

Wrath 861

Chapter 861:

The moment the words left her lips, the entire room fell into stunned silence.

“Wait, what just happened? Did she actually challenge Janice?”

“Is this some kind of joke? This is the Mendoza family’s banquet! Why would she pick this moment for such a thing?”

“She must be out of her mind!”

The audience exchanged confused glances, completely baffled by Liliana’s actions. Yet Liliana stood firm, her face composed, her determination shining through—this was no joke.

Janice furrowed her brows, taken aback. “And why exactly are you challenging me?”

“I challenged you once before, during the show. But circumstances stopped me from seeing it through. Now that it’s all over, I intend to finish what I started,” Liliana stated, her tone firm.

“That’s right!” Alissa interrupted sharply, her voice cold. “I can confirm it. You and Liliana still have unfinished business.”

Janice ignored Alissa, her gaze fixed solely on Liliana. After a moment, she asked, “Is this challenge really necessary?”

“Without a doubt!” Liliana’s eyes darkened, a sharp edge to her gaze. “Before, I challenged you for my own sake. But now, I’m doing this for someone greater—my hero, JE!”

Aiden, mid-sip of water, nearly choked, sputtering as Liliana’s words sank in. “Wait, what?! You’re challenging Janice for JE’s sake?”

“Exactly!” Liliana’s voice was unwavering. “JE was my idol. But when she competed against you, you played dirty and won. She took her own life because of that. Today, I’ll make sure she gets the justice she deserves!”

“What?” Aiden let out an incredulous chuckle, half-amused, half-frustrated.

It was already outrageous that Liliana claimed JE as her idol. But now she was taking it even further, alleging that JE had competed against Janice, lost unfairly, and then died because of it? It was completely absurd.

But Janice was JE, for God’s sake!

Janice, however, raised a hand, signaling Aiden to stay quiet. Her eyes glimmered with intrigue as she studied Liliana.

“Let me take a wild guess—this story came from Alissa, didn’t it?”

“Janice, don’t even think about denying it!” Alissa spat, her eyes burning with venom. “JE was a true prodigy, a once-in-a-lifetime talent, and you crushed her with your despicable schemes!”

A collective gasp rippled through the crowd at the shocking accusation surrounding JE’s fate.

“What? That can’t be true! JE is dead?”

“No way! JE was an unparalleled genius. She built JE Consortium from the ground up at such a young age, leaving behind innovation after innovation. How could she just be gone?”

“But what if it’s true? JE unveiled new designs every single year without fail. And this year, there’s been nothing. Not a word.”

“No, no, no! JE is my idol! I’ve been her biggest fan for years. If she’s really gone because of Janice...”

The speaker's voice trailed off as their gaze landed on Aiden, who stood beside Janice. Fear flickered in their eyes, and they swallowed the words they were about to unleash.

Chapter 862:

This was a situation far beyond their reach. Only someone like Alissa would dare step into it, but whether even she could change anything was another matter entirely.

"Janice, don't you want to clear your name?" Liliana's voice was calm, unwavering. "If you had no hand in JE's death, then prove it the way only you can. Defeat me, and I'll make sure your innocence is known to all."

"Liliana, what are you talking about? JE's death is on her hands. If you truly honor your hero, then make her pay for it," Alissa declared, her voice laced with malice. "Challenge her to a duel—a fight to the death! The guilty should pay with their life!"

A duel to the death?!

A challenge like this was unheard of—unless the hatred ran impossibly deep.

Janice let out a quiet sigh. Then, in an instant, her hand flew through the air like a whip, cracking hard against Alissa's cheek.

The sharp slap echoed like a gunshot, slicing through the stunned silence of the room.

A vivid red imprint bloomed on Alissa's cheek, standing out against her skin.

"Janice! You dare lay a hand on me?" Alissa shrieked, fury blazing in her eyes, her whole body trembling with rage.

Without hesitation, Janice struck again, her hand cracking against Alissa's other cheek. Now, two identical handprints marked her face like a cruel brand.

“You’ll regret this, Janice! I’ll kill you!”

“Alissa, do you really think your bodyguards stand a chance against me?” Janice’s gaze flicked to the men closing in, her tone dripping with amusement. “Even the Payne family’s guards couldn’t lay a hand on me earlier. What makes you think yours are any different?”

