

Bound love 1171

Chapter 1171:

Elyse asked with concern, “Are you going to dispose of it?”

“Dispose of it? I’m just going to tweak it a little to make it palatable,” Garret replied, sounding annoyed.

Elyse quietly took her seat at the dining table, feeling dejected. Louise tried to comfort her. “Don’t worry about it. Cooking for everyone, you can just let Jayden cook for you from now on.”

Elyse asserted, “I can make clam chowder well, and I do have other things I’m known for.”

Louise, seeing Elyse wasn’t convinced, reassured her briefly before suddenly asking, “What’s your opinion on Garret?”

Elyse nearly choked on her food upon hearing that question.

After swallowing a large gulp of water, she asked in a flustered tone, “Why would you ask something like that? I don’t really know him that well.”

“But you’ve been around him for some time now. What do you think of him?” Louise persisted.

Elyse felt a chill run down her spine at the question.

She gathered her courage and said, “He’s attractive, intelligent, and strategic, but his words can be quite sharp.”

Louise leaned her chin on her hand and challenged, “Is that all?”

“That’s all I’ve noticed up to now,” Elyse answered.

Louise continued probing, “If you weren’t fond of Jayden and met someone like Garret, would you be attracted to him?”

Elyse froze, puzzled by the motive behind Louise’s probing questions.

Elyse said, “That question doesn’t make much sense. Even if I weren’t in love with Jayden, I wouldn’t get to meet Garret. He’s the prince, and I’m just a commoner. We would never run into each other.”

Louise pursed her lips. “True. But imagine you did meet Garret. Would you fall for him?”

Elyse responded firmly, “No, absolutely not.”

Louise, skeptical, pressed further, “Are you so certain you wouldn’t fall in love with him? What if you did?”

“No,” Elyse replied confidently. “I am completely sure I would never fall for him. He’s just not my type.”

Louise, still convinced, was about to continue questioning when Garret approached with a bowl of soup.

Garret placed the soup on the table and quickly asked, “What were you two discussing in my kitchen?”

Louise tightened her lips again. “We were talking about you. Just eat.”

Elyse, hesitant to say anything, quietly served herself soup. When she took a small sip, she was amazed by the rich flavor. She exclaimed in surprise, “What did you put in the soup to make it taste so amazing?”

Garret responded, “Even if I told you, you wouldn’t understand. Just enjoy your meal in silence. You won’t get another chance to be in the kitchen.”

Chapter 1172:

Elyse was confused. "But I need to cook tomorrow, don't I?"

Garret replied, "I'll be cooking."

Elyse was taken aback. "You can cook?"

Garret nodded. "I didn't think so at first, but since meeting you, I've realized my cooking isn't too bad."

Elyse gave a dry chuckle and ceased her conversation with Garret.

After dinner, Elyse offered to clean up and headed to the kitchen to wash the dishes.

Garret returned to his study, while Louise quietly made her way to the kitchen to talk to Elyse.

Upon seeing Louise, Elyse felt a headache beginning. She had a feeling Louise wanted to talk about Garret again. Louise, chewing on an apple, kept eyeing Elyse. Unable to hold back any longer, Elyse broke the silence. "Just say what you need to say."

Louise paused for a moment, then asked, "Since Garret is going to start cooking, what are your thoughts on him now?" It was a question that made Elyse feel overwhelmed.

After a brief silence, she answered honestly, "I think it's wonderful. At least I won't be stuck eating my cooking every day."

Louise appeared clearly unhappy with that reply, frowning as she insisted, "That's not the answer I was looking for. Take it seriously. Think about it and then respond."

Elyse was frustrated. She said, "Why not just tell me what you want to hear, and I'll say it?"

Louise sneered, "I'm not that type of person. Stop avoiding the question and answer it."

“Alright, let me think about it.” Elyse finished washing the dishes, and after drying her hands, she turned to ask, “Why are you behaving so strangely today, bombarding me with questions about Garret? It makes me wonder if you’re the one interested in him.”

Elyse hoped this would make Louise give up.

After all, that was a challenging question to respond to. But to her astonishment, Louise didn’t deny it. She confessed openly.

