

A Thousand Faces Hide The Genius Heiress' Wrath

Chapter 61:

Aiden shook his head with a wry smile, too tired to warn this unpredictable woman. “The Edwards family’s future depends on this bid—it’s a turning point for them. You’re raising this now just to leverage me to disrupt them, aren’t you?”

“Sharp as ever!” Janice remarked, her eyes sparkling with witty amusement. “You help me just now, so consider this a repayment. Fair’s fair.” Janice swept her hair back with a graceful gesture. “Conversing with the astute is always a relief.”

Suddenly, Alcott’s thunderous voice boomed from outside. “Aiden! Get out here!”

Janice and Aiden shared a knowing look, their silent exchange speaking volumes. With Alcott and Nina’s arrival, Bart was bound to stir up chaos again.

“Nina, if we let this go on, Bart will be tormented mercilessly.” Alcott’s face twisted with frustration as he looked at Nina. “Today, Aiden must face consequences.”

Nina remained silent, merely accepting a cup of coffee from a servant. She took a thoughtful sip, her gaze settling on Bart, who sat sullen, the weight of injustice heavy upon him. "Let's wait for Aiden and Janice to emerge and hear their side of the story."

"Would their words change anything?" Alcott sighed with frustration. "Those two are just throwing their weight around. Despite Bart's status as an illegitimate son, it doesn't give them the right to mistreat him."

He rubbed his face, a wave of regret washing over him. "In the end, it's all on me. If I hadn't messed up back then, he wouldn't have to endure this humiliation."

Nina set her cup down with a mocking sneer. "So, you're finally ready to own up to your mistake? Fine, I'll grant your wish. Just say the word, and I'm out of here. You two can play the loving father and son."

"Nina, what are you talking about?" Alcott hastily donned a placating grin, aware he had struck a sore spot. "Look, even though I messed up, it wasn't on purpose. You're the only one for me."

"Whether it was intentional or not, only you know the truth." Nina shook her head, clearly done with the conversation. "Anyway, let's wait for Aiden and Janice to clear the air. I'll decide then if Aiden needs to be disciplined."

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Hidden slightly behind the door, Janice caught glimpses of the tension in the living room.

Spotting Bart's battered face, Janice involuntarily clicked her tongue in astonishment.

"Aiden, your brother sure doesn't hold back."

"I don't have a brother."

Ignoring Aiden's scowl, Janice pressed on. "He's gone and battered himself like that?"

"He's always been like that." Aiden scoffed dismissively, absentmindedly caressing the bracelet on his wrist. "Ever since he came back, he's used his victim act to sow discord between me and my parents."

Janice let out a sharp, irritated sigh. "Bart has absolutely no sense of shame, does he?"

"If we step out now, we're practically begging to get torn apart. Got any bright ideas?" Aiden asked with a grim smirk.

Janice's eyes narrowed, and a mischievous grin played on her lips. "Ever heard the old saying?"

“What?”

“Beat the schemer at his own game,” she declared with a wink. Aiden, caught off guard, was speechless for a moment.

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Time ticked by, and Alcott, growing impatient with the silence and absence of Aiden and Janice, flew into a fury. “How dare they! Are they hiding because they’re guilty? Get them in front of me now!”

The servants hesitated, sharing uncertain looks. Janice's earlier audacity had left them wary, but Alcott's authoritative demand now emboldened them.

Just as they mustered the courage to ascend the stairs, Janice emerged, pushing Aiden's wheelchair forward.

"Honey, I know you're upset, but your parents are furious. We need to face them now to avoid making things worse," Janice murmured, her eyes glistening with unshed tears as she steered him towards the elevator.

Aiden, catching her subtle wink, exhaled in exasperation yet played along. "I'll be fine. It's not like it'll kill me."

Nina stood, her eyes filled with concern. "Aiden, what's wrong?" With a puzzled scowl, Bart glanced between Aiden and Janice, suspicious of whatever they were plotting this time.

The elevator dinged on the first floor, and Janice and Aiden got out.

Nina's face drained of color at the sight of him. "Aiden, what happened to you?"

Aiden looked rather pitiful with all the bruises on his handsome face.

“It’s all my fault for not protecting Aiden properly,” Janice said, pretending to wipe tears away and sounding aggrieved. “I went out early this morning to run errands, so he was left home alone. Then when I returned, I saw...” She deliberately trailed off and glanced at Bart. “I don’t dare to say.”

