right. I do have a grudge against her. I can't even tolerate being in the same room as her. That's how much I hate her. I assure you, you'll become an international model as long as you do what I want."

Hannah swallowed in fright upon hearing that.

She knew that the woman before her was dangerous. But the words 'international model' were too much of a temptation, and she couldn't bring herself to refuse.

So she nodded instinctively. Her face was full of determination as though she had thought something through as she said, "Alright."

Content with the reply, Jessie smiled.

Soon, the competition started.

There was a total of ninety-six costume designers participating, and it was such a glorious sight as they sat together.

Natalie was sitting in the middle seat of the second row, waiting for the host to announce the theme for the competition.

Suddenly, she felt a penetrating gaze directed at her, and she couldn't help but straighten her back. She instinctively turned to look and saw Jessie, who was sitting two rows behind her.

"It's her?" she mumbled as she narrowed her eyes.

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The woman didn't panic when Natalie noticed her. Instead, she waved and smiled, seemingly greeting the other woman.

At that sight, the latter could only return a smile instead of acting like she hadn't noticed.

Something's different about Jessie today.

Normally, she would wear a high ponytail, showing her smooth forehead and slender neck.

However, she had curled her hair and let it down.

Jessie was also wearing a pair of glasses which made her look smart.

Although she was puzzled by the woman's sudden change, Natalie didn't think much of it. A woman changing her style from time to time was a normal thing, after all, so it wasn't worth looking into it.

Natalie turned back to the front once she had returned the smile.

Jessie smirked as she stared at the back of the other woman's head. Then she reached up to adjust her glasses, and the lenses shone with an imperceptible blue light. A short while later, the competition started.

The host got on stage and announced the theme, which was a relatively easy one. All the designers needed to do was design a dress for their models.

The host didn't specify the type of dress they needed to design, so it meant that the designers could do whatever they wanted with it. Nonetheless, they were still required to come up with a dress that would show off the model's body shape and temperament.

It meant that they shouldn't design the dresses like how they usually did. They couldn't treat their models as mere mannequins, not caring if the clothes suited them. Instead, they needed to treat their models as their clients.

Natalie knew all too well about Sally. She's just a nut job.

As for her figure, there wasn't much to say about it since she was a model.

That was why there were so many ideas for the dress that could work on Sally.

Still deep in thought, Natalie smiled at the model and started to sketch out her ideas.

Meanwhile, Jessie couldn't help but frown when she saw her sketching so soon, a sense of crisis slowly rising in her heart.

Then, she tapped on one of the earrings she was wearing.

Soon enough, a woman's hoarse voice sounded from the earring.

Jessie was the only one who could hear the voice. "Hold on. I'm drawing it out for you now."

Upon hearing that, her furrowed brows relaxed, and the sense of crisis she felt was instantly relieved. Right then, a glint of provocation flashed across her eyes as she looked at Natalie.

Natalie was finally done drawing her design after an hour. She had decided to make an asymmetrical waterfall dress with straps.

The dress was able to show both Sally's feminine and bubbly side.

Moreover, the train of the dress would make the model's leg seem more slender.

After drawing out the design, it was time to start making the dress.

Since there wasn't enough time, the dress couldn't be made into a ready-to-wear garment. Natalie could only put the pieces of fabric together with straight pins and have Sally wear them. Then, the panel of judges would announce the score after the model walked down the runway wearing the dress.

Natalie quickly got up and went to the fabrics corner to get the stuff she needed.

Right then, Jessie appeared and stood beside Natalie. While she picked out her fabrics, she said, "Are you confident that you'll be assigned to Team A?"

Team A was the team with extremely talented participants who had the best results.

All the designers there wanted to be assigned to Team A. However, it was only wishful thinking for most of them.

After all, the fact that the designers were able to participate in an international competition meant that they were all equally talented and capable. That was why it was still unknown as to who would actually be assigned to Team A.

