**Luciana At The Success Party**

by Llorna

*She wasn't successful, and now the office will see her naked.*

"A prize is only a prize if it's valuable to the recipient." I smiled at Lance.

"Meaning?" he asked.

"Having you nude at the party for an hour isn't very valuable compared to what's at stake." I looked around at the others in my team."It's an office party. I have to work with the same people the next day. A 50-percent chance of having to be naked there is too much."

"I see," said Lance. "Risk-averse Luciana."

Amee and Drake laughed. I had called my team for a meeting in the cafeteria, and our business was done. Lance had proposed a wager based on the result of our local election. It was generally considered too close to call, so I saw the wager as a fifty percent chance of losing.

"What Luciana is saying," said Winona, the fifth person at our table. "Is she isn't all that interested in looking at your package."

"No offense," I said quickly. "It'd be fun to have you naked at a party, but it's just not appropriate for an office affair."

"And not enough incentive for Luciana to strip off before coworkers," said Drake. "Including us, who report to Luciana. You need to offer something more valuable, Lance boy. Work out a good offer. You have time -- our party is next month."

The company had done exceptionally well for three quarters in a row and our branch manager had announced a celebration -- a party at a popular restaurant. The result of the election would be declared the same evening. Since Lance and I favored opposing candidates, he'd suggested the bet.

I went back to my cubicle, and the others dispersed to make calls or visits. The silly wager had made everyone in the company laugh but was binned. Or so I thought.

"Herbert's running five minutes late," I said. My team was sitting around the table again. Our branch manager had asked to speak to us urgently. Ours was a company of young people, and informal meetings around a cafeteria table were encouraged. Unless there were confidential matters to be discussed.

"Hello, Luciana," said Herbert, striding up to us. Our branch manager was just the other side of forty. "Hi, guys. Sorry I'm late. Let's begin."

"Sure, boss," I said. It was unusual for Herbert to be so abrupt. He was a cheerful and fun guy most days.

"Touche, Luciana!" He leaned back in his chair and smiled. "I have an offer for you guys. The company's advanced the new product launch, so we have to finish it by month's end. They've sent us leads, too, so you people just have to convert them and fill up the order book.

"Luciana, you're the newest team manager, so I'm offering it to you first. It's a great opportunity for you."

"I see," I said, trying to control my excitement. These special campaigns usually carried higher bonuses and raised standing in the company. "But we already have a lot on our plate. Month-end is just 11 working days."

"Put routine stuff on the back-burner," Herbert suggested. "Our branch has exceeded targets this quarter anyway. Get after this and give me something to show when I go to headquarters next month."

"We'll do our best," I promised him. "Get on it right away."

"Love that attitude," Herbert said, smiling. He looked at Amee, Lance, Drake, and Winona. "Incentives will be one and a half times the usual, so bend your back for this one!"

"I heard about your bet, which Luciana turned down," Herbert said, looking at Lance. We all laughed. Lance protested, saying it was just a joke.

"Well, I'll add something nice and with spice," said Herbert, grinning at me. I felt a frisson of fear. "A one-bedroom suite at a luxury resort in the Bahamas and two business-class tickets."

I held my breath and tried to remain calm. This incentive was worth several thousand dollars. A Bahamas vacation had been a dream for as long as I could remember.

"The target is half a million dollars of orders for the new product. Our success party's on the second of next month, and that's where we'll announce the sales figures." Herbert smiled at me. "If you get there, you go home from the party and start packing. If you don't get there, you undress on the stage and remain naked till the party ends."

I froze. This was utterly unexpected, coming from our branch head. I heard a dozen people cheering and clapping. It wasn't just my team, I realized. People at nearby tables had joined in enthusiastically. At 29, I was the youngest manager in the branch, and I knew not everyone was happy about it.

I was quiet for several seconds. "So if we don't hit the half million, I don't pack my bags but get naked in front of sixty coworkers." I kept my voice low.

"Well, there has to be some challenge," said Herbert, grinning. "Lance's wager caught everyone's imagination, though you didn't take it up. And it'll be a good incentive for you."

"What were the sales numbers for our last launch?" I asked. I'd been a manager only a few months and didn't have the information others had.

Herbert waved his hand airily. "You'll get all the data. But decide now, Luciana. The launch is soon, and I have to finalize the team today."

I could sense everyone in the cafeteria holding their breath, wondering if I would have the courage to take on this challenge. My team was quiet. Around me, I heard people chuckling. I thrust my hand out at Herbert.

