

La Donna Tutt

She's Getting On My Damn Nerves!

Typically, my work morning began with me stamping 8:28 a.m. on my time card at Phileo Contracting Industries.

Immediately after removing my wraps, I exchanged "hey wassup girl" chat with the receptionist. Following our did-you-see-so-and-so-on-Oprah-yesterday conversation, I excused myself to the ladies room to adjust my wind-blown bob. Subsequent to putting my hair back in sleek form, I sat comfortably onto my padded executive chair, activated my computer, and huffed my traditional Donna Murphy's I-don't-really-want-to-be-here blues.

Before Phileo, I normally was employed at Detroit neighborhood restaurants or nightclubs that catered to African American patrons. So one can imagine the transition from serving food and drinks to working with another race I wasn't familiar with. I am a sista whose tongue spewed shorten, cursed, and slang words. Caucasians proper pronunciation of words tickled the hell out of me. Each time one of my co-workers addressed me in such a formal manner, I wanted to fall out of my chair, crawl under my desk, and curl into the fetal position to laugh myself silly.

While my computer booted up, I retreated to the office kitchen area to retrieve my reserved bottle of caffeine from the frig. Rule number one: I can't jump right into my work day. I must have ample time to prepare myself mentally for what the day may have in store for me.

After I sloshed down ten ounces of my twenty-ounce Coca-Cola (Coca-Cola was my own caffeine fix-I'm not a coffee type woman), I booted up my HP Laser and DeskJet printers. After a couple of belches, I mellowed out and shifted into my "worker bee" mode. I checked the company's incoming emails and spat out a few reports. And then...it happened. I was greeted by the nosey-rosy of the office. Janet Phelps.

At nine o'clock, she slithered her narrow behind past my desk for her routine inspection. I paid her no mind and continued my work. To keep from being detected, she pretended to engage in a cheerful morning conversation with Stephen, a project manager, who stood at the copier behind my desk. It was all a façade, of course.

Janet Phelps was sneakier than a mouse racing around in a food-filled pantry. I swear her day was based on creeping around the office trying to get dirt on folks. Based on the way the employees turned their noses up whenever she was around, it was easy to see that everyone detested her. I wasn't with the company long when I noticed how everyone avoided inviting her into their workspace. Even though everyone tried to run the opposite direction when they saw Janet approaching, some how she always managed to find some managerial reason to be up in someone's face or near somebody's desk.

I came to know the true Janet Phelps three days after I accepted my position as Executive

Director of Compliance. I overheard Janet complaining in a telephone conversation about the hiring tactics of the owner. "She's not qualified to do the work. I don't know what Bobby has been on lately. Is this his way of making the company more ethnic? Hiring a black woman to fill that position was a big mistake. I know it." A couple of months later, I caught her sitting at my computer, going through my electronic files. Heated words were exchanged between us and from then on.

As long as I've been employed at Phileo (24.6 months to be exact), Janet has never spoke to me upon first initial morning encounters. From the first day I walked in the door of Phileo, I've noted that white people are quick with the "hellos", "good mornings", and "how are you feeling today's". Not Janet. This broad chose not to speak yet instead simply cruised by my desk to see what was displayed on my computer monitor. She was trying to gather as much derogatory propaganda to use against me. My guess is that she planned to unfold her secret list of dirt when the time was perfect. Like when I was due for my annual review for my much anticipated (and badly needed) raise.

Janet yakked on and on with Stephen about her amateur golf matches, her disastrous meal from the previous night, and dragged on the conversation with short, non-interesting comments. While they rambled, I typed three cover letters, four transmittal sheets, and packaged four letters for the outgoing mail. Once I got my mail out of the way, I was summoned by Stephen to compose a ten-paged billing statement. After stomaching Janet's boring conversation, Stephen gave Janet her walking papers and she was on her merry way back to her office.

Following two hours of diligent typing and proofing, my eyes and fingers grew heavy. Once I archived the billing statement, I switched my executive duties to remedial clerical tasks: made copies, prepped the office outgoing mail, and checked over some accounting figures.

Okay...Let me be honest. When I stated I "checked over some accounting figures"; that was not entirely true. It appeared that I was tabulating my numerical figures, but I was actually emailing my friends, downloading jokes from jokes.com, and participating in of a couple run-of-the-mill chat sessions with my online buddies. Unfortunately, being that I don't have a hide-away office (I'm in a cubicle in the central area of the office); I had to always leave my "extra curriculum" activities minimized on the taskbar. At least that way Ms. Nosey didn't have the chance to tiptoe up on me while I wasn't on top of my game.