Natalie tilted her head slightly and answered with a smile, "I'm not sure either. We'll see what the judges say."

Jessie's eyes flickered before she said, "Well, I think you'll be able to get in, Ms. Smith. That talent of yours is rarely seen, after all."

"Oh, not at all. I am just slightly more talented. I'm not as good as you say," Natalie said with a smile. She could feel the hostile gazes directed toward her.

Seeing that she wasn't falling for it, Jessie's eyes turned cold, but she still maintained her smile. "You're too humble, Ms. Smith."

"I'm not humble. I was just speaking the truth. Alright then, Ms. Syke. The fabric I want isn't here, so I'll take a look there."

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Natalie made her way to the other side once she finished her sentence.

Sally approached her and said, "Nat, Jessie's such a cunning woman! She complimented you in front of others and said you're going to make the cut for Team A! It's obvious she's trying to make you everyone's foe!"

It's everyone's dream to be a member of Team A. Since Jessie mentioned Nat is going to make it, others will definitely consider Nat a formidable foe. Maybe they'll try something to bring upon her downfall to ensure they'll get another chance.

Natalie found the infuriated Sally hilarious. She chuckled and asserted, "Why don't you take it easy? I have long figured out the things she has in mind. Therefore, I won't fall for her tricks."

Sally asked, "I don't get it! Have you offended her or something? Why won't she stop picking on you?"

Shaking her head, Natalie answered, "I have no idea as well. Maybe it's just a thing she has for her fellow competitors. At the end of the day, we're all foes. As long as she gets to take one of us out, she'll get to climb her way up the ranks."

"I think there's more to the situation than that!" Sally gave it a thought and added, "Have you not seen her scrunched-up face when she walks past you? It seems as though she's holding a grudge against you! Ugh! It gives me a chill whenever I think about it!"

Natalie asked with her brows furrowed, "Are you serious?"

Nodding, Sally asserted, "I'm pretty sure I haven't been seeing things! Those who aren't aware of the things going on might think you have brought upon her demise or something! No ordinary persons would glare at others for no reason!"

Natalie went dead silent with her lips pursed when she figured out the sort of grudge Jessie had been harboring against her.

When the woman lost herself in a process of thought to figure out the truth, Sally handed a stash of fabrics to her and asked, "Are these the slub-women fabrics you have been searching for? I remember coming across something similar in your notebook."

Natalie snapped out of her bewilderment and glanced at the glistering fabrics Sally had with her. She responded with a smile and asserted, "Yes! Thanks, Sal!"

"It's not a big deal!" Sally dismissively waved a hand at her in return.

A few seconds later, Natalie started gathering the fabrics she needed. Once she had everything, she started weaving the dress she had in mind.

Things got lively in the room as the sounds of sewing machines and fabrics being torn into pieces could be heard.

Natalie focused on completing the outline of the dress with the basic technique of draping different layers of fabrics together.

It took her a total of three hours to complete her masterpiece.

Shortly after she was done, she noticed most of the designers had their pieces ready. However, there were still a minority of designers working on their pieces. After a short glimpse around, Natalie noticed that Jessie was a member of the lattermost.

Jessie had chosen to employ a similar technique. However, she was drenched in sweat and seemed to be having a hard time creating the piece she had in mind.

Natalie couldn't fathom the reason behind Jessie's struggles.

What's going on? Why can't a fairly renowned designer create the piece she has in mind? What's with her subpar skills? There's no way she'll be able to reproduce the masterpiece she has designed with those inferior skills of hers!

A glance was all it took for Natalie to figure out Jessie's design was a masterpiece. Nonetheless, the skills Jessie had demonstrated were subpar to the rest of the designers.

Is it because Jessie has focused on polishing her design skills and neglected the technical aspects? If that's the case, how is she going to complete her customers' orders?

Is she going to acquire someone else's aid to complete her design? If that's the case, she'll never become a top-notch designer with that inferior skills of hers!