“You’re right, I do have feelings for him, but it’s not allowed. And I don’t want anyone to notice.”

Elyse was shocked, pointing at herself in disbelief. “I’ve figured it out. You have feelings for Garret. You... You’re not planning on doing anything to me, are you?”

Elyse’s voice wavered as she spoke.

Louise rolled her eyes at her. “Even if you tell others about me and Garret, do you have any proof? With just a snap of my fingers, I could make you disappear completely. So I’m not worried about any tricks you might pull.”

Elyse gave a small smile. “I’d rather not know any of your secrets. If possible, I’d prefer to remain unaware.”

“No chance. As my friend, you have to share my burdens,” Louise said with a stern look.

“Burdens? How stressed can you be?” Elyse asked, puzzled.

Chapter 1173:

Louise fixed Elyse with a stern look, expressing her frustration. “I’m not a child anymore. Of course, I understand the horror of harboring romantic feelings for my half-brother.”

Elyse recalled the unsettling scene she had just witnessed outside the study, sending shivers down her spine.

Rubbing her neck, she inquired, “What about your feelings for Edward? You’ve always wanted to be with him, haven’t you? So why have you shifted your affections to Garret?”

When Elyse mentioned Edward, Louise’s expression grew even sadder. She took a bite of her apple and answered gloomily, “I don’t know.”

After a pause, she continued, “I’m unsure about my feelings for Edward. It was Chesney who suggested I pursue him, claiming that if I married Edward, it would help him secure his rule.”

Elyse was puzzled. “Chesney is king yet, right?”

Louise exhaled deeply. “He believes he’ll ascend the throne sooner or later and is preparing by securing close allies now.”

Elyse pursed her lips, sharing her thoughts candidly. “Chesney is ambitious, but Garret seems more capable to me.”

Louise sighed deeply. “It’s hard to admit, but Chesney doesn’t match up to Garret.”

After a moment of thought, Elyse joked, “Maybe you’re better suited to ascend to the throne than Chesney.”

Louise, caught off-guard mid-bite, responded, “You think I’d do better than Chesney?”

“Why not? You’re humbler than Chesney and equally brave. You could ascend to the throne,” Elyse replied.

Louise chewed her apple. “I never thought about it like that.”

“Well, maybe it’s something to consider. You never know,” Elyse said, patting Louise on the shoulder.

Louise stiffened, then leaned back. “I never claimed to be compelling for the throne. Please don’t spur me on without thought.”

Elyse laughed and changed the subject. “So, between Garret and Edward, who do you really prefer?”

Louise ate her apple in silence for a while before she softly said, “I don’t know.”

Her tone lightened as she added, “But I do have a crush on Garret, and I have strong feelings for Edward as well.”

Caught off-guard, Elyse asked, “Of the two, who do you prefer?”

Louise touched her cheek thoughtfully and replied earnestly, “I think I hold them both in quite high regard.”

“At least you’re fair,” Elyse said, unsure of what else to say.

She shifted the topic again. “Garret is, after all, your half-brother. Continuing to have feelings for him could lead to a massive scandal for the royal family. Don’t you think?”

Chapter 1174:

Louise seemed about to speak, hesitated, then her eyes filled with sadness. “I know. That’s why I should focus on Edward. Marrying him would be the sensible choice.”

Observing Louise’s peculiar expression, Elyse asked nonchalantly, “Did something happen between you and Garret?”

“No. Absolutely not,” Louise’s voice rose sharply as she quickly replied.

Elyse was taken aback by such a strong denial.

The intensity of Louise’s reaction only deepened her suspicions. Noticing Louise’s reluctance to discuss it further, Elyse chose not to push the issue.

Seeing Louise's gloomy look, Elyse suggested, "Would you like to sleep in my room tonight?"

Louise wrapped her arms around herself and replied cautiously, "What are you implying? I'm a princess. Don't assume you can take care of me."

A smirk crossed Elyse's face. "I'm only interested in men."

"Even so, I prefer to sleep by myself," Louise said, throwing her apple core away. She added, "I'm actually going to stop talking now."

Elyse responded, "Alright. Have a good rest then."

Louise yawned and replied, "You too. I'll talk to Garret about arranging a meeting with Jayden, so you don't miss him too much."