Alissa’s face stiffened. She had no retort—Janice was right.

“Oh, and one more thing—you’re insufferable. Keep talking, and you’ll get another slap.”

Janice picked up a napkin, wiping her hands with slow, deliberate disgust. Alissa’s face burned, not just from the pain, but from the sheer humiliation.

“Liliana, are you seriously going to stay silent?” Alissa turned on her, teeth clenched in frustration. “I took this humiliation for you!”

Liliana cast a fleeting glance at Alissa, her face unreadable. It was as if Alissa’s humiliation held no significance to her at all.

“Janice, what will it be? Have you made your decision?”

“Janice, you don’t have to agree to this,” Aiden interjected, his brow furrowing with concern. “This is just a ridiculous joke.”

“Quite funny, indeed. But...” Janice’s lips curved into a subtle smile as her gaze locked with Liliana’s. “I accept your challenge.”

Liliana’s eyes lit up, sparkling with unbridled excitement as her lips curled into a victorious grin. “Since you’ve accepted my challenge, you can decide the content of the challenge.”

“Hold on a moment.”

The crowd parted as Minnie approached them with measured steps. All eyes fixated on her, brimming with curiosity, wondering what she intended to do in this tense standoff.

“Although it might breach the boundaries of propriety for you to compete here, considering the Mendoza family’s gracious hosting of this illustrious banquet, I believe Mr. Mendoza would be utterly delighted to have your contest breathe life and excitement into the atmosphere before the formal proceedings commence.”

Chapter 863:

Just as she finished speaking, Bain appeared once more. He had been informed about the situation by the staff.

“Ms. Payne is right. I fully support your contest,” Bain said with a genuine smile. “Whatever the two of you need, simply let me know, and I’ll provide my complete support.”

His words stirred a wave of interest through the assembled guests.

Many of them had followed the show Love Lab and recognized Janice’s considerable talents, while Liliana was known throughout the industry as second only to JE in creative ability. A contest between these two promised to be truly remarkable.

“JE rose to fame through design. I suggest both of you create an impromptu design, and we’ll have the audience vote without knowing the creators to determine the winner. How does that sound?” Minnie offered.

“That’s a great idea.”

The proposal met with collective approval from the onlookers. “We won’t know which design belongs to whom, and we’ll vote based solely on quality, ensuring complete fairness and objectivity.”

“But is Janice actually familiar with design? Liliana’s reputation in this field is well-established, but Janice... I haven’t heard of her work before.”

"I know something of it. Janice previously worked at Mr. Delgado's company, so she should certainly have design capabilities." Minnie turned to face Janice and Liliana. "What do you think?"

"I have no objections," Janice nodded, accepting the terms with quiet confidence.

"Neither do I," Liliana responded, her demeanor brimming with self-assurance, as though victory was already within her grasp. "Great! Then—"

"Wait a minute!" Alissa cut in sharply, her teeth slightly clenched and her eyes flashing with barely concealed hostility. "Since it's a challenge with a bet, there must be stakes. As for the life-or-death duel I mentioned earlier, if you disagree with that, you should at least propose something of equivalent value."

She shot a meaningful glance at Liliana and whispered under her breath, "Don't forget what you promised me."

Liliana frowned briefly, then turned to Janice. "If I win, you must kneel and apologize to Alissa in front of everyone. Additionally, you'll have to compensate her with a hundred million."

"No problem," Janice agreed readily, without hesitation.

Alissa couldn't conceal her elation—she had anticipated resistance or bargaining, but Janice's immediate acceptance caught her completely off guard.

"Now, what stake do you require from me?"

Janice looked at Alissa. "If I win, Alissa should also kneel and apologize to me. Also, hand over the Welch family's house in the heart of Cloverhill to me."

"What?" Alissa's eyes grew wide with shock, staring at Janice in disbelief. "Are you crazy? That's a historic estate in the heart of Cloverhill, worth over a billion! How dare you make such an outrageous demand?"

Everyone present seemed to share the sentiment that Janice's demand was excessive beyond reason.