Thirty minutes later, everyone had their piece completed for the show.

Sally and the rest of the models had long gotten themselves ready in the makeup studio backstage.

Natalie showed up with the dress she had completed and started dolling Sally up based on the image she had in mind.

The rest of the designers had done the same because no makeup artist could come up with the makeup suitable for a dress that was fresh out of the oven.

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In other words, the designers of the dress were the only ones capable of coming up with the most suitable makeup to go along with their masterpiece.

Natalie managed to doll Sally up within a short period of time since the white dress of hers had a relatively simple theme. Thus, only simple eye makeup would do—no ostentatious makeup was required to complement the masterpiece.

As soon as Natalie finished dolling Sally up, she handed over her dress to Sally.

The model gaped at the sight of the dress. She exclaimed breathlessly, "It's so pretty, Nat!" "You need to get going right now. Get yourself changed immediately! We only have fifteen minutes left until the show!" Natalie stuffed the dress in between Sally's arms once she finished her sentence.

Sally nodded and sprinted over in the direction of the fitting room. Similarly, the rest of the models rushed over to the fitting room once the designers got their makeup done.

The sequence had been determined through drawing lots. Sally was the fortieth amongst the rest of the models. There was nothing special about it since she was in the middle of the rest.

However, Natalie was grateful that Sally wasn't one of the last few for the show. Otherwise, it would be tough to please the judges after the countless ostentatious pieces portrayed.

The judges might be biased unless there was an exceptional masterpiece that could impress them by the end of the session.

Jessie, whose model was the eighty-fourth to show up, was irritated.

Natalie noticed Sally had her eyes glued to the runway once she returned. Thus, the former urged, "Just take it easy and have fun."

In an attempt to calm herself, Sally clenched her fists with all her might. She then reassured Natalie, "I'm not nervous at all! Instead, I can't wait for my turn! I can't believe I have the chance to be part of this glamorous event!"

"Well, I'm glad you're doing just fine." Natalie heaved a sigh of relief and urged Sally for one last time, "Do your best! I'll return to the hall and join the rest of the audience."

As a fellow designer, it was a great opportunity for her to learn from her peers and get a grasp of her potential competitors' capabilities.

She wasn't the only one with that thought. In fact, most of the designers had departed. Only a mere few chose to stay behind with their models.

Sally beckoned Natalie to leave her and assured, "You need to get going already! I'll be fine!"

When Jessie caught Natalie making her way back to the hall after wrapping up the conversation she had with Sally with a smile, she swirled her eyes and followed suit. A short while after Natalie returned to the hall, the show commenced. The moment the first model showed up on the runway, everyone had their eyes glued to her.

Natalie's eyes gleamed in excitement. She immediately reached for her notebook and started jotting down the details she deemed worthy of taking notes.

She could easily tell that Nolan's mentee, Caitlyn, was the designer of the dress — she had once encountered Caitlyn when the woman was better known as Mina back in the day.

A few days ago, Natalie encountered Caitlyn in the restroom, but Caitlyn seemed to have forgotten her.

When Natalie started jotting down the things she deemed worthy of taking notes, someone interrupted her and asked, "Ms. Smith, are you taking notes?"

Natalie responded with a frown and turned around to look at the one who had shown up behind her.

It turned out Jessie had returned to a hall and was about to take a seat next to Natalie.

In return, Natalie nodded and answered, "I think it's quite important to get a grasp of our competitors' capabilities for the upcoming matches."

"Ms. Smith, you're such a hardworking woman!" Jessie ran her fingers through her hair, exposing the earring she had put on.

The glistering earring caught Natalie's attention. "Ms. Syke, that's quite a unique earring you have. They're glistening in the dark in spite of them being matte earrings."

When Jessie heard Natalie's remark, her expression changed. She stopped messing around with her hair and forced a smile in return. "These are obsidian earrings that have been coated with matte black paint."