“Tell me!” Nina snapped, her gaze turning icy. “You have my support. If someone wronged you, I will see to it that justice is served.”

Bart soon realized that things were going south for him. He opened his mouth to interject, but he was a second too late.

“I saw Bart beating Aiden up!”

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“What?” Nina whirled around and pinned Bart with a vicious glare. “Didn’t you say that it was Aiden and Janice who beat you? Just what in the world is going on here?”

“No, I didn’t!” Bart said, revealing a pitiful and helpless expression.

But before he could defend himself further, Janice burst into tears. “Right, Bart didn’t hit Aiden. He’s so kind, after all. He even bought Aiden a cake. Of course, there’s no way he

would raise a hand against his brother. I must have seen it wrong! Aiden must have fallen on his own.”

Bart’s ears were ringing. He knew then that his original ploy of feigning injury had lost all its meaning.

The tables had turned, with Janice and Aiden now being the victims, while he was the aggressor. He was left at quite a loss. His plan was simple enough—he was going to use the oldest trick in the book to gain Alcott and Nina’s sympathy and have them on his side. Now, however, it was clear that he had only suffered in vain, without gaining anything at all.

“Come on, Aiden. Tell us, what really happened? Is Janice telling the truth?” Nina asked Aiden in an urgent tone.

Aiden pressed his lips in a thin line and glanced over at Janice, who was frantically making eyes at him in a silent message. He had never employed such tactics before, and in all honesty, he felt a pang of shame at having to resort to it. But Janice had gone to great lengths to get them to this point. He couldn’t possibly put her well intentions to waste.

“Mom, the injuries on my face... I got them when I fell on my own.”

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Nina's eyes narrowed. She turned on her heel and strode up to Bart.

Bart's anxiety spiked at her approach, and he bristled at her icy gaze.

Before he could defend himself, Nina raised her hand and slapped him hard across the face. "How dare you lay a hand on my son?"

Both Bart and Alcott were stunned into silence. Even the servants who had been milling around nearby were left dumbfounded.

"Nina, what are you doing?" Alcott cried out as he jolted back to his senses. "How can you believe them so easily? You're buying into a one-sided story!"

Nina turned and glared at him. “But wasn’t Bart’s claim a one-sided story as well?”

“Aiden and Janice said it themselves—Bart did nothing. Aiden fell on his own!” Alcott said through gritted teeth, looking over at Bart with a pained expression. Unfortunately, this reaction only fueled the flames of Nina’s fury.

“Alcott, don’t you know your own son’s character?” Nina’s eyes grew red in the corners, but she refused to let a single tear fall. “Aiden has always been steadfast and headstrong. He never bows to anyone. When he said he fell, he meant that Bart actually assaulted him. You are Aiden’s father, but not only do you not care about him, you actually choose to believe the lies of your illegitimate son. Aren’t you afraid of damaging your relationship with Aiden for good?”

“What are you saying, Nina?” Alcott asked, looking flustered despite himself. “Aiden is my son. Of course I care about him. But...”

“But? You actually dare to say ‘but’? When Aiden had an accident and was declared permanently disabled, what did you do?” Nina raised her hand and pointed a finger at Bart angrily. “You brought your bastard son into our home!”

She had to pause and take a deep breath to steady herself. “I knew of your intentions, I always did! But out of respect for our marriage, I told myself I could endure it as long as you behaved yourself. But a line was crossed today. My son was wronged, and I cannot let it slide!”

The sheer intensity of Nina's unanticipated outburst took everyone in the room by surprise.

With a sly smile, Janice murmured into Aiden's ear, "Did you ever imagine your mom could be so fierce? Are you touched?" Aiden remained silent, his gaze locked on Nina. Her delicate, slightly stooped figure strangely brought him a sense of tranquility. This rare display of fiery temper from Nina, all to defend him, was a poignant sight he hadn't seen before.

"Let's try to relax," Janice suggested, stepping in with a soothing touch on Nina's shoulder, her voice a comforting whisper. "Aiden's confided in me quite a lot."

She paused to send a playful wink in Aiden's direction, sparking a mix of confusion and curiosity in him about her intentions.