Beyond its mere monetary value, the historic estate in Cloverhill's center represented generations of status and prestige, a symbol of influence that no amount of wealth could readily purchase. Even for a powerful dynasty like the Welch family, surrendering such a cornerstone of their legacy would be almost unthinkable.

Chapter 864:

"So? Not agreeing?" Janice's lips curled into a hint of a smile as she shrugged with practiced nonchalance. "Then let's just forget about the challenge altogether."

"Wait!" Alissa called out hastily, frustration clear on her face as her teeth ground audibly. "I'll make a call."

"Go ahead."

With storm clouds gathering across her expression, Alissa retrieved her phone, stepping aside for privacy. Her fingers trembled as she dialed Mateo.

She quickly outlined the situation in hushed, urgent tones, and as expected, she found herself on the receiving end of Mateo's thunderous disapproval.

"No way! That house is reserved for your two brothers! Now you want to gamble it away on some frivolous bet? Have you completely lost your mind?"

"Dad, please listen to me!" Alissa pleaded. "I'm absolutely certain I can win this bet. Plus, Minnie is watching everything unfold! If I back down now, the Welch family will become the laughing stock of our entire social circle. But if Liliana wins, she'll inherit JE's honor and become the next JE. Think about JE's reputation and influence. If we're aligned with her, it will open doors to the international market with ease!"

Mateo fell silent.

Despite its century-old heritage, the Welch family remained firmly rooted in domestic business, consistently struggling to expand its influence internationally. Mateo had long dreamed of making his mark and gaining complete control over the Welch family empire. Breaking into the international market had always been his long-sought goal.

Alissa's brothers, Jensen and Calvin, had been strategically sent abroad to study foreign markets. Now, with their return, combined with Liliana—a talented individual carrying JE's prestigious name—they might finally overcome the barriers to international expansion.

"Fine," Mateo finally said. "I'll take the risk. But if you lose, you're never coming back."

A chill of fear ran through Alissa for a brief moment. But as she reflected on her carefully laid plans, her confidence returned in full force.

"Dad, don't worry. If I fail, I won't have the courage to face you again."

Janice, who had been toying with a water glass, watched as Alissa returned. She raised an eyebrow slightly.

"So, Alissa, have you decided? Are you in?"

"Yes!" Alissa replied, her voice firm with determination, her jaw set resolutely. "I agree to your bet. So, can we start the contest now?"

"Sure!" Janice nodded, placing her glass down with a subtle smile. "Let's begin."

"Mr. Mendoza, please make the necessary preparations." Minnie turned her gaze to Bain. "Get two laptops ready for them, along with all the required design tools."

"Understood," Bain replied, nodding as he quickly set things in motion. Minnie then turned to face Janice and Liliana. "Take a moment to gather your thoughts and get ready."

Janice nodded slightly before returning to her seat with Aiden.

“Janice, doesn’t this seem odd to you?” Aiden asked, furrowing his brows with concern. “Liliana isn’t a fool, yet she actually bought into Alissa’s nonsense, believing you were responsible for JE’s death. It’s absurd. Why would you let yourself be dragged into this?”

Janice took a slow sip of water before replying, “It’s beyond ridiculous. But Alissa’s confidence in Liliana’s victory tells me she’s up to something. I also have a feeling someone betrayed her.”

Chapter 865:

Aiden’s eyes widened in surprise, his confusion deepening. Janice glanced at Alissa from the corner of her eye, a faint smirk tugging at her lips. “If I’m right, Leonidas is the one pulling the strings behind Alissa’s entire scheme.”

There was no way Alissa knew Janice was JE. If she did, she never would have set up this competition, exposing herself to such humiliation. Furthermore, if Alissa truly believed Janice was responsible for JE’s downfall, then Leonidas must be the mastermind orchestrating everything from the shadows. To prove her innocence, Janice had no choice but to reveal her true identity. Otherwise, she would have to go through with the competition.

Leonidas had only ever had one goal—to make her life a living hell.

Janice sighed inwardly, a tinge of resignation in her heart. Since childhood, Leonidas had been fixated on opposing her, an obsession he refused to let go of. Alissa’s fate? That had never mattered to him.

At that moment, Alissa was on a call with Leonidas. “I did exactly as you instructed, and the competition is set. But are you sure Liliana can win?”