"Oh?" Natalie answered with her brows arched in confusion. She found it unnecessary to coat obsidian earrings with matte black paint, but in the end, she decided to pay no heed to it.

After all, she wasn't in a position to pick on Jessie and her preferences.

Jessie's racing heart stopped pounding furiously. She secretly heaved a long sigh of relief as Natalie stopped getting to the bottom of her earrings.

Oh, God! That's so close! I need to be mindful of my behavior and stop playing with my hair in the future!

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The models showed up on the runway one after another. It was soon Sally's turn.

It was her debut in an international show, but the woman wasn't anxious the slightest bit—she was able to carry herself just fine with a smile.

She portrayed Natalie's masterpiece with a bright grin when she reached the judges. After a short while, she sashayed her way around in the opposite direction.

As she strode in the direction of the backstage with her chest held high, Sally snuck a wink at Natalie. She charmed the audience with her assertive look, impressing the journalists who had never heard of her before the show.

Proud of Sally and her performance, Natalie had faith that the woman would soon make a name out of herself in the fashion industry.

"Ms. Smith, you have such an exceptional model!" Jessie remarked in a sarcastic manner, indicating her jealously once again.

Natalie immediately noticed it was a double innuendo. Thus, she played along with Jessie and replied, "Thanks, Ms. Syke. Your model isn't half bad as well."

Jessie's eyes widened in disbelief when she heard Natalie's reply. She was surprised Natalie had the audacity to return the favor in a sarcastic manner.

"You need to stop flattering me, Ms. Smith. She's just a nobody as compared to your model over there."

Suppressing the urge to laugh, Natalie rebuked, "You're the one who's supposed to stop belittling yourself, Ms. Syke! I'm sure there's something special about her! Otherwise, you wouldn't have brought her along with you in the first place!"

"H-Hahaha—" Jessie responded with a sheepish grin and wrapped up their conversation.

There's something special about her? If you're referring to her arrogant and childish attitude, I guess you're right!

It was soon Hannah's turn, Jessie's model, to show up on the runway.

Hannah had put on a relatively revealing black dress. It could perfectly highlight her busty figure due to its perfect cutting and design.

However, Hannah had brought upon the downfall of the masterpiece as she was nervous and failed to carry herself in a confident manner.

The woman's eyes wouldn't stop flickering the moment she showed up on the runway. The judges furrowed their brows when they caught a glimpse of Hannah's odd expression. Meanwhile, the rest of the designers could barely suppress the urge to laugh.

The moment Jessie heard someone chuckling in the dark, she flushed and glared at Hannah as she couldn't take things out on the designers.

Judging by their interaction, Natalie was certain Jessie would get Hannah back for her subpar performance on the runway once the show was over.

Once the show came to an end, Natalie cleared her throat and remarked with the urge to laugh written all over her face, "Ms. Syke, your model has portrayed your masterpiece in quite a unique manner. I guess it's a job well done, huh?"

Jessie forced a smile in response to Natalie's sarcastic remark.

Unwilling to give up just yet, Natalie looked at Jessie in the eyes and queried, "Ms. Syke, what's the reason you have chosen to collaborate with Hannah? Is it merely because you think she's the one?"

Jessie's eyes flickered when she heard Natalie. She then answered, "Actually, it's because of a favor she has done me quite some time ago. I'm just trying to return the favor and repay her."

"Oh! You're such a wonderful friend for doing so! With that being said, aren't you afraid she's going to ruin your career and your masterpiece?"

Jessie looked elsewhere to avoid Natalie's gaze as she asserted, "I-I'll try my best and show her the proper way to carry herself in the upcoming match."

"I wish you the best of luck then, Ms. Syke!" Once again, Natalie wrapped up the conversation with a bright grin.

Jessie secretly clenched her fists with all her might to suppress the urge to take things out on Hannah. Truth be told, she really regretted pairing up with the woman after the show.

Actually, she had only acquired Hannah's help after figuring out the sort of grudge Hannah held against Natalie.