

Bound love 121

Chapter 121:

Jayden followed Elyse's gaze and noticed a picture seemingly captured in secret. Judging by Joanna's attire, it appeared to be taken on Enzo's birthday. Exchanging a knowing glance, Jayden and Elyse made their way to the living room.

Tess's attention was solely fixed on Bryce, her hand firmly grasping his as she inquired with concern, "Sweetie, what troubles you? Why this sudden bout of emotions?"

Andrew echoed Joanna's sentiments, his voice filled with conviction. "That's right. Tell Dad and Mom. We'll help you through this."

Despite their prodding, Bryce remained silent, casting occasional glances towards Jayden. Sensing his gaze, Jayden quipped, "Why are you looking at me? Am I the cause of your distress?"

Tess's brow furrowed in confusion. "What's amiss? Has Jayden upset you?"

Bryce's demeanor shifted, his gaze turning fierce as he angrily declared, "I want him gone! I never want to see him again! Get rid of him!"

Tess and Andrew were bewildered, unable to comprehend Bryce's sudden animosity towards Jayden. However, they respected his feelings, understanding there must be a reason behind them.

Thus, Tess resolved to send Jayden away. "Did you hear him? My baby boy doesn't want you here. It's best you and your wife leave immediately. Don't return."

Bryce's voice thundered with determination, his declaration echoing through the room. "Forever! I never want to see you again! It's your call, forever," Tess affirmed, her demeanor turning icy towards Jayden in an instant.

"Please leave promptly. We wouldn't want my boy to be distressed further."

While Jayden remained silent, Elyse could no longer contain her frustration. Rising to her feet, she exclaimed, “Have you lost your senses? How could you treat Jayden this way? You summoned him when you needed him only to push him away the moment you deemed him unnecessary. You forced him to come. Now you’re driving him away because of one sentence from Bryce. Yes, Bryce is your beloved son. But isn’t Jayden your son too?”

Elyse’s anger surged, her eyes ablaze with intensity as she spoke. She asked Tess, “Is it because Jayden is in a wheelchair that you believe he’s unworthy of your love or even of being your son?”

Tess’s countenance darkened with fury. “How dare Elyse admonish her?”

Elyse Lloyd,” she snapped, “you are my daughter-in-law. You will heed my words regardless of your opinions.”

But Elyse stood her ground, her voice firm. “Were you present when Jayden and I exchanged vows? I am his wife, recognized or not. My authority over him surpasses yours.”

Tess seethed with anger, clutching her chest as she struggled to breathe. Seeing her distress, Bryce hurried to her side, his expression fierce. “You’ve hurt my mother,” he growled, “and for that, I’ll make you pay.”

But before he could act, Jayden intervened, his grip halting Bryce in his tracks. “And whom do you intend to harm?” Jayden’s tone was icy.

Bryce froze, realizing Jayden didn’t regard him as a brother but rather as an adversary. Jayden’s commanding presence still held sway. In his absence, all was calm, but with his return, Bryce trembled, fearing Jayden’s wrath.

“You’re my brother. You can’t treat me like this,” Bryce murmured, his voice feeble with remorse.

Jayden managed a strained smile. “And now you remember our bond. But whom were you shouting at moments ago?”

“I... I apologize. I spoke in haste, consumed by emotion. Please, Jayden, forgive my outburst,” Bryce pleaded, his once haughty demeanor humbled, his legs trembling.

Jayden's forceful shove sent Bryce tumbling onto the sofa. "My dear, are you alright? Did you hurt yourself?" Tess rushed to Bryce's side, concern etched on her face.

Bryce remained silent, unable to lift his head. Jayden, unmoved by Bryce's reaction, dismissed him with a disdainful glance. To Jayden, Bryce was merely a facade of strength, propped up by Tess and Andrew's indulgence but feeble in the face of real challenges.

"Don't bother calling me for trivial matters anymore. If you truly wish to sever ties, do so swiftly. I hate procrastination. You can do it and don't have to tell me about it," Jayden stated firmly, taking Elyse's hand as they headed for the door.

It dawned on Tess then that Jayden intended to sever their familial bond. Yet she hesitated, clinging to the hope that Jayden, with his residual influence, could still aid Bryce in his future endeavors.

"Jayden, Elyse scolded me earlier. I understand your silence, but must you also cut ties with me?" she implored, her voice tinged with anger.

Chapter 122:

Jayden raised an eyebrow and asked calmly, "Didn't you threaten to sever our ties to force me to come back?"

Tess swallowed hard and looked down at her feet. She had indeed said that to force Jayden to come back. However, she felt that she was entitled to play such a card since she was Jayden's mother. But he ought to know that he wasn't qualified to say the same to her.

Looking up at Elyse, Tess dumped all of her anger on her, saying, "This is all your fault. You are a woman sent by the devil to create a rift between me and my son under the guise of being a daughter-in-law. My son should have never had anything to do with you. You are nothing but a scourge. I won't accept—"

"Enough!" Jayden thundered at Tess. Pointing an index finger at her, he said icily, "If you dare insult her again, I'm going to sever my relationship with you guys immediately. Surely you won't be concerned with finally having nothing to do with me, since I'm the useless son to you."