Leonidas’ voice, cold and laced with menace, echoed through the phone. “Relax. I never start a battle I can’t win. As long as Janice accepts the competition, the only real winner will be me.”

Alissa furrowed her brows slightly as unease flickered in her mind, but she quickly dismissed the thought. "As long as we win, I'll do whatever you ask. But if you make me lose, you'll regret it."

Leonidas let out a low chuckle. "That won't be an issue. Oh, and the person I've placed is ready. When the time comes, just bring her in—I guarantee Janice will have nowhere to run."

"Alright." Alissa ended the call and walked back to Liliana. "Feeling confident?"

"Without a doubt," Liliana replied, giving a firm nod. Determination gleamed in her eyes. "No matter the opponent, I step in ready to win."

"If that's the case, why did you end up losing to her on the show?" Alissa took the opportunity to sneer, her tone laced with ridicule. No matter how self-assured Liliana seemed, the undeniable fact remained.

Liliana, unshaken, responded with calm composure, "What's the problem?"

Alissa hesitated, briefly perplexed, as though Liliana's words didn't fully register with her.

"I trust my abilities and always compete with the determination to win. But that doesn't guarantee the outcome will be in my favor," Liliana added.

Alissa found herself at a loss for words, unable to refute that.

Liliana allowed the conversation to end there, shutting her eyes to meditate. It wasn't long before Bain had everything arranged. The stage, once intended for speeches, had been transformed into a competition platform.

"To keep things fair, let's set a theme," Minnie proposed, shifting her attention to the two competitors. "As this is the Mendoza family's banquet, let's choose a theme of joy and celebration—something visually striking and full of festivity."

"Works for me," Janice replied with a nod, her tone confident.

“Agreed,” Liliana added just as quickly.

Their confidence was evident. It seemed they already had a vision in mind and were eager to bring it to life.

For the guests, however, the choice of theme felt almost ironic.

The guests exchanged knowing glances at Bain, fully aware that just moments ago, tragedy had struck—Bain’s daughter had been shot. Mourning still hung in the air, yet they were now expected to embrace a theme of joy and celebration.

Chapter 866:

Bain felt the heavy pressure of their gazes bearing down on him, filling him with unease. In that moment, he wished he could disappear entirely. He had a strong suspicion that Minnie’s actions were deliberate. She must have uncovered something; otherwise, she wouldn’t have orchestrated such a precise and strategic move against his family.

“Ahem!” Bain cleared his throat, attempting to mask his unease. “Let’s get started. You’ll have one hour to complete your designs, after which we’ll hold a blind vote to determine the winner. Ladies, give it your all. We’re all eager to see your creations. In the meantime, to keep the guests entertained, the banquet will proceed as planned. Feel free to enjoy the food and drinks.”

At Bain’s words, the crowd’s energy surged. On stage, Liliana and Janice were deeply immersed in their work, while the others began conversing.

“Who do you think will win this competition?”

“Liliana, I believe. I’ve heard she’s a prodigy—not just in design, but also in cooking and sports.”

“Exactly, she’s also known as the second most talented, just behind JE.”

“Hah, then Janice might face a challenge. All we know is she’s the outcast from the Edwards family and Aiden’s partner, which hardly confirms her design talent.”

“I’m placing my bet on Janice. She’s no fool. By entering this contest so calmly, she must be confident. Remember, she worked for Delgado Jewelry and is friendly with the CEO of Freak Design.”

At this, the crowd exchanged looks of surprise and skepticism. If Janice was close to Leah, who was JE’s best friend, could Janice also be linked to JE? The anticipation in the audience intensified.

Meanwhile, Aiden remained calm, leisurely sipping his wine. His indifference, however, seemed to annoy Kenneth. “Aren’t you concerned at all?”

“Why should I be?” Aiden replied, raising an eyebrow and glancing briefly at Kenneth. “With Janice in the competition, she’s bound to win.”

“You’re quite the optimist.” Kenneth frowned. “I concede Janice is skilled, but she’s not infallible. I’ve researched Liliana. She’s regarded as second only to JE in talent, with unparalleled design skills.”

“But isn’t JE still ahead of her?” Aiden took another sip, grimacing at the wine’s bitterness. “The Mendoza family really should serve better wine at their events.”