After Louise departed, Elyse leaned on the kitchen counter, exhaling deeply.

Once she felt settled and began heading upstairs, she encountered Garret.

Garret extended a phone towards Elyse, saying, "The idiot's calling. Answer it, or he'll keep bothering me tonight." Elyse wasn't sure who Garret referred to. She looked at the phone and saw Edward's name displayed.

Feeling slightly uncomfortable, she met Garret's gaze, who said, "Letting you use my phone, just make it quick." Garret then walked away.

Elyse took the phone, went back to the ground floor, and took the call.

As Elyse picked up the call, Edward's angry voice boomed from the other end,

"Elyse, you are quite courageous, aren't you? How could you possibly venture to a location that is so dangerous?"

Elyse laughed nervously. "I wasn't alone. I found someone to help me."

Edward's tone softened. "Who helped you?"

"Uh... I'm not telling you," Elyse wouldn't reveal Louise's involvement.

"Ha! You won't tell me? Garret already did. The nerve of Louise!" Edward was enraged. These two women were both troublemakers.

"Why ask me since you know already?" Elyse retorted, clearly annoyed.

"I wanted to check if you would be honest with me," Edward explained. "It surprises me that Louise, who once disliked you, would assist you now. Have you two made a secret agreement?"

"If you keep this up, I'll end the call," Elyse said.

"I'm sending someone to bring you back, and you're going to follow their instructions," Edward commanded.

Chapter 1175:

"No, I have tasks to complete. Stay out of it," Elyse responded firmly.

Edward's expression showed his irritation. "Do you understand the danger Jayden is in at the moment? His enemies have laid a trap to capture him."

Startled, Elyse quickly asked, "How are you aware of all this? Did he inform you?"

Edward felt a surge of jealousy at her concern, but he had decided to keep their relationship platonic and dismissed his feelings.

"I've got my connections," he said. "There's no longer any signal from where he is. Someone has severed all communications. He's trying to reach out, but it's proving difficult."

Fear enveloped Elyse.

She bit her lip, sensing turmoil within herself, yet unable to identify its origin.

Edward sighed and replied, "Please come back. Tucker and the others have been asking about your whereabouts since your phone is off. Do you know how much I had to lie to keep them from panicking?" In a soft voice, Elyse responded, "I owe you for this."

Touching his chest, Edward looked wounded. "Will you ever repay me? Even Gavin and Irving scolded me because I wouldn't disclose your location. How could I tell them the truth?"

Elyse remained silent, afraid that any word from her might trigger another outburst from Edward.

After his rant, Edward noticed her quietude and asked, "Do you really want to find him that badly? He's struggling to keep himself safe. How could he possibly take care of you too?"

"But I don't want to just sit back and be protected by everyone," Elyse replied gloomily. "You and Jayden are the same. Both of you keep me in the dark, never sharing what's really happening."

Elyse thought that if Jayden wouldn't open up, she would have to uncover the truth alone. She needed a breakthrough in their relationship.

She resolved not to wait any longer. Taking action seemed the only way forward.

Edward, hearing her resolve, said, "This is no joke. They're dealing with real threats. Stop this nonsense. I'm sending someone to fetch you tomorrow." With that, Edward ended the call.

Elyse set down her phone and gazed out at the night sky. The heavy, gray clouds reflected the despair in her heart.

She then walked up to Garret's room and knocked on the door. When Garret opened it and saw her somber face, he asked, "What did Edward say to upset you so much?"

Elyse exhaled deeply. "Not really. He just told me to stay put. He's planning to take me back."

Then glancing up cautiously, she inquired, "Can you stop him? I don't want to go back."

Garret raised an eyebrow. “You care for Jayden that much? To stay in such a dangerous place?”

“It’s not about that,” Elyse said stubbornly. “He owes me an explanation, and I can’t move on without it.”

Garret observed her carefully, catching the guilty and evasive look in her eyes. He realized and said, “So what you’re saying is, you still have feelings for him. But there’s been a misunderstanding he won’t clear up, and that’s making you unhappy, right?”

Elyse hesitated. “You don’t understand us at all, so stop making assumptions.”