"Deal," I said, and Herbert shook my hand. "We'll give it our best shot.

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"We'll all work double hours and fill that order book!" Winona tried to cheer me up after Herbert left.

"And think Bahamas!" said Lance. "You'll have an amazing time."

The next two weeks were a blur. My team and I worked long hours and visited multiple potential clients every day. I started visiting clients with my team members, hoping for more conversions. On the last day of the month, I took potential clients to lunch and dinner, desperate to meet my target.

And all through these two weeks, my coworkers stopped to talk to me. How's the campaign going? New product taking off? It's a tough target, let me know if I can help.

And the unspoken thoughts, which I could sense from both men and women. Hope you get stripped at the party. Can't wait to see you naked.

The first of the new month was a Thursday, and I met with my team in the morning. "We've ignored our regulars over the past two weeks. Let's go back to talking with them and providing them service." Then, with a forced smile, "Party tomorrow!"

"And the Bahamas!" said Lance. "Who's going with you? Do you have a boyfriend?"

"If we win," I said. "We'll exchange the two business class tickets for five regular ones. And we'll figure out something for an additional room. What do you guys say?"

I held out my hand, and all four crowded around, joining the handshake. The four of them had been resentful of being put into my team at first, but had worked smoothly together after the early weeks.

Winona came and hugged me from behind. "That is so incredibly generous of you, Luciana!"

I shook my head. "You people have put your all into this. I've seen all of you stretching yourselves. Wouldn't be fair for me to hog the prize." I paused. "If any."

Amee lingered after the others had left. "How's it looking, Luciana? Are we likely to hit it?"

"My running count is a little over the half million mark. But clients sometimes cancel or reduce their orders." I shook my head. "We won't know till Herbert announces it on stage tomorrow night."

Amee looked me up and down, then hesitated. Looking at me again, she asked," Luciana, you've always been in great shape. But these days, you're looking leaner, more toned. Are you working out extra hard to get in shape for, you know, just in case?"

I blushed. I felt my face and throat get warm. "No, nothing like that." I looked up to see a broad grin spread over Amee's face.

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It's a little bright, I thought, looking at myself in the mirror. But it is a party dress, after all. Deep blue, sleeveless, and a high neck. Reached below my knees, too. Tonight, of all nights, I wanted a sober look.

The party started at eight, and everyone had group pictures with their team and friends. The company had hired a photographer for the party. Then Herbert took the stage and thanked everyone for their performance and gave out performance awards. Gene then took over as master of ceremonies.

Gene was the manager of one of the sales teams, making us colleagues and competitors. At 9.15 he invited me onto the stage.

"Friends," he announced. "We're all waiting for this moment. The new product launch, handled by our youngest manager. If she meets her target, a magnificent prize will be hers. If not..."

The incomplete sentence was met with oohs and cheers. Half the people got up from their tables and came near the stage. I was quite sure they weren't so excited about watching me get a vacation voucher.

Gene raised his hand. Althea, head of Accounting, walked over and made a show of handing over a sealed envelope.

Gene opened it slowly, extracted a single sheet of paper, and unfolded it. "I am happy to inform you that our branch has had the second highest sales, countrywide, of the new launch."

Herbert clapped, and some others took it up. Gene went on, "Luciana's team's sales for the promotion period is four hundred and eighty-eight thousand and..."

He wasn't allowed to finish. The crowd roared as they realized my target wasn't met. I looked at all my coworkers celebrating that I would now have to undress completely on stage.

"Congratulations on that big sales number, Luciana." Gene was shouting to be heard over the noise. "Too bad you didn't get the big prize, but you and your team will do well out of this. And now, you know what you have to do."

The crowd was quieter now. "As per the terms of the deal, take off all your clothes now. You can get dressed after the party's over."

I decided not to make a long striptease act of it. Putting a foot on a chair, I took off a shoe and stocking, then did the other leg. Standing up again, I smiled at the noisy, cheering crowd. The people I would soon be exhibited to and with whom I had to work afterward.

"Do you need help with the zip, Luciana?" Gene asked, and I turned my back to him. With a broad grin, he ran it down. I lifted the dress over my head and draped it over the chair.

As I turned to face my audience, a powerful flash went off, and I realized the event photographer had taken a picture of me in my underwear. I guessed it didn't matter. Several guys had their phones in their shirt pockets with camera forward, and I was sure they were discreetly recording video.