Andrew, who had said nothing all this while, cleared his throat now that he saw that Jayden was really angry and said, "Calm down, Jayden. I'm sure your mother doesn't mean all that she said,

okay? She's simply upset. Every single one of us can testify to the fact that Elyse is an admirable daughter-in-law."

Jayden scoffed at this and, since he wasn't interested in having any more conversation with them, turned around and stormed out while holding Elyse's hand.

As the duo got back into the car, Elyse turned to face Jayden and said softly, "I can't believe your parents really treated you like that."

Jayden shrugged and replied, "They care more about what's in their pockets than family affection." Turning to look at Elyse, Jayden continued, "Seeing just how shameless and self-centered my family members are must make you regretful and aggrieved that you married me, right?"

Stunned by this question, Elyse looked away and whispered under her breath, "Why on earth would I regret marrying you?"

Jayden raised an eyebrow as he tried to make out what she had said. He leaned over to her and asked, "Would you care to tell me what your thoughts are?"

Elyse raised her eyes and stared deeply into his eyes as her heart thumped against her chest. Suddenly, she moved closer to him and kissed him. When she withdrew her face, a look of surprise filled Jayden's face. Staring at her as she blushed deeply, he asked, "Am I expected to kiss you back?"

Elyse widened her eyes and opened her mouth to say no, but Jayden took her into his arms and planted his lips firmly onto hers before she could say anything.

When the driver at the wheel saw this through the rearview mirror, he was smart enough to realize that the duo needed their privacy. Quietly, he hit a button, and a partition blocked the view of the rear seats from him.

Meanwhile, Kieran, with a pipe in his hand, was busy watering the plants in the garden.

At that moment, his butler walked up to him and whispered, "Joanna's mother is more stubborn than we expected. She called and asked us to deliver the corpse back."

Kieran shrugged and replied casually, “If that’s what she wants, then she’ll have to pay by herself because I won’t drop a dime. Joanna made the decision to commit suicide all by herself after failing to carry out her task fully. All because of her, the cooperation plan between the Foster and Owen families is in ruins. Despite the fact that I’m not pointing any accusing fingers at them, they still have the audacity to ask me to pay.”

The butler lowered his head slightly and said, “I’ll get your message to them.”

Kieran nodded and continued to water the plants. A few seconds later, he turned around and saw his sister Judy Foster sitting in a chair quietly sipping tea.

Smiling sincerely, Kieran walked up to her and asked softly, “The cake must be quite delicious, right?”

Judy sighed and shook her legs, causing her red suede shoes to glisten in the sun. She looked up at Kieran and said, “Joanna is no more, Kieran. How on earth are you going to make our cooperation with the Owen family work out?”

Frowning, Kieran sat in front of her and said doubtfully, “Well, Dad and I have discussed this issue at length with Enzo, but he still insisted that the only way forward was for someone to marry Jayden.”

Judy raised an eyebrow and asked, “Why is he insisting on Jayden so much? Isn’t there someone else?”

Kieran shrugged and replied, “That is a question that actually baffles me also. In fact, I inquired about this from Enzo, but he didn’t provide me with an answer.”

Cocking his head slightly, Kieran studied Judy for a moment and then asked, “When did you become interested in this stuff?”

Judy set aside the teacup in her hand and sat up with ambition in her eyes. She took a deep breath and said slowly, “You should let me marry Jayden.”

Stunned, Kieran asked, “Why on earth would you want that for yourself? Jayden is nothing but a loser and doesn’t deserve you. Besides, Dad is in the process of picking another guy for you.”

Remembering that Judy's heart used to be filled with love for Jayden, Kieran sat up and said with a frown, "Don't tell me that you are still in love with him after all this while. Trust me, Jayden might have been okay for you in the past, but now he is totally inappropriate."

Judy rolled her eyes and clearly disagreed with her brother. The fact that she was in love with Jayden was all that mattered. To her, this moment, thanks to Jayden's present disability condition, was her best chance to marry him.

Smiling softly, she said, "I warned you before that Joanna shouldn't be allowed to marry Jayden, but you didn't listen to me. It was clear to me from the beginning that she was hesitant. If I had been in her shoes, the Foster family would be way better off."

Kieran hesitated for a moment before shaking his head and replying firmly, "I'm sorry, but I can't agree to your wishes. Jayden doesn't deserve you, and that's that. Quit messing around now."

Chapter 123:

The more Kieran pondered, the clearer it became that he couldn't see eye to eye with Judy. "If you insist, I'll have to involve Dad and let him intervene," he declared.

Judy rose from her seat, her dissatisfaction palpable. "Kieran, you're missing the point entirely. Choosing me is the best course for our family."

Shaking his head, Kieran rebutted, "No. We possess that land. Enzo will provide us with resources for its sake."

Realizing she couldn't sway Kieran, Judy rose, poised to depart. Kieran halted her, his tone chillingly stern. "Jude, don't forget your duty. Do nothing to disappoint us."

"Understood," Judy replied, licking her lips.

With that, she left, her red leather shoes clicking on the path. Judy instructed her driver to proceed to Jayden's residence and pull up at the driveway.

Observing Judy's infatuation with Jayden, the driver couldn't resist offering advice. "Miss Foster, why must you pursue this? It's said that Jayden and his wife love each other deeply."