"He often feels inadequate, like he might never be able to contribute to the Green family. His deepest hope is simply for the family to live in harmony and thrive." Janice spoke with such heartfelt emotion that tears streamed down Nina's face. "Despite his struggles, he keeps them hidden, bearing them alone. He believes that if he can just witness the joy and contentment of his parents, his own hardships are worthwhile."

"Aiden, my dear, the burdens you've borne are immense," Nina responded, her voice laced with sorrow, her features quickly turning to resolve. "From this moment forward, I will not stand by and watch. If anyone dares to upset my son, they will answer to me."

Assertive and commanding, she stood her ground. Janice couldn't help but admire her. Indeed, who could resist loving such a fiercely protective mother?

“Nina, this is just beyond unreasonable!” Alcott protested, feeling that if this continued, he would become a laughingstock.

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“Unreasonable?” Nina responded with a mocking sneer, her voice dripping with defiance. “I can be even more unreasonable. Alcott, I want a divorce.”

Alcott’s eyes flew open in shock as he leapt from his seat. “What the hell are you doing? You always bring up divorce. Have you thought about how this looks to others?”

“You called me unreasonable. I’m merely showing you just how unreasonable I can be. What’s wrong with that?” Nina’s commanding aura left Alcott reeling and speechless.

“I must take the blame for this,” Bart declared, his face a mix of remorse and naive sincerity. “Perhaps it’s best if I leave the family. Everything will get better if I’m no longer around.”

Janice raised an eyebrow. It was the classic manipulator move—sacrificing a little to grab a lot.

Bart cast a desolate glance toward Aiden, his smile tinged with bitterness. “I’ve always been the outsider here. No matter how earnestly I strive, assumptions are always against me. Even if the servants witness the truth, they’d never vouch for someone like me, would they?”

Alcott seized on Bart’s statement, thumping his thigh emphatically. “Exactly! We simply need to ask the servants to unearth who initiated this.”

Nina’s expression darkened as she alternated her gaze between Bart and Alcott.

“Very well, since you demand the truth, let’s delve into it.” Janice and Aiden shared a look. Their eyes revealed no trace of alarm. Rather, there was a spark of anticipation.

“Bethel, we need answers. What truly went down between Aiden and Bart?” Nina called in Bethel Moore, the most senior servant. Bethel’s eyes flitted nervously from Bart to Aiden.

“Bethel, don’t be scared,” Alcott commanded, his expression stern. “Speak only the truth, and I assure you, you’ll face no repercussions.”

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“I... I haven’t seen a thing,” Bethel asserted, shaking her head resolutely.

Bart’s face twisted in confusion, his voice tinged with disbelief as he probed, “Bethel, how can you say you didn’t see it? You were right there when Aiden and I clashed!”

Taking a brief pause, Bethel shook her head once more, her tone firm. “I honestly didn’t see anything. After I finished up in the kitchen, I stepped outside to water the flowers.”

Panic began to seep into Bart’s demeanor. He stole a quick glance at Aiden and Janice, both of whom were smirking at him.

In that moment, a realization dawned on him. Pressing his lips into a thin line, Bart clenched his fists, his muscles tensing with frustration. Earlier, Janice had exerted her dominance in front of the servants. The servants, preferring to steer clear of household dramas for their own safety, chose to remain neutral.

Despite Alcott's reassurances, they remained wary of Janice, a woman whose reactions were hard to predict and who might seek retribution for their involvement.

"Do you have anything further to add?" Nina inquired, her gaze piercing as she looked between Alcott and Bart, both visibly unnerved.

Janice stepped forward and took Nina's hand, admitting, "To be honest, I'm the one who hit Bart."

The room fell into a sudden, stunned silence, with everyone turning to stare in disbelief.

Bart was even more puzzled. Nina had clearly taken sides, so why would Janice step forward now? A sly gleam flickered in Janice's eyes, sending a shiver of apprehension through Bart.

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“Janice, you have nothing to fear with me here,” Nina assured her, assuming Janice was merely trying to shield herself from potential backlash.

Janice, however, shook her head and insisted, “I did hit Bart.”

Nina’s brows knitted in concern as she eyed Janice intently. “Are you certain?”

With an earnest nod, Janice replied, “Yes, absolutely. I was just so overwhelmed with emotion that I acted on impulse. Was it too hasty? Did I make a mistake?”

Nina raised her hand to pat Janice’s head, her voice warm and approving. “Janice, all I can say is, well done!”

Those words, “well done,” echoed back to Bart, feeling like a slap to his face.