“Aiden, please take this seriously. If Janice loses, she’ll be forced to publicly apologize to Alissa!” Kenneth said, his frustration evident. “That scenario is worse than losing a billion dollars to me.”

“Janice isn’t JE, you know.” Aiden suppressed a smirk, knowing full well that Janice was, in fact, JE.

Liliana had dedicated years to her craft, but she had always remained second to JE. Facing JE directly in competition, her chances were slim.

“Kenneth, do you realize the difference between us?” Aiden asked, his tone calm.

“What’s that?” Kenneth replied, clearly intrigued.

"I will always be ahead, while you're stuck following my lead." Aiden's arrogance was palpable, causing Kenneth's hands to ball into fists. His urge to strike was strong, yet he couldn't deny Aiden's point. In both business and personal affairs, Aiden was always a step ahead. No matter how hard Kenneth tried, it seemed he was destined to trail behind. Kenneth had resigned himself to this in business, as long as it benefited the Delgado family.

Thus, he had avoided Aiden, and their paths seldom crossed. However, their mutual affection for Janice had forced Kenneth into Aiden's orbit. As they interacted more, the disparity between them became stark.

Chapter 867:

"Just watch, Kenneth." Aiden's gaze shifted to the stage, where Janice was absorbed in her design work. A subtle smile played on his lips. "You only see Janice's exterior. You'll never truly understand her—not in your lifetime. Because she belongs with me."

"Hah, how presumptuous. You and Janice are merely friends for now; nothing's official yet. Who knows what the future holds?"

"Is that so?" Aiden's lips curled into a confident smile, unfazed by Kenneth's challenge. He couldn't foresee everything about the future, but he was certain of one thing: Janice would eventually marry him.

As time passed, the two designers on stage focused intently on their work. Janice, though confident in her skills, always approached her design work with seriousness. She treated every competition as a challenge against herself, regardless of the opponent's experience.

At that moment, Liliana's expression changed. Her brows furrowed, and her swift movements halted. She glanced toward Alissa in the audience. Alissa wore a smug smirk.

Liliana's gaze hardened as she returned her attention to her computer screen, where a new image appeared. It was one of JE's unreleased sketches.

Liliana couldn't fathom how Alissa had accessed the draft, but it was evident that Alissa had managed to upload the design to her computer, intending for her to use it in the competition.

Alissa's eyes narrowed as she mused, "Liliana, I might not know your true skill, but one thing is certain—you're no match for JE."

With JE's design draft in her hands, Liliana's victory seemed assured. JE stood at the pinnacle of the design world, her creations admired by designers everywhere.

But just as Alissa was certain Liliana would rely on the design draft, her eyes widened in disbelief when Liliana calmly dragged the file into the trash bin on her desktop.

Despite being universally acknowledged as second only to JE, Liliana held her own sense of pride. Resorting to underhanded tactics to claim victory was beneath her.

"That ungrateful bitch!" Alissa's face twisted with fury as realization struck. Her eyes gleamed with malice. "You're seriously tossing away a guaranteed win? What a fool!"

"Time's up!" Bain's voice echoed through the hall.

The two competitors halted their work, their expressions composed as they glanced up.

The spectators, noting their unwavering poise, found themselves unable to determine the frontrunner. The suspense surrounding the designs deepened.

"Seeing your expressions, it's clear both of you are confident in your work. Now, our technical team will shuffle the order of the designs and strip them of any identifying marks. This way, the votes will be cast without bias."

At that moment, Bain turned his gaze to Minnie. She responded with a firm nod, signaling him to continue.

Within moments, two designs illuminated the grand screen in the hall. One was labeled “No. 1,” while the other was marked “No. 2.” These would be their sole identifiers.

As soon as the designs appeared, a wave of awe swept through the audience. Their sheer creativity left everyone speechless.

“These are amazing! The moment you look at them, they burst with joy and celebration. There’s such a variety of elements, yet everything comes together seamlessly and with purpose.”

Chapter 868:

“Exactly! Take No. 1—it’s so abstract, shattering every expectation. Yet it radiates sophistication and grace. Just looking at it, I can almost sense the warmth of spring.”