I unhooked my bra and took the straps off my shoulders. As I lifted it off my breasts, there was a momentary hush. My 32B breasts had no sag to them, and I was relieved my dark nipples were not embarrassing me by jutting out. Then the crowd went berserk, whistling and roaring. The flash went off again.

"Toss it! Toss it!" The crowd called out. I held my bra at arm's length and dropped it to the floor. It was a good bra, and I didn't want to lose it.

To my dismay, Gene bent and picked it up. He rolled the lacy material into a tight ball and tossed it to the crowd. Half a dozen guys jumped, and one caught it. I knew I'd never see it again.

Once the frenzy over my bra was over, everyone went back to ogling my exposed breasts. Whistles and suggestions about posing came thick and fast. Then someone started a chant, "Toss the dress! Toss the dress!"

Before Gene could do it, I knocked my dress to the floor and stepped on it. I hoped he wouldn't be crazy enough to yank it while I was standing on it.

"For my next trick," I announced. "I will require the assistance of a young lady from the audience. Amee, could you join us?"

"Hurry up! Hurry up!" The crowd chanted. Almost everyone, man and woman, wanted to see me completely naked quickly. Amee walked onto the stage and stood near me.

"Slide my panties down," I said to her. I didn't need to whisper because of the noise the crowd was making. "And then take them and my dress with you. I'll need them to get home."

Amee nodded and knelt before me. I'd let my pubic hair grow for two weeks, thinking it would provide some cover. My labia were thin and didn't meet in the center, leaving my clit exposed. But when I had looked at myself this morning, it had looked messy. I'd shaved it all off, leaving a thin rectangle above my labia.

Amee slid my panties over my hips, and the crowd clapped and whistled as my landing strip came into view. As Amee slid my last garment down my legs, the noise escalated. I lifted one leg, then the other, to allow Amee to get the tiny bit of lace off.

Stark naked, I faced my coworkers and bowed as they cheered and whooped. Amee spun my panties around her finger. The crowd went wild. The photographer took two pictures. I signaled Amee to leave with my dress and panties.

"Well, that's it, Gene," I said, turning to him. "Stripped on stage, as required."

"Well, that's it, boys" he boomed, turning to the crowd. "It's 9.28 now, and Luciana will be naked with us until eleven, when this place closes."

But it wasn't only the boys. As I walked towards my table, men and women both stared at me. People I'd worked with for almost four years didn't even make a pretence of looking at my face. Each pair of eyes looked at my breasts as I came close, then moved downwards.

"Luciana," Winona said quietly as I reached their table. She reached out and held my hand. "Would you like to join us?"

She looked stricken, and Drake and Lance looked unhappy, too. My heart went out to my team.

"Yes, I will, thanks." I could almost feel the stares on my wholly exposed body. "But I don't want to give the impression of running away from those people." Before going on the stage, I had been sharing a table with three other managers. "Can you keep a chair for me?"

I walked with as much confidence as I could muster to my table. I sat down, relieved to be able to hide my lower body under the tablecloth. Picking up my glass, I took a large sip of wine.

"We didn't make it," I said, holding up my hands. "No Bahamas for me."

"And no clothes for the rest of the evening," said Francis, looking at my breasts. "Hard luck, Luciana."

"Never mind, Luciana," said Quentin. "Better luck next time. You came pretty close."

Francis looked at me curiously. "Did you believe that target was achievable? A target no one in the company has ever touched?"

"I didn't know that when Herbert offered me the launch project." I found out the next day when I began working on it. "I should have been more diligent."

Cameron shook her head. She was one of the most senior managers in the branch. "Company data on past campaigns is sent to managers and above annually. You've been manager only a few months, so you wouldn't have received it."

"But you guys gave Herbert a scare, I guess," said Quentin. He looked away from my breasts to look around the restaurant. "Hardly half the staff comes to office parties. And look at the crowd today. Everyone expected to see Luciana stripped."

I hadn't thought about that. Our office parties were usually dull affairs. Herbert and other executives would make speeches and hand out awards. Only the people being awarded would attend.

Francis was having a hard time keeping his eyes off my breasts and knew I was noticing. His gaze jumped from nipple to nipple. I took another large sip of wine.

"Hi, everyone," said Tanner, stopping by our table. He'd been my manager for three years until I got my promotion. "How're you doing, Luciana? I got them to turn down the cooling."