Janice had predicted earlier that even if Nina discovered her actions, her response would be one of praise. And now, that prediction had manifested into reality.

Janice then looked at Alcott with a fearful expression. “Do you think so too?”

Alcott’s face betrayed a tumult of emotions. He yearned to remain silent, yet Nina’s piercing stare compelled him to acknowledge, “Yes, well done.”

Just then, Bart staggered, nearly toppling over.

He fought to regain his balance, casting a venomous glare at Janice. Unfazed, she responded with a bold, taunting gesture.

Having overcome her struggles with deceitful individuals, Janice now felt an unshakeable strength within her. She knew Bart, with his manipulative ways, was no longer a threat. Aiden watched her with a soft smile, admiration glowing in his eyes.

“Alcott, for Aiden’s sake, we can no longer tolerate Bart’s presence in this home,” Nina declared, her voice firm as she comforted Janice, dealing Bart a crushing blow.

“Nina, isn’t that going a bit too far?” Alcott’s voice was tinged with sorrow, his plea for Bart met only with Nina’s fierce glare. “Choose wisely, Alcott—either divorce or he’s out.”

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Alcott faltered, his resolve melting into a resigned sigh. “Bart, the Green family owns several vacant villas. Pick one.”

“Dad, I don’t want to leave...”

“Didn’t you just offer to leave for the sake of family harmony? Or did I mishear?” Janice cut in sharply.

“No.” Aiden quickly supported her, a playful note in his voice. “I heard it too.”

Then, both of them looked at Bart in perfect sync.

Janice and Aiden were seamlessly in sync, their united front nearly causing Bart to betray his composure.

At that point, the Green family’s legacy was the least of his concerns—his one burning desire was to eliminate Janice from his life completely.

Nina, her arms folded, regarded Bart with a cool detachment. “If that’s what you said, it’s time for you to leave.”

Bart hesitated, his shoulders drooping in defeat, yet his eyes simmered with a venomous glare that seemed almost palpable. Janice noticed the sinister shadow in his gaze and leaned in towards Aiden. “Don’t underestimate him. This cunning fox won’t go down easily. Who can guess the ploys he has up his sleeve?”

Her breath brushed Aiden’s ear, prompting an involuntary gulp from him.

“Are you scared?” Aiden’s voice deepened, laced with a hint of teasing provocation.

Janice chuckled, her expression dripping with scorn. “Scared? Hardly. The only thing I’m scared of is him dragging out his same pathetic tricks. How utterly dull. Having faced true schemers like Delilah, his boring attempts at plotting are nothing more than child’s play.”

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“In this regard, your prowess is genuinely formidable,” Aiden conceded.

“Obviously,” Janice quipped, arching her eyebrows smugly—a sight Aiden found irresistibly charming.

Meanwhile, Delilah had just come back from Delgado Jewelry, slipping quietly into the kitchen where she locked herself away. The rest of the family was left in the dark about her activities.

As dusk settled, Lowell arrived home to find Delilah stepping out of the kitchen, her hands carefully balancing a beautifully decorated cake. His eyes widened in surprise.

“Did you bake this cake, Delilah?” he inquired, his voice tinged with astonishment.

“Yes,” Delilah confirmed with a gentle nod, her smile brightening her features. “There’s been a string of troubles here recently, and I thought it might lift everyone’s spirits. I made this cake to spread a little happiness to Mom, Dad, and you.”

Moved by her thoughtfulness, Lowell pulled out his phone, captured several photos of the cake, and promptly shared them in the family group chat—a chat that notably did not include Janice.

Carman’s message popped up almost immediately. “This cake looks fantastic. Lowell, did you pick this up from a bakery?”

“Nope, Delilah baked this herself,” Lowell responded proudly.

“Mom, Dad, and I are in for a real treat. Unfortunately for you and Dotson, you’ll just have to settle for pictures.”

Dotson quickly chimed in, “Lowell, send that cake my way, now!”

Lowell asked, “When are you guys planning to come back? The situation at home got out of hand, and Janice was forced to—”

For a brief moment, the group chat fell into an unexpected hush. Carman replied, “That worthless ingrate should have been kicked out a long time ago! Ever since she returned, she’s done nothing but bully Delilah. If she weren’t tied to us by blood, I’d have sent her packing.”

Dotson agreed vehemently. “Indeed. Everything about her is so fake, unlike Delilah, who’s kind and sincere.”