The scent of fresh blossoms lingered in the air. “No. 2 is just as breathtaking. The embroidered magpies symbolize joyous occasions ahead. The lines flow so effortlessly—I can already picture how striking it would be in motion.”

“My vote goes to No. 1!”

“No. 2 gets my vote!”

Without hesitation, the audience began submitting their votes for the design that captured them most.

Soon, every vote was cast, ushering in the night’s most electrifying moment.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I can see the anticipation in your eyes—you’re all curious to find out who created these two remarkable designs,” Bain said with a knowing smile. “But before we unveil the designers, let’s first reveal the vote counts for each entry. First, let’s reveal the results for No. 1.”

Every eye in the room fixated on the screen as a bar steadily climbed, displaying the vote count for No. 1.

The bar ascended steadily, inching higher and higher, before finally settling at 280 votes.

“This has to be the winner, right? There are only about six hundred people here, and 280 votes is nearly half of that!”

“Not so fast. What if No. 2 racks up more than 300 votes?”

A wave of murmurs swept through the crowd. The tension was thick, and every spectator leaned forward, eager to see No. 2’s outcome.

“No. 1 has earned 280 votes. The competition is tight. Now, let’s see the results for No. 2.”

The moment Bain finished speaking, a fresh bar chart emerged next to No. 2.

The votes for No. 2 started rising steadily, eventually halting at a crucial point.

“No. 2 has secured 250 votes.”

“What? The margin is razor-thin! Now I’m convinced that No. 1 has to be Liliana’s creation. She’s second only to JE, after all. The fact that Janice got this close is impressive in itself.”

“Hold on! The results aren’t final yet! Why are you assuming? What if Janice actually outshined Liliana this time?”

“Exactly! Liliana might be ranked just below JE, but that’s only because Janice rarely enters competitions. If she had competed more often, the rankings could have told a very different story.”

The crowd’s chatter grew more intense, with opinions flying from every direction. Yet, no one could definitively say which design belonged to which designer.

Kenneth shifted uneasily, his tension evident. “From what I know about Janice, I’d bet No. 2 is hers. She often integrates recognizable imagery into her work.”

Aiden, however, stayed silent, a knowing smile subtly curving his lips. The moment the designs were revealed, he had already recognized Janice’s signature style.

“Now, it’s time to unveil the designers behind these creations.” As Bain made the announcement, the screen flickered, revealing the designers’ names under each design.

“What?” Kenneth’s eyes widened as he saw the results. Staring at the screen in shock, he muttered, “No. 1? But the style...”

Chapter 869:

“Janice doesn’t confine herself to a single style.” Aiden shot Kenneth a smirk. “You think you know her so well? The truth is, you don’t understand her at all.”

Kenneth’s lips pressed into a thin line. Aiden’s words hit him like a punch, knocking the wind out of him. He had been certain that No. 2 was Janice’s work, yet she had shattered his expectations in the most unexpected way.

Aiden’s eyes lingered on Janice as she stood on the stage, a mixture of admiration and intensity in his gaze. “She never stops challenging herself. Even a minor competition like this is just another stepping stone for her growth.”

“Wait, what? No. 1 is Janice’s work?”

“Does that mean Janice just won?”

A wave of excitement surged through the crowd, crackling like a live wire. No one had seen this coming—it was a complete shock. Everyone had assumed Liliana, the only one second to JE, held an undeniable edge. But now, doubts crept in—was her reputation truly earned?

“Miss Payne, would you do the honors and announce the final result?” Bain turned to Minnie with a subtle smile.

Minnie gave a firm nod before raising her voice. “The winner of this competition is none other than Janice!”

The moment her words landed, the entire room burst into thunderous applause.

Janice stood amidst the applause, composed and unshaken, as if she had walked this path countless times before.

Liliana’s gaze fixed on Janice—not with resentment, but with fierce determination and, surprisingly, a flicker of exhilaration.

“This can’t be happening! Liliana actually lost?” Alissa’s voice trembled on the edge of hysteria. She whirled toward Liliana. “Why didn’t you go along with the plan? Didn’t you want to fight for JE’s honor?”

Liliana met her gaze with unwavering composure. “I did, but not at the cost of my own integrity. Losing once doesn’t mean I’ll keep losing. One day, I’ll surpass her.”