"You don't understand. I fell for him the moment I laid eyes on him long ago," Judy countered, her gaze fixed on the villa's entrance, anticipation flickering in her eyes.

The Owen and Foster families had once hoped to connect through marriage. But her father had chosen to wed Joanna instead of her. One glance was all it took for Judy to perceive Joanna's reluctance. While Joanna hesitated, Judy willingly sought her father's permission only to find herself locked up until recently.

Upon her release, she sought out Joanna only to witness her tragic end behind the wheel. "Joanna brought this upon herself. She never truly loved Jayden," Judy remarked callously, placing blame on Joanna for tarnishing Jayden's perception of the Foster family.

"Miss Foster, it appears that's Jayden's car."

"Really?"

With a gleam of excitement, Judy lifted her gaze and beheld an elegant luxury car gliding into the villa's garage. She lingered on the car, lost in admiration until her driver gently reminded her, saying, "It's time to return home. Jayden is here. We shouldn't linger."

Without a word, Judy swung open the car door, her red leather shoes adding a dash of boldness to her demeanor.

"Miss Foster," the driver exclaimed, his surprise evident as he moved to follow her.

"Wait in the car. I won't be long," Judy replied calmly, brushing aside his concerns.

The driver felt the urge to convince her otherwise. After all, Judy's future marriage to a wealthy suitor was seen as a means to fortify the family's influence.

If his boss were to learn of Judy's audacious visit to Jayden, the consequences for her would be dire indeed. The driver couldn't fathom the potential repercussions, his mind recoiling from the mere thought of it. Yet, Judy bore the esteemed mantle of being a Foster, a fact that rendered the driver

powerless to intervene. All he could do was watch her determined stride toward Jayden's villa, resigned to her chosen course of action.

Just then, Elyse emerged from the car and entered the living room with Jayden. Driscoll approached them bearing news. "A young lady from the Foster family wishes to speak with you two."

Elyse's curiosity was piqued. Joanna's recent passing left her puzzled as to why another member of the Foster family was seeking their audience now. "Should we see what she wants?" she inquired, glancing at Jayden.

After a moment's consideration, Jayden nodded. "Let her in," he instructed Driscoll.

Driscoll acknowledged with a nod and proceeded to grant Judy entry into the villa.

Elyse and Jayden settled into their seats, anticipation lingering in the air. Before long, Driscoll returned, escorting Judy into the room.

Judy possessed an innocence that was evident in her countenance. Her gaze had a tender quality that could soften even the sternest hearts, prompting a desire in others to be kind to her. In stark contrast to Joanna's striking beauty and assertive demeanor, Judy exuded a purity akin to that of a delicate lily.

Elyse observed Judy closely, her gaze sweeping over her form. Yet she couldn't shake the feeling that Judy's demeanor harbored a subtle hostility toward her, leaving Elyse uncertain if it was merely her perception or a genuine sentiment emanating from Judy.

Jayden fixed his gaze upon Judy, his tone tinged with impatience as he inquired, "What is the reason for your visit?"

Judy met Jayden's gaze briefly before lowering her eyes, her voice gentle as she spoke. "Mr. Owen, there seems to be a misunderstanding. I've heard of Joanna's actions towards your wife, and I'm deeply sorry for any distress it may have caused you two. I've come here to offer my sincere apologies."

Elyse's eyebrows lifted in surprise as she remarked, "Kieran Foster has already come to apologize to me."

“That may be his concern. However, I’m here acting on my own accord,” Judy replied.

Judy directed her gaze at Jayden, her sincerity evident as she spoke softly. “I understand that Mr. Owen has been deeply hurt. I earnestly wish to find a way to atone for these mistakes.”

With a subtle smile, Jayden inquired, “What do you propose to rectify the situation?”

Following a prolonged pause, Judy turned her attention to Elyse and confessed, “I’m unsure if Ms. Lloyd will be amenable to my proposition.”

Elyse asked further, “What is it that you wish to do?”

“I am willing to serve, dedicated to assisting both of you until the harm inflicted upon you has been alleviated,” Judy replied.

Elyse was taken aback. Was she offering to become a servant? Was she out of her mind?

Chapter 124:

With a complicated look on her face, Elyse asked, “Did your family consent to this idea of yours? Or should I contact them and confirm whose decision it was for you to come here?”

Judy shook her head and replied politely, “I made this decision all by myself.”

Jayden kept mute and said nothing. He simply looked up at Elyse with a raised eyebrow, clearly waiting for her to make a decision. Seeing this, Judy had an idea and immediately kneeled in front of Elyse. Using her most sincere voice, she said, “All I seek to do is to atone for the mistakes of my family. To achieve this, I don’t mind being a servant of your family.”

Frightened by this sudden action from Judy, Elyse quickly tried to get her to return to her feet, saying, “Please get up. What on earth do you think you’re doing?”

Judy put up a struggle and remained adamant that she'd stay on her knees until they accepted her proposal.

At that moment, Jayden cleared his throat and said, "Well, if you're so fixated on being a servant, then you're permitted to be one."

Surprised, Elyse looked at Jayden and wondered why on earth he would allow a Foster to be a servant in his household. Wasn't he afraid of pissing off the Fosters?