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Carman and Dotson kept up their bitter criticism of Janice, contrasting it with glowing and exaggerated praise for Delilah. With a smug smile, Delilah read the messages, savoring the thought of how livid Janice would be if she saw them.

In the group chat, Carman announced, “Delilah, my latest song is nearly complete. I’ll be home in a few days and I’ve got a special gift for you.”

Dotson chimed in, “And Delilah, I’m swamped with my upcoming book, so my return might be delayed. But rest assured, I’ve picked out something wonderful for you. I know you’re going to love it.”

Delilah responded warmly, “Thank you both, Carman and Dotson. Your presence really brightens my life.”

Laurie scrolled through the chat history silently, choosing to remain an observer.

She harbored doubts, questioning whether Janice was truly the villain her brothers portrayed her to be.

She vividly recalled moments when Janice had presented them with modest gifts and prepared meals for them, only for them to deride the presents as cheap and the food as tainted, discarding them openly in front of Janice.

In the past, Laurie had accepted the situation as normal, attributing it to Janice's modest upbringing and her free-spirited nature.

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Now, upon reflection, Laurie was overcome with remorse. How could they have so coldly overlooked the sincere efforts of their family?

At that precise moment, Connor chimed in on the family group chat. “Working late tonight, so you all enjoy the cake.”

Lowell, his brow furrowed in concern, quickly responded, “Dad, does this have to do with the development project in the western suburbs?”

“Yes. Your proposal has been postponed far too long. I need it by tomorrow.”

Lowell’s face darkened as he absorbed his father’s words. He had dedicated hours to crafting the proposal, yet something was amiss. His earlier efforts had garnered accolades from the shareholders, but his recent submissions had been dismissed as amateurish, much to his dismay. A shadow of a thought flickered through Lowell’s mind. Could it—

No, that just didn’t make any sense.

All Janice did was make a few offhand remarks. Could those really have made such an impact?

Dismissing the thought, Lowell scoffed inwardly. Janice, lacking any real skills or insight, surely couldn’t be the reason behind his once-lauded proposals now being dismissed.

“Delilah, shall I put away the things in the kitchen?” Daryl, the servant, asked from the kitchen.

Delilah turned to Lowell and said, “Lowell, please start without me. I’ll give Daryl a hand cleaning up the kitchen.”

Lowell’s face lit up with a tender smile as he responded, “Delilah, let Daryl manage the cleanup. You’ve been on your feet all day. Why not sit and savor the cake with me?”

Delilah shook her head. “The kitchen is a complete disaster. It’ll get done quicker if I help out.”

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“Very well,” Lowell replied, his tone brimming with warmth. “You’re always so considerate. If only that useless fool had even half your traits, we wouldn’t be so let down.”

Delilah offered a forced smile in response and made her way to the kitchen with haste.

“This box...” Daryl held up a box, her brow furrowed in confusion.

“A cake from Gustin’s Cake?”

“Leave it be, Daryl,” Delilah interjected quickly, casting a wary glance back at Lowell, who was still outside, and concealed the box. “They mustn’t learn this cake is from a bakery and not homemade.”

Daryl paused, a look of realization dawning on her. “I’ll take care of it for you.”

Delilah nodded. She feared that Daryl might accidentally expose the hidden box. If Lowell were to discover it, her carefully crafted image of being well-behaved and sensible would shatter instantly.

Throughout the day, she had pretended to be busy in the kitchen, although she was simply killing time on her phone, consumed by boredom. Her meticulously planned deception couldn’t end in vain.

“Daryl, get rid of the box. I’m heading out now.”

“Understood.”

After pretending to clean up for a bit, Delilah made her way back to the living room.

There, she noticed Lowell indulging in the cake, his face glowing with contentment. A sly smirk danced on Delilah's lips as she thought about how effortlessly the Edwards family would fall for her carefully staged performance.

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The family had been duped by her simple ruses, showering her with affection and admiration.

"Lowell, do you enjoy the cake?" Delilah asked, seating herself across from him, her eyes sparkling with curiosity.

“It’s wonderful,” Lowell responded, nodding enthusiastically while giving her a thumbs-up. “The flavor of this cake is truly exceptional. Delilah, your baking skills might even rival those of Gustin’s Cake.”