Garret stroked his chin thoughtfully. “As long as you have feelings for him, I think my guess is accurate. So do you love him?” Garret suddenly leaned in closer, his expression mischievously smug.

“Ehem, do princesses concern themselves with such gossip? Does it matter whether she cares for Jayden or not?” Elyse turned her head away. “What does it matter to you? You’ve never been in love, so you wouldn’t understand.”

Chapter 1176:

After her conversation, Elyse quickly made her exit, steering clear of Garret.

Garret propped himself against the doorframe, smirking as he watched her swift departure. “Her reaction clearly shows she’s got a thing for Jayden.”

Louise’s voice emerged from behind him. “Give her a break. She’s really confused at the moment. Even if you confronted her about her feelings for Jayden, she wouldn’t be able to give you an answer.”

Garret closed the door and turned back to the room. Louise sat ensconced in her silk robe, her legs and arms crossed, exuding an effortless regality.

Garret walked over and cradled her face gently in his hands, tilting it to meet his gaze.

“What were you and Elyse discussing?” he inquired. “She’s been notably somber since then.”

Louise met his eyes and posed her question. “She believes I would be a superior ruler compared to both of my brothers. What are your thoughts on that?”

Garret hesitated, then responded, “Is ruling something you actually aspire to?”

“I’m unsure,” Louise admitted. She then continued, “What I am sure of is that I have no desire to abide by Chesney’s command to marry Edward.”

“Why oppose marrying him?” Garret pressed. “He is a man of promise, competence, and responsibility. Being his wife could bring you happiness.”

Louise looked intently at Garret. “Have you ever entertained the idea of us getting married?”

Garret stiffened, then released her face. “That’s not an option for us.”

Louise persisted, her gaze unwavering. “But wouldn’t you like to see me happy?”

Garret sidestepped her question, shifting the focus. “You’ve expressed fondness for Edward before. Why not consider him?”

With a soft chuckle, Louise remarked, “It seems you care for me too, yet you’re fixated on pushing me away.” Frustration colored Garret’s tone. “I’m not the right match for you. If we were to marry, how would we face the world?”

Louise’s voice was calm but firm. “You are merely avoiding the truth.” Garret fell silent then.

Silence engulfed them. Louise watched his back as he moved away, feeling a deep ache in her heart.

She had misled Elyse earlier; her affection for Garret ran much deeper than she admitted.

Despite this, Garret was not ready to sacrifice for their love, and she knew she must not let herself grow bitter over it as a princess.

Louise decided it was time to take control of her destiny. "I'm off to bed," she announced, rising and heading towards the door.

Garret felt the urge to call her back but realized he had relinquished that right when he had drawn a line between them.

Outside the room, Louise leaned against the door, sighing deeply.

Making her way back to her room, Louise encountered Elyse just as she was leaving hers. Their paths crossed.

Curious, Elyse asked, "Where are you headed?"

Feeling unexpectedly flustered, Louise replied, "Just taking a stroll. I'm not familiar with this place, and it's quite unsettling."

Elyse accepted the explanation without further question and continued, "I was hoping to get your help. Edward plans to take me back tomorrow, but I'm not ready to go. Could you help me out? I asked Garret, but he was evasive, so I thought I'd ask you."

After a moment of consideration, Louise said, "I can delay him for a few days, but I can't completely stop him."

Elyse's face lit up. "That's fantastic. You're amazing." She paused, then asked cautiously, "How will you manage it? Are you really able to delay Edward?"

With a proud lift of her eyebrow, Louise confidently responded, "Absolutely. I know him well enough to know exactly how to preoccupy him."

Admiration filled Elyse's eyes. "You're incredibly capable. If it weren't for Garret tipping off Edward, he wouldn't even suspect you were helping me."

Chapter 1177:

Louise pondered this, touching her chin thoughtfully. “You know, considering it now, my skills are on par with theirs, especially compared to my brother Chesney, whose skills are dismal. His only advantage is his gender.”

Elyse nodded, her voice laden with disapproval. “Exactly. He’s not just incompetent; he’s arrogant as well. Are you comfortable with him taking over the country?” Louise reflected on this seriously.

“Why do you want me to be the ruler so much?” Louise inquired, puzzled.