His practical concern touched me. I extended my hand in thanks, and he held my fingers briefly. I didn't even mind his lingering gaze on my breasts before he nodded and moved away. I drank the last of the wine in my glass.

"Not right away, thanks," I said as Cameron picked up the bottle. "I'm already naked. Better not to be drunk, too."

"That's smart," said Quentin approvingly. "Keep your wits about you today."

"Oh, I don't know," said Francis. "A little more wine might help you get through the evening easier."

"I don't think Luciana needs wine for that," said Todd, over Francis's shoulder. He worked in Cameron's team and had stopped at our table. He raised the glass he was holding to me. "That was awfully brave, Luciana. You were great on the stage." He let his gaze run over my breasts as I answered politely. He nodded to Cameron and moved off.

"Ooh, you're looking good, Luciana!" Our receptionist, Hailey, appeared behind Francis. We were at a table for four, and Francis was sitting opposite me. I realized everyone was stopping behind him, facing me. "And you were so confident up there!"

"I wasn't feeling very confident," I confessed, and everyone at the table grinned. "But thanks."

"No, you were great, absolutely," Hailey insisted. She dropped her voice. "You know, Luciana, you're living my dream. I've always wanted to do the naked at a party thing, but I always chicken out."

"I see," I said, somewhat mystified. "Why is it your dream?"

"Oh, just think!" Hailey exclaimed. "Look at you, naked at our party. Everyone looking at you. Wanting to come over and talk to you. You're made this party exciting."

"I don't think that's quite Luciana's view," said Quentin gently. I kept quiet, absorbing Hailey's words.

"No, but really, that's true, isn't it?" Hailey was bubbling. "Our parties are so quiet. But today, it's buzzing."

"I can't take all the credit, Hailey," I looked at her and smiled. "But it's sweet of you."

"It's so nice to, you know, stand here and look at you." Hailey ran her eyes over my breasts unashamedly. "But everyone's waiting their turn, so I should move."

"Such an honest girl," said Cameron, laughing as Hailey left. We all agreed and laughed with her.

But Hailey was right. As soon as she moved, another colleague appeared behind Francis and then another. I got somewhat used to having my breasts ogled from close range.

After a while, I pushed my chair back. "I should spend some time with my team," I said. I moved towards my team's table.

Althea held out her hand as I passed her table, and I shook it in passing. Then I had to stop because Althea had taken a grip on my hand.

"We're all so deeply unhappy, Luciana," said Althea. "We're the people that did the accounting and calculated your sales total. We're feeling terrible."

Four of the five deeply unhappy people were running their eyes from my breasts to my thighs and back as I stood there. The fifth was burning my nipples with his steady stare.

Althea rambled on about how careful they'd been and how they'd double-checked everything. People at other tables were turning to see me standing. Finally, after ten minutes, I freed my hand and left.

My team table was only a few feet away, but it took me several minutes to get there. At every step, someone would rise and shake my hand for the great sales numbers. Though not quite enough, ha, ha. You have a great body.

At last, I reached my team. Drake pulled back a chair, and I sat down with a sigh. Winona and Amee sat close to me on either side, providing me with some cover. Drake and Lance sat opposite us.

"Sorry, Luciana, I couldn't save your panties. Someone grabbed them while I was wrestling two guys for your dress." Amee was apologetic. "But Brett has his car parked in the basement, so don't worry about getting home."

Winona put her hand on my arm, and I was relieved. Brett was Winona's boyfriend and worked in the IT section. They shared an apartment at the edge of town. I'd met him a couple of times in the cafeteria with Winona.

"Oh, is he here?" I asked. "The IT people don't come to office parties often."

"Luciana, everyone is here today," said Drake. "The whole office has been talking about you and your bet. Just look around."

"You've been so focused on the work," said Winona. "Office chatter didn't reach you much."

"I guess so," I said. "Why isn't Brett with you?"

"Umm, he was," said Winona. "When this happened, I told him to go sit with his friends."

"Thanks, Winona," I said. "That was very thoughtful of you. But let's get him back here."

Drake moved his chair to make room. Brett nodded to me and sat opposite Amee. I looked at the stage, where a dozen people were dancing.

"Just past ten," said Lance, glumly, glancing at his watch. "Almost an hour more."

"You're growing old, Lance," I teased him. "Wanting parties to end quickly."