Happy that she had been granted permission to stay in Jayden's house, Judy smiled inwardly. Through hard work and dedication, she believed she'd get Jayden to connect with her again.

To Judy, Elyse's luck was on the verge of running out. Jayden was everything that a perfect husband would be: handsome, well-educated, and had numerous other lovely attributes. For Elyse to think that she was the only one eligible to have him was nothing short of delusional.

Judy glanced at Elyse and mocked her inwardly.

Looking humble, Judy stood up and said softly to Driscoll, "Jayden has agreed to my request to be a servant here. Could you please take me to my room? I don't mind if the room is small."

With that, she turned around and walked off to a room as if she were the hostess of the house.

Feeling embarrassed, Driscoll looked about confusedly. Sure, Judy was now a servant of this household, but then that didn't change the fact that she was still a member of the Fosters. How the hell was he going to give her a servant room to stay in?

"Don't worry about it; you can go ahead now," said Jayden with a wave of his hand, dismissing Driscoll.

Nodding slightly, Driscoll turned around and reluctantly went after Judy.

After Driscoll exited the room, Elyse turned to look at Jayden and asked, "Why would you allow her to stay here as a servant? You do know that her family will be very offended by this, right?"

Jayden pursed his lips for a moment and then replied calmly, "She's the one who's so determined to be a servant of my family. All I did was merely grant her what she wanted. She could do some chores there."

Elyse frowned slightly as she digested Jayden's words. Realizing what he intended to do, she asked, "Will your grandpa accept her if you send her there?"

Jayden shrugged and replied casually, "I simply need to expend some effort here and there to get her there. Just know that one way or another, I'll fulfill her wish."

Jayden was acting oddly, leaving Elyse to gather her thoughts. Without waiting for her to recover, Jayden stood up and went to his study. Elyse, not bothering to stop him, sighed and returned to her room to retrieve her violin. She then took it to the garden intending to practice before dinner.

After a brief practice session, Judy, having heard the violin, came to the garden with a tray of fruits. "You must be feeling tired and hungry. Have some fruits to regain your strength," Judy said warmly, placing the tray on the table in front of Elyse.

Not wanting to stop practicing, Elyse declined, "No thanks, I'm not done yet. You can have the fruits for yourself."

Judy replied, "Well, I'll leave them here in case you change your mind later. If these aren't enough, feel free to tell me. We have plenty more at home."

Elyse froze at Judy's words. She asked coldly, "What do you mean by that?"

Looking confused, Judy asked, "Did I say something wrong? I apologize if I did." When Elyse remained silent, Judy excused herself, "If you'll excuse me, I need to get some tea for Mr. Owen. I'll leave you to your practice."

Watching Judy leave, Elyse gritted her teeth. Judy's behavior made it seem like she was the hostess and Elyse was just a guest in her own home.

After leaving the garden, Judy went to the kitchen where Driscoll was. She took a cup of tea from his hand and said, "I'll handle this. It's my duty as a servant."

Driscoll was surprised but let her take the tea. Judy then went to Jayden's study. Knocking gently, she entered and offered Jayden the tea, saying, "Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Owen. I thought you might want some hot tea."

Jayden, still focused on his work, asked, "Why are you serving me tea instead of Driscoll?"

Judy replied shyly, "He's busy, and as your servant, it's my duty to serve you."

Placing the tea carefully on the table, Judy stepped back, her heart racing with obsession. Without looking up, Jayden cautioned her, "Are you sure being a servant is what you want, Miss Foster? Take time to think about it carefully. Don't make impulsive decisions."

Chapter 125:

Judy's urgency was palpable as she asserted, "I'm genuinely serious." She then patted her chest, her voice earnest. "I desire to serve your family to atone for the harm done. Let me comfort your heart on Joanna's behalf, Mr. Owen."

Raising an eyebrow, Jayden replied with a hint of detachment, "Keep your excessive sympathy to yourself. I have no need for anyone to comfort my heart."

Despite his dismissive words, Judy nodded and continued unfazed, gracefully serving him a cup of hot tea. Her refined manners indicated a good upbringing, and her willingness to serve highlighted the effective training of the Foster family.

As Judy prepared to depart, Jayden halted her. "Wait, don't leave just yet. If you're truly keen to work, sign this contract so there will be no complications in hiring you."

Judy beamed with happiness upon hearing this. "I'd love to sign the contract. How long do you expect to need my services?"

"One week," Jayden answered.

"That's far too short. A minimum of one month," Judy exclaimed with enthusiasm.

Giving her a meaningful look, Jayden paused for three seconds. “Are you certain?”

Judy affirmed confidently, “Of course, I’m sure. If you find my work satisfactory, I’d be happy to stay on for a few more months.” She then shyly glanced at him, her cheeks flushed with red.

Chuckling at her reaction, Jayden amended, “Alright, a month then.” He printed out the new documents and laid them before Judy with a smile. “Take a look at the contract. If everything looks good, you can sign it.”

Quickly scanning the documents, Judy signed her name. “I’ve signed it,” she announced, handing the signed contract back to Jayden.

Accepting the contract, Jayden offered a gentle reminder, “You didn’t read through the contract carefully just now. Remember, no regrets after signing.”