Elyse smiled warmly. “Why shouldn’t there be a queen? Whatever they can achieve, you can too. I think you should vie for the throne.”

The morning light streamed through the windows as Elyse prepared breakfast. Just as she settled into her seat, Garret approached, his eyes fixed on her with an almost mischievous look, fingers tapping rhythmically against the table.

Noticing his expression, she blinked in curiosity. “What’s on your mind?”

Garret asked pointedly, “What did you do? Edward called to say he couldn’t make it today. He’ll need a few more days before he can pick you up.”

With wide-eyed innocence, Elyse replied, “I didn’t do a thing. Why would you think I had anything to do with it?”

He studied her, a glint of suspicion in his eyes, brow arched in doubt. “If it wasn’t you, then was it Louise?”

Still donning her mask of innocence, Elyse shrugged. “I have no idea. If you’re so curious, go ask Louise yourself. Do you really think I could stop Edward from coming?”

Garret considered this and, after a moment, seemed to concede that Elyse didn’t wield that kind of influence. But the timing—it was too convenient.

Completely baffled, Garret resolved to question Louise later, once she finally awoke. She hadn't woken up yet, likely struggling with restlessness in an unfamiliar place, her night stretched long with sleeplessness.

"Where's that breakfast of yours?" Garret asked. "Give me some."

Elyse snorted. "Didn't you claim my cooking was terrible? And now you want to eat it? Keep dreaming."

Garret replied earnestly, "My critique was based on firsthand experience, not meant to put you down. But I'll give you this—you make edible noodles. So, I'll take some of those."

Elyse was about to refuse when Garret raised a finger, a warning glint in his eyes. "Refuse, and I'll throw you out. You'll be on your own if you want to see Jayden again."

"Fine, you win." She rolled her eyes, putting down her fork as she trudged back to the kitchen.

Garret trailed after her.

As she prepared the noodles, he casually mentioned, "I'll be stepping out after breakfast. A supply truck will be stopping by later today, so take Louise with you to pick out some snacks."

Elyse paused, puzzled. "Snacks? Didn't you say supply trucks never bring any?"

"They didn't, until yesterday." Garret's tone was as casual as if discussing the weather.

Recalling a fleeting scene in the study yesterday, Elyse's brow furrowed. A sudden thought struck her. "You changed that rule just for Louise? Did she ask for snacks?"

Garret's lips barely moved. "Since you're clever enough to figure that out, do as instructed."

A wave of confusion washed over Elyse. Just what was his bond with Louise? Could love truly spark between siblings?

Whatever it was, she couldn't begin to understand the nuances between them.

Once the noodles were ready, Elyse served them, and Garret followed, fork in hand.

After breakfast, Garret disappeared, leaving no word of when he'd return.

By noon, Elyse sat staring blankly at the sofa, lost in thought, until she finally caught sight of Louise descending the stairs.

"You're finally up. Anything specific you'd like for lunch? I could whip something up," Elyse offered.

Chapter 1178:

Louise, looking weary, slumped beside her on the sofa, sighing, "I don't want lunch; I want snacks."

Elyse reassured her, "Garret mentioned a supply truck will arrive later today, and he asked me to take you to pick out some snacks."

Louise responded with little interest, a glimmer of listlessness remaining as she leaned against the sofa.

With neither speaking, Elyse turned her gaze to the window, staring into the forest, her eyes filled with a distant longing.

"Are you thinking about Jayden?" Louise's voice cut through her thoughts.

Elyse's gaze remained fixed on the trees as she replied,

"Sort of. There's something else weighing on me—a question that's been on my mind for ages."

"What question?" Louise asked, sipping from a glass of water.

“Jayden isn’t exactly a man of good character. He lies and keeps secrets. In any real relationship, isn’t trust supposed to be the foundation? But he doesn’t trust anyone. He’s controlling, demanding, and expects nothing but my compliance. Whenever I push back, his temper flares.”

Louise’s expression grew thoughtful. “From what you’re saying, he seems riddled with flaws. Does he have any redeeming qualities?”

“He’s wealthy, clever, and solves problems like it’s second nature, but none of those things really matter to me,” Elyse answered, reflecting.