My team laughed, but not much. Winona looked at me. "We're all counting the minutes, Luciana. It's an awful thing to happen."

I nodded. "I'm glad you guys got this table."

"Hello, hello!" Benson came up to our table. He'd joined the company recently and worked in Francis's team. "You guys are monopolizing Luciana."

"We work together, we party together," said Drake coolly.

"You people are a good team," said Benson. He took a good look at my breasts before continuing. "I wish ours was as nice to work with." Nodding to us all, he moved on.

"Does he expect you to go table-hopping?" Amee sounded offended. "It's great that Luciana is staying at this party at all."

"Never mind, Amee." I put my hand on hers. "What did you do with my dress?"

"Lance is sitting on it," said Winona apologetically. "Guys were trying to grab it from Amee. Wanted to have pieces as souvenirs."

"What!" I was astounded. "Cut up my dress! How would I leave?"

"Jordan suggested it would be fun to send you home naked," Drake said. "And some others took it up. Lance and I had to escort Amee and your dress to our table."

Jordan had been in line for a promotion, but my strong sales over three quarters had seen me getting it. She'd always been cordial, but I realized resentment ran deep.

"Hi!" I looked up to see Bradley standing behind Lance, glass in hand. He'd joined Tanner's team a few months after me, and we'd worked together for two years. He nodded to everyone at our table. "Good to see your team around you, Anna."

"Luciana is always around for us," said Amee, smiling up at him. She sidled closer to me.

"She's the most helpful person I know," agreed Bradley. "Always." He swirled the wine in his glass and looked into it. "I'd invite you to our table for a while, but I guess you won't be moving around tonight." Nodding to us all, he moved off.

"Nice sort," said Winona, putting down her glass. "Didn't eat you with his eyes." She turned to look at me, grinning. "Or has he seen it all before?"

I shook my head, smiling. "We went out a couple of times last year. But it was only dinner and dancing."

Everyone knew everything in our office, I reflected. With less than seventy people, we all knew each other. Gossip traveled fast.

"Didn't get along?" Lance asked. "Brad seems to be a good guy."

"Oh, we were fine." I looked at my plate. "We went out twice, and things were going well. Then I got promoted to manager, and he didn't ask me out again." Lance and Drake nodded.

Amee looked at Winona and slowly shook her head. "Is he waiting for a promotion before asking you again?"

"I don't think he is close," said Drake thoughtfully. "There are lots of others doing much better."

"True," I said. "And you know what they say. Nice guys..."

"Finish last!" finished Winona. "But it's not true. The nicest of them all became manager." She put her arm around my bare waist and pulled me close.

"Thanks, love," I said, smiling. Her dress was smooth against my body, and being held felt surprisingly good. "But I'm not a guy, as you may have noticed."

Lance deliberately dropped his eyes to my breasts and then looked up, grinning. "Yep, we have noticed, sort of." I joined the others in laughing about my nakedness.

"Tanner's team has come apart," Brett remarked. He'd not spoken at all since joining us but looked carefully at whoever was speaking. "He's struggling to get things done."

I looked at Bradley's table, diagonally across from ours. Only he and Olivia remained, of the old team. Two people had left the company, and one had got married and asked for a transfer to another branch.

"Good show, Luciana!" Gene had stopped at our table. I wasn't sure if he meant the campaign or my show on the stage. "Party's going well, isn't it?"

"We're having a good time," I answered. "How about you?"

"Oh, yes!" Gene said. "Best party we've had, and I've attended every one. Great idea of Herbert's, this wager with you." He grinned at me. "You've found a good place to hide."

"He's even older with the company than Herbert," said Winona. "He was pretty ghoulish on stage with Luciana."

"Yes," I said thoughtfully. "But he's not a bad sort. Got carried away, I guess. Can you move a little, Amee?"

"What are you doing?" asked Lance as I stood up. "Guys are waiting to swarm all over you."

"Everyone seems to think I've found a place to hide and won't move," I said. "That won't do."

Winona knocked her fork on my glass. "How many of these have you had, Luciana?"

"I had one glass at the other table." I smiled at them reassuringly. "And this one Lance poured me. I'm all right, really." I squeezed myself around Amee's chair and moved around the table.

Two long strides brought me to Bradley's table before anyone could stop me. The table abruptly became silent as I stopped with my hands on Bradley's chair. I smiled around at the six people.