“I won’t have any regrets. Choosing to serve you is my decision,” Judy responded, hinting at the deeper feelings she harbored. She yearned to declare her affection for Jayden openly but restrained herself. For now, he was still a stranger to her emotions. She knew she needed to reveal her feelings gradually.

“Leave now. I’m going to read,” Jayden stated as he stored the contract, dismissing her without further ado.

Mr. Owen, enjoy your reading. I won’t disturb you further,” Judy said as she turned and exited the study, leaving Jayden to his solitude.

As Elyse entered from the garden, she noticed Judy emerging from Jayden’s study, her face noticeably red. Elyse narrowed her eyes slightly, curious about the cause.

“Judy, were you in the study?” Elyse asked in a relaxed tone.

“Yes, Mr. Owen needed my assistance, so I went in,” Judy replied, her cheeks still flushed, her demeanor shy.

Growing more curious, Elyse pressed further. “What did Jayden need help with?”

Judy placed a finger to her lips, silencing Elyse. “It’s a secret between Mr. Owen and me. Please respect our privacy. I can’t disclose everything.”

Stunned, Elyse watched as Judy quickly changed the subject. “I’m heading to the kitchen to see what the chef is preparing. I’m not sure if he’ll make Mr. Owen’s favorite dishes today.”

Elyse was taken aback. A secret between them? A twinge of jealousy arose, sensing Judy’s provocation. Had Jayden not noticed?

Approaching the study, Elyse knocked. After Jayden invited her in, she entered and was about to speak when she noticed a document on the desk—a contract with Judy’s signature at the bottom.

Quickly reading through it, her jealousy flared. “Is the secret between you and Judy that you’ve arranged to keep her on as your maid?” she asked, her tone laced with displeasure.

Jayden had mentioned sending Judy to his grandpa’s place as a maid. Why then did Judy linger here shyly instead of departing? Maybe Jayden never intended to send Judy away. Could it be that he deceived her earlier, planning to keep Judy close by?

While Jayden focused on his computer screen, he failed to notice the distress evident on Elyse’s face. With calm assurance, he stated, “Judy orchestrated her role as a servant herself, and I merely facilitated her request. There’s no secret involved.”

Elyse, however, interpreted his words differently. Could it be that Judy’s genuine approach had influenced Jayden to alter his plans?

Considering Jayden’s profound aversion to Joanna, Elyse couldn’t help but wonder why he showed such tenderness towards Judy.

A wave of sadness overcame Elyse. “Jayden, when you decided to bring her into our home as a servant, did you think about the impact on me? Do you appreciate her qualities, and are you perhaps looking to pursue something with her?”

This questioning seemed to resonate with Jayden. When he finally lifted his gaze from the screen and saw Elyse’s tearful eyes, he was taken aback. “Why are you crying?” he asked, puzzled.

Chapter 126:

Elyse felt hurt as she thought about the shy expression on Judy's face. "It's just a contract. Why did you keep it from me and say it was a secret between the two of you?" she asked, her tone conveying her pain.

Jayden, utterly confused, responded, "What secret? How could there be any secret between me and Judy?"

Elyse waited for Jayden to explain, but all she got was a puzzled look, making her feel like she was being impolite for pressing the issue.

At that moment, Theo's face flashed in Elyse's mind. Once upon a time, she and Theo were solid. He treated her well. But then Kaelyn entered the picture, and Theo's heart took a turn.

A shiver ran down Elyse's spine. Was history repeating itself? Would she have to endure the agony of abandonment once more?

She held back the pain in her heart, her grip on her clothes tightening. "I've got nothing left to say."

With those words, tears began to spill uncontrollably, as if a dam had burst.

Seeing her tears, Jayden was taken aback, his instinct urging him to reach for her hand, but she slipped away before he could touch her.

"Oh my, what's wrong?" Driscoll's voice broke the tension as he caught sight of Elyse running out. He hadn't expected to find her in tears. Concern etched on his face, he hurried to Elyse's side. "Are you alright? Did Mr. Owen upset you?"

Jayden sat in silence, feeling unjustly accused. He hadn't done anything to upset her.

Ignoring Driscoll's questions, Elyse bolted upstairs, her tears flowing freely, leaving a trail of anguish in her wake.

Watching her go, Judy, lurking in the shadows, smirked to herself. It was a mere ploy of hers, but enough to unsettle Elyse. “What a gullible woman. Joanna’s failure against such a woman was a stain on our family’s reputation.”

Judy slipped away to her room, summoning her driver. “You can head home now. I’ll be staying at Jayden’s for a while.”

The driver, taken aback, inquired, “Wow, how did you manage it? Joanna never succeeded.”

“Don’t compare me to her. She’s a dimwit who can only please men in bed,” Judy scoffed.

Impressed, the driver pressed for details. “So, are you aiming to replace Elyse? Do you have a plan?”

Judy sneered and responded, “Elyse is easier to manipulate than I thought. A little trickery and she’ll be going crazy. How Joanna bungled this, I’ll never comprehend.”

The driver grinned. “So, you’ll soon be marrying your beloved?”

“We’ll see. Rushing things won’t win Jayden’s heart. We need to take it slow,” Judy explained with a self-satisfied smile.