Louise studied her, then smiled gently, asking, “So, can you live with his faults?”

Elyse looked out the window, lost in her own conflicted thoughts before finally murmuring, “Even though being with him is hard and he’s hurt me, somehow, I believe I can.”

As she spoke, a look of self-loathing crossed her face. “I feel like such a fool. He’s treated me like this, and still, I accept it. There must be something wrong with me. It’s as if I’ve fractured into pieces. I despise who I’ve become.”

Louise placed her glass down, her lips curving into a wry smile. “But you know, love is what stops you from being yourself.”

After Louise finished her thoughts, she caught sight of the bewildered look on Elyse’s face and, with a playful smile, asked, “Why do you look like that? You do know what love is, right? Didn’t your parents ever explain it to you?”

Elyse shifted uncomfortably and murmured, “My parents... they passed away when I was very young. My uncle and aunt-in-law raised me, and they never talked about love.”

Louise gazed at her for a moment, as if putting the puzzle pieces together. “Ah, no wonder you’re a little off. I think I’ve finally found the root of it.”

Feeling the weight of Louise’s eyes on her, Elyse quickly lowered her head, trying to escape that probing stare. Louise softened and gently touched Elyse’s shoulder, her tone turning serious. “Do you love yourself?”

Elyse's entire body stiffened, a shiver running through her as confusion clouded her features even more.

"Before you can figure out if you love Jayden, you need to understand if you love yourself," Louise said earnestly. "When you love yourself, you'll know if you love someone else."

This notion struck Elyse, leaving her shaken. In all her years, no one had ever told her to love herself. The words hit her as both a revelation and a delayed understanding. It dawned on her: she didn't love herself.

A heavy silence filled the space between them. Louise didn't push further, leaving Elyse to her thoughts.

After what seemed like an eternity, Elyse broke the silence, her voice low and reflective. "I didn't expect you to understand all this so well."

Louise, feeling a sense of pride well up, straightened. "Of course! I'm a master of all trades, especially when it comes to love."

A bitter smile tugged at the corners of Elyse's mouth. "But when you really experience love, all that stuff you know can just disappear. When it's true love, your mind goes blank, and all you can think about is the person right in front of you."

Louise nodded knowingly. "You're right. Love's a tricky magician—it makes everything else disappear."

Chapter 1179:

After that conversation, something in Elyse changed. She retreated into silence, withdrawing into her own thoughts more often than not.

She began spending long hours by the window or in quiet corners, lost in contemplation, her mind far from the present.

Even Garret, who was used to her quirks, noticed the shift.

One day, he couldn't hold back and asked, "Are you lovesick or something? Should I start packing your things and ship you off to Jayden?"

Elyse, for once, didn't give a quick response. She shook her head slowly. "There's no rush. I have some things to figure out first. Let's wait a few days."

But life, as it often does, had no intention of waiting for her to sort through her thoughts.

One afternoon, Peyton stormed in, his face flushed with panic. "Jayden's in trouble!" he blurted out.

Elyse blinked, momentarily thrown off by his dramatic entrance. Though she recognized Peyton's voice, his disguise still startled her.

"How do you know?" Her heart skipped a beat. "What's happened to him?"

Peyton hesitated, clearly conflicted about what to say next.

Sensing his reluctance, Elyse's patience snapped. She kicked him, frustration boiling over. "Why are you stalling at a time like this? Jayden's in trouble, and you're dithering! You two are going to drive me mad!"

Rubbing the spot where she'd kicked him, Peyton awkwardly confessed, "Okay, okay. There's something I need to tell you, but don't be mad that I kept it from you."

Elyse raised a sharp eyebrow, her mind racing. What had these two been plotting behind her back?

Peyton leaned in and whispered a few hurried words. When he finished, he stepped back, watching her carefully. "Jayden's been working toward this goal. Please don't be angry—I didn't mean to keep it from you."

Elyse clenched her fists, taking deep breaths to calm the storm brewing inside her. "So, this is what that fool has been hiding from me?"

Peyton nodded nervously. "That's just Jayden for you. But don't worry, I've already given him a good scolding on your behalf."

Elyse glared at him, eyes flashing with frustration. "What good does scolding do? Can you stop him?"