While going over my "accounting figures", I hummed along with Ruben Studdard's Sorry 2004, which played through my Media One player. After sending ten instant messages to my girl AngelaMichelle, I downloaded six chapters from an aspiring author's emailed novel. Once the two hundred pages finished cooling in my laser printer tray, I quickly bond the pages together with a black binder clip, stashed the chapters in my file drawer, and went back to the work I was paid to do.

In less than forty-five minutes, I formulated the company's monthly minority status reports. Traditionally, it took me longer than two hours to complete such a tedious task. So of course, I was feeling pretty proud of myself. I smiled to myself even patted myself on the back a couple of times. Just as I thought my day was going to go smoothly, in walked Janet. She was standing

behind me AGAIN! And she had the nerve to be wearing a slick expression that read, "I'm trying to catch you. I don't have anything on you yet but you wait. I'll catch you doing something."

I watched her paced back and forth from the corner of my eye as paper was generated from my slow-paced HP DeskJet printer. While the document dried, Janet stood behind me meddling around in the storage cabinets. The whole time she was positioned in the vicinity of my comfort zone I was thinking, If she says one thing to me I'm gonna nut up. I am not in the mood for her bullshit today.

Janet flipped through a phone directory, glided to the cubicle adjacent to mine, and made a phone call.

As she spoke quietly, I rolled my eyes to the ceiling and continued my train of thought. She thinks she is so slick! Why would you come all the way out here just to use the phone? I chuckled under my breath and kept pecking at my Gateway keyboard.

"Uhm, excuse me Donna?" She beckoned from the neighboring cubicle.

Hold it together girl. You can do this. I rationalized, debating mentally whether or not to answer her.

"Excuse me, Donna. Can you hear me?"

Oh God, please help me right now. I might not be able to hold myself back under my own powers. I'm liable to say something that might cost me my job and my free internet service, I prayed silently. While that prayer was being deciphered by my Heavenly Father, I inhaled deeply and released a stress relieving sigh to calm myself. "Keep it cool Donna, keep it cool," I said at a whispery tone.

Janet hung up the phone, slinked her way over to my desk and bellowed, "Donna, do you think you can print me out last month's status report for the Northlawn Apartments?"

Why all of a sudden does this heifa need a copy of that status report? I fumed. She has never asked me for a damn report before, but now out of the clear blue sky she wants to talk to me!

"Didn't you get one last month when they were circulated throughout the office?" I asked with a get-the-hell-away-from-my-desk tone.

"Yes, but I can't seem to find it," she said, while thumbing through the paperwork stacked on my L-shaped desk.

I slammed my hand on top of my to-be-filed pile and stared deep into Janet's blue deviled eyes, "I can assure you that what you're looking for is not there, so I would appreciate it if you back the f-" I stopped myself. I wasn't about to give her any free ammunition to use against me.

"I'm sorry?" She asked smugly. She and I both knew she had the upper hand in the conversation.

In order to get her out of my area nonviolently, I uploaded the requested archive. Once the Excel spreadsheet was presented on my screen, I pressed the print icon. The paper oozed out of the laser printer in less than five seconds and lay weightless in the paper tray.

"There's your report," pointing to the sheet with my narrowed eyes, "Now if you don't mind." I rolled my eyes, shifted my wireless mouse on the pad, and kept a close eye on Janet. She threw me one of those she-devil smiles and slowly stepped away from my desk after she retrieved the document.

As Janet proudly strolled down the hallway, I clutched my mouse, tightly.

I closed my eyes and held a silent prayer. Lord, if you could grant me ten free minutes, I'll do anything. I'm serious, Lord. All you gotta do is freeze time for ten minutes. That would be plenty of time for me to go throw up on Janet's desk. And I promise I'll leave a note that I did it.

Once I realized that crushing my mouse and Janet's larynx wasn't going to do anything but bring me pain, I sat deathly still for a good minute, stewing with flared nostrils. Even though I had sent a quickie prayer up to the Heavenly One, my mind continued to stir up demonic thoughts. In a matter of minutes, I had conjured up at least twelve different painful devious plans of retaliation against Ms. Good Ol' Janet for rubbing me the wrong way.

I mean I had every right to plot something against Janet. She had it in for me since day one. She couldn't stand that a sista (a strong, opinionated, hardworking sista I might add) could come in her secured work environment in a high powered position and make friends as quickly as I did. Hey, I couldn't help that I was easy going and kept it real. After hearing Janet's comments about me and catching her rummaging through my belongings, I was not about to bend over and let Janet stick it to me.

Along with Janet's dislike of my hiring, another stake was driven into her heart when she discovered that our boss favored my opinion over hers. He often stopped at the receptionist's and my desk or ideas, suggestions and daily exchanging of giggles. After observing our cool, non-threatening relation, Janet did everything in her power to bring me down.