"Hi," I said as cheerfully as I could. I could see all of them holding their breath as they looked at my breasts above Bradley's head. "Room for me?"

"You want to sit at our table?" asked Grace incredulously. She was an intern in Cameron's group. I'd talked to her in the cafeteria a couple of times.

"Unless you have a strict dress code," I answered. The group laughed and shifted their chairs to make room. Bradley pulled a chair next to his for me.

"Welcome aboard, Anna," said Olivia. "We'd assess you for dress code, but there's insufficient data." She ran her eyes up and down my body, emphasizing my lack of a dress. I laughed along with the others.

"Thanks, Ollie," I said. "What have you named the baby?"

"We call her Hazeline," said Olivia, her eyes lighting up. She'd just returned from maternity leave. "Almost four months old now."

"You were at home for three months after the birth, I guess." Bradley scowled at her. "We struggled to run the team without you."

"She was doing more important stuff," I said, and Olivia nodded, smiling. "Is three months' leave enough?"

"My sister got only two months after her cesarean," said Felipe. Soon we were deep in a discussion of maternity benefits offered by different employers. It was a lively discussion, and I almost forgot my situation.

But not for long. Another of my coworkers passed our table, his head turning to keep his eyes on my breasts. I was reminded I was naked in a party full of people wearing clothes. My glass shook, and I spilled some water on the table.

"You've not done this before?" Grace asked me discreetly. The young girl had noticed my trembling, sitting next to me. "I mean, undressed at a party?"

"I've never had sex with the lights on," I confessed. "And that's only one guy."

I could have bitten my tongue as soon as the words were out. I was trying to show I was tough and unfazed by being naked, and now I'd confessed to the youngest person in the office.

"Oh!" Grace raised a hand to her mouth, her eyes wide as she looked at me. "Wow! You're amazing!" She placed her hand on mine on the table, and I gave her a grateful smile.

"Ten forty, Anna," Bradley murmured to me from my other side. "Only a little while more."

"Thanks for having me here, Brad," I said. "Your friends are as nice as you. I've felt comfortable."

"Are you leaving?" Olivia asked as I stood. "Thanks for joining us, Anna. It's been lovely."

"You were kind to me, all of you," I said warmly. "Thank you!"

I waved to people trying to shake my hand. I'd learned my lesson with Althea. Herbert was talking to Gene and Tanner, and they all turned to me as I approached. Cameron joined us.

"So you didn't make it," said Herbert.

"Kind of obvious, isn't it?" I said, lifting my hands. Gene and Cameron smiled as Herbert nodded.

"Still, you made a good effort," he said. "Only one other branch did better, by a couple of thousand dollars."

"Good for you, Herbert," said Gene. "You'll be invited to headquarters for the campaign wrap-up."

"Probably, probably," said Herbert, grinning. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves." He ran his eyes over me. "I'll be sure to mention your hard work."

"Half a million dollars," said Tanner. "No product has done that in the launch phase."

"I thought Luciana would be the one to break through," said Herbert. "That prize would have been from me. The company doesn't provide such lavish trips."

"Your money was always safe, Herbert. No launch has come close to that number," said Cameron. She smiled at me. "You tried, Luciana, but it was a mission impossible."

"I wish I'd known that when it was offered to me," I said.

"You should have looked it up before accepting," said Herbert. His gaze flickered over my breasts. "But the challenge got you going, didn't it? And your team."

I sensed a lot of people were waiting to engage with me but staying away from the branch head and three senior managers. The photographer approached, but Tanner waved him away. I wondered how many fully naked pictures of me he'd taken.

The restaurant manager came up to Herbert and talked to him. Herbert nodded and turned to Gene.

"You need to announce it, Gene. These people close in ten minutes." He ran his eyes over me again. "Might be a good idea to start looking for your clothes, Luciana."

"Good thought," I said and moved toward my team's table. But, of course, it wasn't so easy. Half the people on the way were on their feet to talk to me.

Climbing onto the stage, Gene clapped his hands and said, "Five minutes, people. This place is closing. Finish your drinks, everyone, and thank you for a great party!"

"Special thanks to Luciana," someone shouted. There was laughter, and then people started clapping. "Luciana, Luciana," the crowd took up the chant.

"No doubt, no doubt," boomed Gene. "Luciana, could you come up here and say a few words, please?"

"Nuts to that," I muttered to myself. Gene must be truly drunk, I thought, inviting me on stage to make a speech. Didn't he know I was naked?