Delilah’s expression stiffened momentarily, but she quickly mustered a smile. “I’m glad you like it. I really put my heart into making it, so I’m thrilled it wasn’t a waste of time.”

Lowell set his fork aside and gazed at Delilah, his eyes clouded with concern. “Delilah, I promise you. Once I’m at the helm of Edwards Group, I’ll transfer thirty percent of the shares to you. I want everyone to recognize you as the rightful daughter of the Edwards family.”

Delilah, visibly moved, fluttered her hands dismissively. “Lowell, how could I possibly accept that? That’s Dad’s life’s work. As someone who was adopted, how could I claim such a right?”

Before she could continue, Lowell pressed a finger to her lips, silencing her.

The intimate gesture startled them both, causing a mutual recoil.

A flush crept up Lowell’s neck as he cleared his throat awkwardly. “Please, no more talk of rights, Delilah. To me, you are and always will be my sister, nothing less. I’m sure Mom and Dad, along with your other brothers, all feel the same. When the time comes, the entirety of Edwards Group will rightfully be yours.”

Joy surged through Delilah's heart at his words. Yes, this was exactly as it should be. The entire legacy of Edwards Group would one day be hers.

She hadn't anticipated such an overt declaration of loyalty and support, especially not so soon after Janice's departure from the family. But here it was, Lowell's promise, clear and unequivocal.

"Lowell, you are truly wonderful," Delilah exclaimed, her arms opening wide as she moved in for an embrace.

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Lowell tensed, the brief contact with her lips still echoing in his senses, sending his thoughts into a whirl.

Just as their arms wrapped around each other, a stern voice cut through the moment. "What are you doing?"

"Mom, you're back."

Delilah quickly pushed Lowell aside and got up to greet Laurie, her arms wide open for a hug. But Laurie stepped away at the last second, leaving Delilah embracing empty air.

Delilah froze in shock. Laurie would always hug her the moment she arrived, then stroke her hair and ask about her day. Why was she suddenly acting so distant?

Laurie noticed the look of bewilderment on Delilah's face and realized that her action might have been hurtful. She forced a smile and said, "I had a very long day, and I feel a little out of sorts. I'll go take a shower."

"Is something wrong, Mom?" Delilah asked with concern.

"It's nothing much, just that... I'm finding it hard to get the company's new project to move forward. I've had to visit several other companies to seek collaboration, but..." Laurie trailed off and sighed helplessly.

In truth, all the difficulties the company was currently facing would be solved if she could secure a partnership with JE.

If JE gave her approval, not only could Laurie's project proceed smoothly, but the other companies would be the ones extending offers to her instead of her seeking them out.

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Unfortunately, in light of their recent strife with Janice and the matter of the stolen design during the competition, it was highly unlikely that JE would give her that much-needed chance.

Even now, Laurie still found it hard to believe that Janice and JE were close friends. Why had Janice never mentioned it before? She had been back with the Edwards family for a whole year, but she never told them about her relationship with JE. More importantly, how did someone as unremarkable as Janice end up being friends with the renowned JE?

“I baked a cake today, Mom. Would you like to try a piece?” Delilah’s voice pulled Laurie out of her reverie. She glanced at the cake on the table, and a memory suddenly flashed in her mind—that of a small, frail figure holding a small cake in her hands while smiling at her.

“Mom, I baked this cake myself. Please give it a try.”

The innocent face was filled with hope as the person waited for Laurie to taste the cake and praise her efforts. But Laurie's response had been cold and impatient.

"Can't you see I'm busy? How do I know if that's even safe to eat? If your cake is unclean and makes me sick, it will only delay my work. Can you take responsibility if that happens?"

Janice had tried to reassure her that the cake was clean and safe, but Laurie sent her away without listening to a single word. There was a brief scuffle when Janice resisted, and the cake ended up falling to the floor.

"Mom?" Delilah called out, bringing Laurie back to the present. "What's the matter?"

Laurie took another deep breath and shook her head. "I'm sorry, I think I'll pass. I don't have much of an appetite." She paused before adding, "It's thoughtful of you, Delilah, to bake a cake for everyone."

With that, she turned and headed upstairs.

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Delilah frowned as she watched Laurie leave. She couldn't help but feel agitated at Laurie's odd behavior. What was going on in Laurie's head? Delilah had noticed that she had been distracted lately, and her attitude just now was significantly more aloof than before. Did it have something to do with Janice?