“You go on home. I’ll be staying here. And don’t breathe a word to my brother or try to reach me. I’ll get in touch when I’m ready,” Judy instructed the driver firmly.

The driver nodded. “Understood. I’ll hit the road then.”

Judy tossed her phone aside and collapsed onto the bed, as happy as Larry, visions of her future with Jayden dancing in her head. “Elyse is so fragile, like a delicate glass figurine waiting to be shattered. But fear not, I’ll shatter her slowly.”

Calculating the time, Judy emerged from her room around dinner. The table was set, and Jayden, summoned from his study by Driscoll, sat waiting.

Noticing Elyse's absence, Judy feigned concern. "Mr. Owen, Ms. Lloyd isn't down yet. Should I fetch her?"

Jayden, clueless about Elyse's distress, dismissed it. "No need. If she's not hungry, let her be."

Driscoll opened his mouth, but a glance from Judy silenced him.

As Jayden approached the table and started eating, Judy served him and stood next to Driscoll. It was her responsibility to be a maid, but could she truly be willing to do such a job?

Glancing around, she remarked, "The aroma in the kitchen was tantalizing. Mind if I join you for dinner now that the table is set?"

Chapter 127:

Jayden glanced at Judy with indifference and said, "Sure thing, whatever floats your boat." He was clueless about Judy's offer to serve as his servant. Before sending the contract to his grandpa's mansion, Jayden didn't hesitate to extend temporary kindness towards Judy, inadvertently fueling her unwarranted enthusiasm.

Judy beamed happily at his response, sliding in beside Jayden and thoroughly enjoying her meal. To prove her point, she dug into the dishes with gusto, and seeing her eating with satisfaction, Jayden's furrowed brow relaxed.

On the other hand, Driscoll was on edge. Judy had brazenly taken Elyse's seat and commandeered her tableware, both of which were explicitly reserved for Elyse. Driscoll was sweating bullets, hoping Elyse wouldn't come downstairs at this moment. If she did, things would get even tenser between her and Jayden.

Unfortunately, Elyse descended the stairs with her violin case in hand. As she passed the dining room, she saw Judy occupying her seat, dining with Jayden. It felt like a dagger to her heart, the pain so intense she felt like crying. Turning away, she hurried out of the house, clutching her bag.

Driscoll rushed after her, asking, "Where are you off to? I can get the driver to prepare a car for you." Elyse forced a smile, saying, "I've got something to take care of. No need to bother the driver. I'll grab a taxi." With that, she left without looking back, and seeing he couldn't stop her, Driscoll headed back inside.

Jayden remained composed, still eating. Despite Judy's presence, Driscoll approached and said, "Elyse just left. Aren't you going to check on her?" Jayden continued eating calmly, replying, "She's not a child. If she doesn't want to eat, I won't push her."

Driscoll could sense Jayden's frustration with Elyse. Both of them were fuming, and with a third party involved this time, it seemed like their relationship could hit the rocks because of this.

Driscoll held Elyse in high regard, not just because she had saved Jayden's hide in some tight spots but also because of her character. Jayden had grown up in a nest of vipers, and having someone who genuinely cared about him was crucial. Driscoll believed only someone as genuine as Elyse could be Jayden's better half.

As for Judy, he believed she was full of schemes.

At that moment, Judy interjected, "This food is divine. It's a shame Ms. Lloyd isn't joining us." After a pause, she asked tentatively, "Mr. Owen, if I ask for seconds, will you think I'm a glutton?"

Jayden replied indifferently, "Suit yourself."

With an even brighter smile, Judy exclaimed, "Thank you, Mr. Owen. I'll clean my plate." Jayden didn't say anything more. Driscoll couldn't fathom what was going on in his head, so he backed off. It wasn't the right time to enlighten Jayden. He'd have a chat with him later, one on one.

After leaving the house, Elyse hailed a taxi to the studio and went straight to the practice room. Since other members were not present, she stood alone in the middle of the room and began playing her violin. The music fluctuated between fast and slow. She tried to lose herself in it, but all she felt was turmoil in her heart. She felt like a caged animal, unable to find a way out. It was like she was surrounded by invisible walls. No matter how hard she tried, she only ended up hurting herself.

When she finished playing, tears streaked down her face. She slumped to the floor, utterly drained. Then suddenly, she heard clapping. In a panic, she looked up to see a man wearing a cap and sunglasses entering, applauding.

"You're incredible! Your music moved me," he said, approaching her. He looked familiar. Taking off his sunglasses, he tried to remember. "Haven't we met before at the TV station?"

Looking at him in disbelief, Elyse asked, “Are you Richie Larson? What are you doing here?”

Richie reached out his hand and said, “What a small world. We meet again.” Elyse didn’t take his hand, turning away awkwardly to wipe her tears. Noticing her distress, Richie pretended not to see, saying, “Your violin playing is amazing. Can we be friends?”

Chapter 128:

Elyse was impressed; after all, Richie was a leading celebrity in the entertainment industry, and she felt fortunate to have the chance to befriend such a figure. Removing his hat and placing it backwards, Richie leaned forward, supporting his chin with his hands, and gazed at her with sparkling eyes. “What’s your name? How long have you played the violin? Could you play a piece just for me?” His request came even before Elyse had agreed to be friends.