Her eyes locked onto Janice, blazing with sheer determination.

Janice met Liliana’s unwavering stare, yet found no trace of bitterness—only resolve. A slow, knowing smile curved her lips. “Liliana, you lived up to my expectations.”

Then Janice turned to Alissa, her gaze becoming stern. “Alissa, it’s time to uphold your end of the bet. With all these witnesses, surely you’re not planning to back out?”

All eyes snapped to Alissa, amusement flickering in their expressions. The Welch family, a prestigious name in Cloverhill for over a century, carried an air of untouchable authority. Yet here and now, Janice had shaken its foundations. Perhaps the Welch name wasn’t as untouchable as everyone once believed.

"I didn't lose!" Alissa's head jerked side to side in frantic denial before her expression hardened. "No! This competition was rigged. Something's off!"

"Are you accusing me and Mr. Mendoza?" Minnie's expression hardened as her cold gaze locked onto Alissa. Her authoritative tone carried enough weight to make Alissa flinch.

Alissa squared her shoulders and met Minnie's gaze head-on, her defiance unwavering. Both hailed from esteemed families, yet the chasm between them felt impossibly vast, as if no amount of effort could ever place her on Minnie's level.

"I'm telling the truth," Alissa said through clenched teeth, her voice low and steely. "Liliana is acknowledged as the genius second only to JE. And yet, Janice, a woman who depends on men, somehow managed to defeat her? Impossible! I believe Janice resorted to plagiarism."

Chapter 870:

A wave of shock rippled through the crowd, their murmurs swelling into a restless uproar. "It is strange, isn't it? If Janice really possessed such extraordinary talent, why has she remained unnoticed until now?"

"Exactly! There's a real chance she could have cheated."

"But if she did, whose design did she steal?"

Alissa inhaled deeply, steadying herself. In an instant, her shaken demeanor was gone, replaced by an air of unshakable confidence. "She plagiarized JE's work."

The crowd reeled, their astonishment deepening. "No way! Are you saying this is JE's work? But JE passed away, didn't she?"

"Hold on! Now that I look at it, this design does carry traces of JE's signature style—bold, unconventional, brimming with imagination."

“But where’s the proof? This entire competition was held in the public eye, with Mr. Mendoza and Ms. Payne overseeing it. How could she have even had the chance to plagiarize?”

Listening to the crowd’s mounting speculation, Minnie furrowed her brows and addressed Alissa.
“Alissa, do you have any actual evidence that Janice plagiarized?”

“Of course, I do!” Alissa folded her arms, her gaze dripping with smugness as she turned to Janice.
“You’re panicking now, aren’t you? Bet you never expected me to have solid proof of your plagiarism.”

Janice blinked, her expression unreadable. With a calm gesture, she pointed at herself. “Do I seem panicked to you?”

“Drop the act, Janice!” Alissa scoffed, her voice laced with triumph. “It doesn’t matter how composed you pretend to be—the outcome won’t change. Get ready to apologize to me.”

Alissa’s gaze swept across the room, as if rallying support. “Everyone here knows how close Janice is to Leah Sugden.”

The crowd nodded in agreement. That was no secret—when Janice had first stepped into the spotlight through a reality show, it was Leah who had supported her.

“Leah and JE were best friends. Through her, Janice could have easily gotten her hands on JE’s design. Isn’t that the simplest explanation?”

“That explains everything! This practically confirms Janice’s plagiarism!”

“Hold on! That’s just a theory—it doesn’t actually prove she copied anything.”

The audience remained skeptical, not immediately convinced by Alissa’s brief remarks.

Yet, Alissa was composed. “I certainly have proof. The evidence I have will reveal Janice’s true colors.”

“Please proceed then. I’m eager to see this evidence you claim demonstrates my plagiarism,” Janice responded calmly.

“Christie, please enter,” Alissa demanded.

At that moment, a tall woman with striking blonde hair and piercing blue eyes made her way into the room.

As soon as she entered, a murmur of excitement swept through the crowd.

“This is Christie Brown, the internationally acclaimed designer, well-known for her admiration of JE’s creations. Without a doubt, she is the foremost authority on JE’s work.”

“Ah, with Christie’s expertise, we’ll definitively determine the authenticity of Janice’s work.”