Delilah bit her bottom lip as her anxiety grew. She needed Laurie to design on her behalf, or she would never be able to complete the task Stella had assigned her.

“Delilah, Mom does seem quite tired. Don’t take her refusal to heart, I’m sure it’s just stress.” Lowell saw the troubled look on her face and quickly offered words of comfort. “Let’s wait until she’s done with her shower, then ask what’s bothering her, okay?”

“Honestly, Lowell, I think it would be better if we leave Mom alone for now,” Delilah sighed, looking worried. “But I’m still on probation at work. If I don’t perform well, I might get kicked out of Delgado Jewelry. If that actually happens, I won’t only embarrass myself but will also drag the name of Edwards Group as well. What should I do? It’s all my fault! I’m so useless! Why can’t I shift my talents from fashion design to jewelry design?”

Lowell’s heart ached when he heard Delilah blame herself. “Don’t worry, I’ll talk to Mom and ask her to help you with your task. You’re the precious treasure of this family. We can’t let anybody look down on you, especially not Janice.”

Laurie retreated to her room, yet instead of slipping into more comfortable attire, she found herself rooted in front of her computer. She rubbed her temples, a sensation of emptiness gnawing at her—as if a crucial part of herself had been misplaced. Fleeting glimpses of Janice flickered through her mind, stirring up doubts.

“Could I have been mistaken?” she murmured to herself. With a heavy sigh, Laurie turned on her computer and pulled up a design project she had left unfinished. She held a faint hope that immersing herself in her work might soothe her turbulent emotions.

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However, as she scrutinized the draft before her—merely a skeletal framework—her expression gradually twisted into a frown. Something was amiss. Her once boundless creativity had vanished, leaving behind a barren landscape where inspiration no longer thrived.

Laurie shut her eyes, seeking solace in the quietude, yet the persistent visions of Janice breached her tranquility.

“Mom, your designs are truly captivating. If you could just tweak it here, add some flair there, it would transcend perfection.”

“Mom, does this piece draw its essence from the ocean? How about adding some wave patterns to give it a more dynamic feel?”

“Mom...”

Laurie’s eyes snapped open, her breath coming in ragged gasps.

A realization dawned on her, sharp and sudden. It was Janice she needed.

Over the last year, Laurie had ascended to the heights of the fashion world, a journey sculpted profoundly by Janice’s guidance. Before Janice had re-entered her life, Laurie’s creations had been unremarkable, barely stirring interest. Without the backing of the influential Edwards family, starting her own label and earning any sort of acclaim would have been out of reach. But with Janice’s return, everything had changed.

It was as though a portal to boundless creativity had flung open, allowing Laurie to craft hit after hit, carving out a name for herself in the fashion world.

“But I didn’t even recognize Janice’s effort. Instead, I got annoyed at her interruptions and snapped at her to leave. And yet, every suggestion she gave made my drafts perfect!” Tears began to gather in Laurie’s eyes, blurring her vision.

“I always convinced myself that the brilliance of my designs sprang from spontaneous bursts of inspiration, but could those moments have existed without Janice? I was so terribly mistaken.”

Clasping her chest, Laurie felt a piercing sting of pain. The more brutally she had treated Janice, the heavier and more unbearable her guilt felt now.

It was bitterly ironic. With Janice’s help, Laurie might have risen to unmatched heights in the industry. Yet now, staring down at her latest unfinished sketch, the familiar spark of creativity failed to materialize.

Reflecting on her previous indifference and biting critiques directed at Janice, Laurie was consumed by regret. She wished she could turn back time and alter her behavior. Had she shown Janice more warmth, could that have persuaded her to stay? Perhaps Janice would have remained a beacon of inspiration and even approached JE for support in their darkest moments.

“I must call Janice and make amends.”

Laurie reached for her phone and dialed Janice’s number, only to be met with an instant block.

The abrupt busy signal left her gazing at her phone in dismay, a pang of sorrow throbbing in her heart.

“Could you truly be so ruthless as to block your own mother? Or perhaps, are you just upset and this is temporary?”

She opened her messaging app, only to notice that Janice’s profile picture was now a portrait of herself.

Janice’s features, serene yet assertive, stared back at her. The image was a stark contrast to her previous cheerful sunflower profile picture.

Laurie remembered Janice’s words like a distant echo. “Mom, I love sunflowers because they always face towards the light. I hope for the same...”

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