Elyse shook her head in refusal. “I’m not feeling up to it right now. I’d rather not play the violin.” After a brief pause, Richie proposed, “I actually came here to unwind, but I ended up falling asleep on stage and missed dinner. Would you like to join me for a meal?”

Elyse, taken aback by his proposal, inquired, “Just the two of us?”

“Absolutely. You seem upset. A nice dinner might lift your spirits,” he replied, pulling her to her feet. He then pulled out his phone to search for good restaurants nearby.

Overwhelmed by the turn of events, Elyse didn’t know how to react. She had initially planned to practice solo here until midnight. “Let’s opt for barbecue. I haven’t had it in a while, and these pictures are really tempting,” Richie said, showing her his phone display with images of barbecue.

Elyse also hadn’t eaten yet, so the image of the barbecue immediately made her stomach rumble. She had initially thought to decline Richie’s invitation but found herself unable to voice her refusal. “Well, then, let’s go,” she said quietly, too awkward to look at him directly.

Ignoring these minor hesitations, Richie led her out of the building straight to that grill. They settled into a secluded spot and quickly ordered. Richie appeared well-acquainted with the place, quickly choosing a variety of dishes, and Elyse matched his enthusiasm with her selections. They then waited for their orders to be served.

Disliking the quiet, Richie broke the silence. “Are you the concertmaster in your orchestra? The piece you played was deeply moving. I felt your emotions—both the pain and the confusion.”

Surprised by his compliment, Elyse modestly shook her head. “No, I’m not as accomplished as you suggest. I’m not the concertmaster.”

Richie looked surprised. “Is that so? Your performance seemed more proficient than many. To me, conveying emotion is the most crucial aspect of music. Without that emotional resonance, music fails to truly connect.”

Curious about his insights, Elyse questioned him. “You seem well-versed in music, yet you’re an actor. Do you play any instruments?”

Richie laughed, scratching his head. “Actually, I don’t play. My understanding comes from a friend who’s very much into music.”

Elyse nodded in agreement. “Exactly, I too believe that the best music resonates with the audience.”

Their easy conversation continued until their food arrived. Ravenous, they both started eating immediately, their earlier chat momentarily forgotten as they focused on the meal.

After their meal, Elyse felt better but was still troubled by earlier events. Richie noticed her mood and suggested, “How about a walk in the park to help digest?”

Elyse paused to check her phone, hoping for a message from Jayden. When she saw none, her disappointment deepened. The thought that Jayden might be with Judy nagged at her, and she struggled to dispel these unsettling ideas.

Richie, seeing her distress, expressed his concern. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” Elyse replied, picking up her violin. “Let’s take that walk in the park.”

They headed to a nearby park bustling with visitors. Concerned that Richie might be recognized, Elyse led them to a quieter area. Spotting an empty bench, she sat down heavily and sighed.

“Why sigh after such a good meal?” Richie inquired.

“It’s nothing. I’m just a bit tired and need to rest,” Elyse responded, her gaze distant.

Richie sensed that his new friend, being sensitive and emotional, might be carrying a heavy burden. He believed that playing the violin could offer her some relief. Glancing at her violin, he suggested gently, “Would you like to play your violin? It seems like a perfect spot for it.”

Chapter 129:

Elyse glanced around, noting the sparse crowd. “This place isn’t exactly the best spot for a violin performance. There’s hardly anyone around.”

“And am I not an audience?” Richie retorted confidently. “Besides, a performer can perform anywhere. If you want it, everything around can be your audience.”

Elyse gave him a skeptical look. “Is that what your music-savvy friend told you?”

“Absolutely. My friend is amazing. You’ll meet him when he’s back in our country.” Pointing towards a nearby streetlight, Richie said, “There’s light there. You can stand under it and play your violin.”

Elyse hesitated, then walked over to the streetlamp with her violin. She positioned herself, took a deep breath, and began to play.

Meanwhile, Richie pulled out his phone to record a video. With her eyes closed, Elyse poured her emotions into her music. Every unspoken grievance found a voice through her violin.

As Richie was recording, he noticed a few people approaching, drawn by Elyse’s performance. Worried about being recognized, Richie quickly donned a mask and a hat.

But Richie had underestimated the power of Elyse’s music. Soon, as one piece ended, Elyse found herself surrounded by a crowd.

“Bravo! Your music really touched my heart. Are you a professional musician? What’s your name? I’d love to look you up online. Could you play one more piece? Your music is so captivating.”

Elyse was used to performing on stage, following a set list, and rarely interacted directly with her audience. This was the first time she had been so close to her audience, and she found she enjoyed the direct communication.

Subconsciously, she scanned the crowd, looking for Richie. Richie waved at her, giving her a nod to continue. With his hat and sunglasses, he was confident no one would recognize him.

Under the gaze of the crowd, Elyse played several more pieces, each one stirring the emotions of those listening, leaving them eager for more. After performing three or four pieces, she thanked the crowd and left the park with Richie.

Seeing Elyse’s smile, Richie teased, “You no longer feel down, am I right?” Elyse was about to say she was feeling great, but as they approached the park’s exit, they saw Jayden sitting in a wheelchair, Judy standing next to him.