She emailed me duties, knowing she didn't allow me ample time to complete them yet demanded that I meet her deadline. There were times where she gave me reports to compose without all the needed information and expected me to figure out her encrypted handwriting. Each time her paperwork wasn't completed, she complained to the owner that I wasn't prioritizing my workload. The ultimate slap in the face were the days when Janet forwarded email to my attention that contained ethnic intimidating jokes with her signature line "It's just a joke. Don't take it personal. Love J".

Once my blood pressure lowered and my injurious intentions subsided, I toured the other staff member's offices. Every office--except Janet's--was greeted by my smiling face.

Soon after friendly words were exchanged with my co-workers, an urge to ruffle Janet's scrawny feathers came over me. I switched passed her office on a couple of occasions giving her the ha-

ha-nobody-likes-you grin. To rub more salt into her open wound, I purposely stood at her door and asked my passing boss about his wife.

"Hey Bobby, how's Leonette doing? I haven't talked to her in a couple of days?"

He answered happily and that pissed Janet off. I glanced over at her as she pretended to grind at her laptop when I knew all along she wanted to be a member of our socially elite.

At the end of the day, I was going through some serious drama with the central copier/scanner/fax machine. I was bent over staring at all the open doors of the machine attempting to figure out where my misfed paper was located. Dealing with the over-priced, over-complicated machine, had my attitude on high altitude. At that moment if anyone even thought about batting an eyelash in my direction, let alone uttered a word, they were going to be in for a rude awakening.

Janet walked her hoity-toity self on the side of the downed machine and exhaled an annoyed sounding deep sigh. "How long before you get this thing up and running?"

"I'm not a damn copier mechanic. I'm doing the best that I can. So bear with me," I barked as I twisted a green release knob in hopes a crumbled sheet of paper would prevail.

Janet slammed her paper on top of the copier input tray and sulked, "Well, I hope this doesn't take forever because I have to fax this document out of here today."

That did it.

I stood tall at the machine, position one hand on my hip and the other held up in mid air. "Look bitch, you have gotten on my last damn nerve! I'm doing the best that I can. Now if you can do better, then help yourself. But know this, if you say one more damn thing to me, I'm likely to punch you in those thin lips right where you're standing."

I knew I shouldn't've said that, but I couldn't restrain myself. The boss, who was standing in his doorway, overheard our confrontation and immediately proceeded towards us. I decided to sweeten the moment by stepping closer to Janet, basically daring her to make the first move.

As our boss came to intervene in our intense moment, I noticed horror radiating in Janet's eyes. I presumed this moment was the first time she had been fronted on by a black woman. I knew the look in my eyes intimidated her because she had difficulty holding eye contact with me. By the look in my eyes, she could tell I was inches away from choking her pink tonsils right out of her throat.

For several minutes, our boss stood between us and spewed negotiating tactics. Listening to his drab voice calmed me momentarily until I noticed Janet's abhorrence diminishing. Despite the fact that I was the favored opponent in our office war, Janet was gaining confidence and looked as though she was eager for battle. Or so she thought.

I stood silent while my boss continued to calm the murky waters between Janet and me. While he

talked to my blank, non-registering face, I stared down Janet.

Assuming my temper has simmered, Bobby thought the coast was clear and began to back away. Janet grew a calculating grin and slid closer to his side.

I quickly assessed the situation.

As if a little bird perched itself on my shoulder and told me her plan, I knew how everything was going to play out. Janet was about to grow some man-sized balls and try to take me down with alleged, incriminating, circumstantial evidence. I heard her meek voice echoing in my ears. "She's been threatening me" or "she's very uncooperative and doesn't want to listen to reason".

I, on the other hand, had a better plan of action. I was going to beat her to the punch and land the Layla Ali body shot and put her down on the canvas. My punch, of course, would not only ruin Janet, it was going to be more lethal to the company. See I held the gun with the bullets. Janet only had blanks.

I had an ace in my pocket. I possessed one thing that all corporate America feared would be the downfall of their very existence. I had grounds for a racial discrimination suit.

Janet had been riding me since the day she found out that a black woman was hired in with potential to take her position. She tried everything in her power to sabotage my very existence by using intimidating tactics that I didn't play up to. Janet failed to realize that I waltzed in the door with a Master's Degree in finance and a Bachelor's Degree in marketing. She only held an Associates Degree in business administration. Too bad Janet didn't use her degreed smarts before she gave away hard evidence and justified reasons to bring her down.

Yes, Ms. Janet had screwed with the wrong sista on the wrong day. Can it get much sweeter than this? I don't think so!