Peyton flinched under her fierce gaze, suddenly feeling much smaller.

He dared not say another word, standing frozen and trembling. Jayden had never warned him that Elyse's anger could be this terrifying.

With a deep sigh, Elyse tried to regain her composure. "Where is he now? Take me to him."

Peyton hesitated briefly before answering honestly. "He's making his move tonight. He's set on going through with it, even if it means putting his life on the line."

Elyse couldn't hold back an exasperated groan. "Then what are we waiting for? Take me to him right now! You want him to make a terrible mistake?"

Peyton quickly shook his head, knowing there was no turning back from what he had just revealed.

"Alright, let's go," he said, taking off his mask as they prepared to leave.

At that moment, Louise appeared, coming down the stairs. She noticed Elyse with her backpack and asked, "Where are you going?"

Elyse turned briefly, determination etched across her face. "I'm going to find Jayden."

Louise raised an eyebrow. "So, have you found your answer?"

Elyse shook her head. "No. But I can't leave him to face danger alone." And with that, she set off.

Elyse settled into the car alongside Peyton.

As they approached the boundary of Garret's domain, Garret himself materialized. He had caught wind of their arrival and had deliberately waited there to meet them. Positioned beside the car, Garret cautioned, "Beyond my territory's gates, I hold no sway. Your safety isn't something I can ensure, so your survival will depend solely on your own resourcefulness."

Chapter 1180:

Elyse's gaze was unwavering. "I've steeled myself for this. I appreciate your hospitality these past few days. Jayden and I will both come back to thank you later."

Garret observed Elyse intently, then exhaled deeply before commanding his men, "Open the gates for her." At his command, the formidable gates opened wide. Elyse expressed her deep gratitude, and then Peyton drove her onward.

Only ten minutes after they had left Garret's realm, Elyse felt the atmosphere change; it was laden with the acrid scent of gunpowder and an eerie tension.

Peyton, concerned Elyse might be uneasy, clarified, "This area recently witnessed an ambush, but it's been secured and cleared now."

As they passed a robust tree, Elyse noticed a bullet hole marring its trunk.

For Elyse, who had never experienced conflict firsthand, the scene felt oddly surreal. Even the visible signs of violence seemed somehow disconnected from reality.

However, as they drew nearer to the conflict's core, the surrealism slowly dissipated, replaced by an oppressive dread and mounting fear.

Peyton's vehicle was marked with a red cross, signaling it as an ambulance—an emblem that should deter hostile actions.

It took them three hours to reach the heart of the conflict from Garret's domain. Though it was a relatively short duration, it felt to Elyse like an exhaustive day had passed. When she finally stepped out, her back was soaked with sweat.

Upon exiting, Elyse found no sign of Jayden. The news that he had ventured to the front lines in support sent a wave of panic through her.

Peyton offered consolation. "Don't worry. Jayden is exceptionally capable. He won't come to harm."

Elyse shook her head, dismissing her initial shock. "It just caught me off guard. I'm calmer now."

While they conversed, a woman with closely cropped hair and a piercing gaze emerged from the base. She strode toward Elyse and inquired scornfully, "Who are you? This is a battlefield, not a retail complex. If you came here to shop, you're sorely misplaced."

Peyton's brow furrowed as he said, "Amanda, don't be rude. This is Elyse, Jayden's beloved."

Amanda Winston crossed her arms, her expression toward Elyse sharpening with arrogance. "So, you're Elyse. Why are you here? Let me warn you, Jayden is here on serious business. Don't cloud his focus with your romantic fantasies."

Elyse was far from naive; Amanda's blatant hostility did not go unnoticed.

With calm precision, Elyse replied, "Why would you assume I'm here for romance? It's disappointing to see such bias from another woman."

Amanda sneered. "Disappointing? You're the one who disappoints. I doubted you could even manage in a place like this. You're undermining women."

Elyse retorted firmly, "As I've stated, you're prejudiced against me. You've concluded I'm here to cause trouble. What more can I add? I'll leave you to your assumptions."

Having lost interest in further argument, Elyse turned to Peyton and requested, "Please take me to Jayden's room. I need to rest a while."

Peyton nodded. "Alright, I'll take you there now."