Elyse froze, her face falling. Judy, noticing the man beside Elyse, almost couldn’t contain her joy. “Ms. Lloyd, why don’t you head home? Mr. Owen has been worried sick about you. He came looking for you himself. And who’s this guy with you? Do you two know each other well?”

Elyse glanced at Judy, sensing the trap in her words. She was about to say something when Richie strode up to Jayden, bending down in front of them.

“Excuse me, are you Mr. Jayden Owen?” Richie asked enthusiastically.

Jayden looked at him coldly, not remembering Richie.

Richie said excitedly, “It’s really you! I’m Richie Larson. I starred in three movies you invested in, all of them hugely successful. But you stopped investing in the entertainment circle after that. I never got the chance to work with you again,” Richie said, trying to jog Jayden’s memory.

Jayden remembered Richie after the reminder. “I’m not involved in the entertainment business anymore. Perhaps we could collaborate in the future.”

Richie's eyes lit up. Jayden could be his future investor. He had to make sure to keep a good connection with him for his own future.

Annoyed by Richie's talkative nature, Jayden looked at Elyse, showing his disapproval.

Elyse saw Jayden's reaction and felt uncomfortable. She pulled away from Richie. "I have to go back now. Thank you so much for your help today," she said, genuinely grateful.

Richie grinned. "No problem. And thank you for helping me reconnect with Mr. Owen."

Elyse didn't reply. She couldn't help but notice the way Richie looked at Jayden, like a hungry wolf eyeing its prey, ready to pounce.

Jayden couldn't bear it anymore. "Come back with me, Elyse."

Seeing the awkward exchange between Elyse and Jayden, Richie couldn't help but ask, "Are you two married? You seem like a real couple, a perfect match."

Chapter 130:

Richie's remark startled both Jayden and Elyse. They exchanged glances before simultaneously turning away, an unspoken agreement between them. Although they remained silent, there was a subtle shift in their mood for the better.

Seeing that they didn't contradict him, Richie grew more enthusiastic. "So you are Mr. Owen's wife! I must be blind not to have noticed. I'd like to formally invite you to dinner next time. Please don't turn me down."

Elyse's lips twitched into a reluctant smile, and she nodded her agreement. Richie then urged, "You should probably head back now. Your maid looks quite displeased. She might be cursing you under her breath."

Judy was taken aback, wondering if Richie was referring to her. Once she realized he was, she managed a forced smile. "You're mistaken. I'm not a maid," she corrected gently.

Richie scrutinized her further, his expression skeptical. “That’s hard to believe. You don’t seem like you come from a wealthy and influential family.”

Judy felt a surge of anger. Richie’s careless words in front of Jayden threatened to undo the positive impression she had worked hard to establish. “I am not a maid. You’re wrong,” she insisted once more.

Richie, still puzzled, asked, “If you’re not a maid, why are you following them around?”

His blunt words left Judy at a loss for words, unable to muster a quick response. “Mr. Owen, please defend me. How can he speak about me in such a manner?” She looked to Jayden for support, hoping he would intervene on her behalf.

However, Jayden barely glanced at her and responded with impatience, “You are a maid, aren’t you? He’s not wrong.”

Judy was stunned. Despite her close relationship with Jayden, today he hadn’t come to her defense. Why?

Elyse approached and took hold of Jayden’s wheelchair, bidding Richie farewell before turning to leave with Jayden. Judy hurried after them, eager to take over wheeling Jayden herself. In her mind, that was a duty fit for a wife, and she saw herself as Jayden’s true spouse, not willing to concede the role to Elyse.

Just as Judy was about to make an excuse to intervene, Richie stopped her. “Where do you live? Let’s go together.” Richie, treating Judy as an outsider, believed he was being thoughtful and considerate to all women.

As Jayden and Elyse moved further away, Judy grew anxious to catch up, but Richie held her back, asserting, “Enough. You’re just a third wheel. Stay away from them. I’ll see you home.”

Frustrated and fed up with Richie, Judy protested, “I’ll go back with them.”

Richie paused, then responded with a sarcastic smile, “I understand you reject the title of a maid, but let’s face it. Your self-importance is truly unparalleled.”

Judy could no longer contain her anger. Pointing at Richie, she exploded, “What is wrong with you? How is my relationship with Jayden any of your concern? I was his companion long before any of this. Why can’t I follow them?”

When she turned around, Judy realized that Jayden and Elyse were no longer in sight. Her heart sank. Had Jayden really left her behind?

Richie, taking a step back to distance himself, retorted, “You’re delusional. You claim you’re not a maid yet act like one, and now you even think you’re Mr. Owen’s woman. If you were, then what does that make Elyse?”

After a brief pause, Richie dismissed her. “Forget it. I’m not taking a lunatic home. You can go back by yourself.” He then walked away without a second glance.

Fuming, Judy hurried to catch up with Jayden and Elyse, but they were nowhere to be seen, not even their car. Feeling utterly humiliated, Judy clenched her teeth. For a moment, she considered just going home, but she soon regained her composure. She had only been at Jayden’s house for a day. It was natural for him to overlook her.

“As long as I stay with Jayden longer, he’ll remember me,” she reassured herself, convinced that she could eventually replace Elyse.