I moved towards my team's table, my eyes fixed on Lance holding my dress protectively in his lap. But a dozen people on the way all encouraged me and even turned me around. Propelled by friendly shoves, I found myself on the stage.

"Er," I said, and it was the most well-received speech I'd ever made. The entire crowd clapped and whistled. "You go, girl," someone shouted. I stood and waited for the noise to subside as my coworkers ran their eyes over me.

"Thank you all, guys," I managed to say at last. "My team and I fought the good fight. I'm deeply grateful for their effort, but as you can see, we fell short." There was laughter and whistling as I waved my hands around myself.

"So, on to new challenges, everyone," I said. "Our branch is already number two nationwide for this launch. Next year, let's all aim for number one." The other managers were all standing with Herbert, and that group led the clapping and cheering this time. "Yes, take more such challenges!" someone called out to me.

I wagged my finger at the crowd, and they quietened a little. "Be careful what you wish for. Just the other day, someone told me, hope to see more of you, and..."

A fresh burst of laughter and cheering drowned me out. The wine had flowed pretty freely, I guessed. People were laughing at everything, which felt good, but it was delaying the few things I needed to say. And I was uncomfortably aware I was standing naked on a stage before all my coworkers.

I had to speak loudly to be heard. "And a huge thank you to my team, Amee, Drake, Lance, and Winona. For all your hard work and your support in difficult moments."

My team waved and cheered. "All the names in alphabetical order," someone called out. "Very managerial!"

I waited for the laughter to subside, conscious of sixty pairs of eyes on my fully exposed body. "Here's wishing us more success going forward. And let's meet our targets so I can afford a dress next time."

This was met by laughter and a few good-natured boos. The mood of the crowd had changed, I sensed. Now that I'd spent half the party naked, there was no animosity and a lot of goodwill.

I raised my hands, and the photographer blinded me with his flash. The lights in the restaurant dimmed in a strong hint. I waved to the crowd, and stepped off the stage. Lance was waiting for me, holding my dress. My team and Brett surrounded me as I slipped into it and Gene said loud goodbyes from the stage.

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"How did you swing it?" Lance asked excitedly.

"I didn't do anything," I said. "If anything, I kind of avoided Herbert after the party."

"So he did this on his own?" asked Winona slowly.

"The other managers were saying pretty clearly that I'd had no chance of winning the Bahamas trip. No product in the introduction phase had ever touched 500,000. The unspoken implication was that Herbert had tricked me into taking off my clothes in public." I stopped as Lance banged his fist on the table.

"And so he did!" He sounded furious.

"That was a really dirty trick!" Winona sounded angry, too.

I felt myself tearing up. "Guys, your anger on my behalf is worth a thousand prizes to me."

"So he felt guilty?" asked Amee.

"No idea. But then I got invited to headquarters for the wrap-up meeting of this launch. Next day he sent me a message saying he'd decided to double my incentive. I messaged back that the whole team had worked for it."

"And he doubled for all of us." Amee spoke flatly and looked around at the others.

"It's like we're getting a payoff for the dirty trick and suffering." Winona still sounded angry.

Lance spoke, looking down at the table. "And Luciana is the only one that suffered."

"Get over it, fellas," I spoke cheerfully. "It was a bad hour, but your support felt so good. Amee wrestling with guys to save my dress, Winona asking her boyfriend to leave to save me from embarrassment, Drake and Lance physically saving Amee and my dress. And all of you looked miserable the whole time I was bare. I've never felt closer to anyone!"

"But still," said Amee. She sounded a lot more cheerful.

"You worked hard to get me the prize, didn't you?" I demanded.

"Which you were going to share," said Drake, but he was, at last, smiling.

"Forget everything, guys," I said. "Let's have a party of our own. This Friday?"

"Suits me," said Lance.

"And me," said Amee and Drake together.

"Brett and my place," said Winona. "We'll order from that new place on Second. Is it okay that Brett's there?"

"He's more than welcome," I said, and Lance nodded.

"Brett's a keeper, Winona," said Amee. "He was at the table when our gorgeous Luciana was bare, but he had eyes only for you."

"Brett's one of the good guys," confirmed Drake. "No question."

"Thanks, guys," said Winona warmly. "So eight o clock suits everyone? We have some good wine. I'll order food at nine."

"Sounds good," I said. "So, only one more question. Do you want me dressed or naked?

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