

## Bound love 171

Chapter 171:

Elyse's eyes widened in shock as she stared at Jayden. He returned her gaze with a calm expression. Was he really behaving like a dog? He had literally bitten her. Refusing to be outdone, Elyse pinched Jayden's thigh again. Despite the pain, Jayden, driven by his frustration with her boldness, bit her lip once more. The pain brought tears to her eyes, and she groaned, struggling to break free.

Just then, Freddy arrived with a notice in hand, only to find Elyse moaning in the embrace of a muscular man, their lips locked in a kiss. It was all too much to take in, especially in a public place. Stunned for a few moments, Freddy turned away, trying to ignore the scene before him. However, remembering the notice he was supposed to deliver, he hesitantly turned back.

"This is the new notification, Elyse. I think it's important. You should take a look," Freddy said, one hand covering his eyes, the other holding the notice as if he was ready to bolt.

Elyse had never felt so embarrassed. Her mind went blank, and she remained frozen in Jayden's embrace. Jayden loosened his hold, took the notice from Freddy, glanced over it a few times, and handed it to Elyse. "Take a look," he urged.

Peeking through his fingers, Freddy watched closely. Why were they both dressed properly? Realizing his misunderstanding, he sighed in relief. Elyse stiffly took the notice, read it, and snapped to attention. "Gary Hank has pulled out of the competition."

"It was completely unexpected," Freddy responded. "I heard that Grace Fuller and Bart Gino respectively paid a visit to Merlin. Although I am close to Bart, he declined to share any details about his meeting with the director. I have a feeling there's something suspicious going on."

Standing up, Elyse murmured, "The notice was released because Merlin was worried Gary might change his mind. This way, Gary can't back out and keep campaigning, and Darren Reynolds will not face another rival." She couldn't let Merlin's plan work. She needed to talk to Grace and Bart.

Jayden, I have something to do. Go to the lounge and wait for me.” Noticing the determination in her eyes, he waved his hand, indicating she should go ahead. With a smile, Elyse hurried away.

Seeing her departure, Freddy touched his nose awkwardly and said to Jayden, “I know you two are together, but could you keep it down a bit? This is a public place. You can save it for when you two get home.”

Jayden glanced at him and replied, “You’re overthinking it. You should feel lucky it was me who saw that. If it had been someone else, the rumors would be swirling by now,” Freddy stated loudly.

Jayden said calmly, “You should feel lucky it was you here, or someone else would have got the chance to talk.” Freddy felt a chill as Jayden’s gaze lingered one last time before leaving. He realized then just how precarious the situation had been.

After wandering for quite some time, Elyse spotted her first target, Bart, who was seated in the lounge, cradling a violin and lost in thought. Elyse approached and sat across from him. Bart looked up, recognized her, and asked, “What’s up?”

“I know Merlin asked you to drop out of the election. I want you to refuse,” she said.

“How do you know? I think he suggested it for my own good. Besides, I’m not even sure I can win.”

“Can you promise you’ll be the concertmaster next year? Gary has already pulled out of the competition. He agreed to Merlin’s terms, thinking he would be concertmaster on next year’s tour. All he ended up with was empty promises,” Elyse explained.

Stunned by this revelation, Bart then realized Merlin had spoken to Elyse as well. “Did he say the same to you?” he asked.

“There was no guarantee either of us would be concertmaster next year,” Elyse’s expression hardened. “Yes, but I turned him down. I want to compete. I want Cody to choose me.”

Jayden interjected in surprise, “So it’s not just a baseless rumor that Cody is scouting for new talent?”

“It’s true. That’s why Merlin is so concerned about this competition. He wants us out of the picture so Cody doesn’t notice us,” Elyse concluded firmly.

Chapter 173:

How could any employee listen to me when I don’t even work there? Jayden stated firmly.

Clenching her teeth in frustration, Tess found herself without a rebuttal. Jayden glanced at a dejected Bryce and suggested, “If you’re concerned about Bryce, consider planning a future for him. I can’t help him.”

Bryce retorted loudly, “It’s clear you don’t want to help. You’re the one who told me to leave the company. You have no respect for me.”

“Why do you look down on him?” Tess interjected.

Jayden tilted his head, picked up the teapot, and poured a cup of tea for Elyse. His voice carried a note of indifference. “If Bryce truly had potential, Grandpa would have noticed it.”

Tess was at a loss for words. Indeed, Enzo had little faith in Bryce. When Jayden was healthy, Enzo frequently invited him to stay for dinner or to chat in the study. It was evident to everyone that Jayden was highly favored by Enzo. Bryce wasn’t accorded the same treatment. At Enzo’s birthday party, those young men were invited to the study for a discussion, but not Bryce.

Tess’s face showed her frustration. She had two children and couldn’t understand why only Jayden was favored while Bryce was overlooked.

Casting a glance at the silent Elyse, a flicker of annoyance crossed Tess’s face. “You treat your wife better than your own brother. Remember, he’s your family by blood.”

Suddenly called upon, Elyse sat up straight and looked anxiously at Tess. Jayden glanced unhappily at his mother and said, "Our family has never cared much about blood ties. You know that, Mom."

Tess's face turned pale, and she was too angry to respond immediately. The Owen family's motto was profit first. In the pursuit of profits, kinship meant little. Only money and power mattered. Everyone in the Owen family upheld this principle, Tess and Andrew included.

Jayden gave a scornful laugh. "Tess only brought up blood ties now because it suited her needs. Such a great mother she was."

"Enough. Bryce needs to establish himself in the company. As his brother, it's your duty to help him. Bryce, starting today, you're going to live with your brother and learn from him," Tess declared, ignoring everything else.

After saying this, she glanced at Jayden's legs and added, "Your legs may be weak, but your mind is sharp."

Elyse's expression grew darker. How could Tess say such a thing about her son? Didn't she realize how sensitive Jayden was about his legs? She was so furious that she felt compelled to stand up for Jayden. No matter how aggressive Tess was, she couldn't bring herself to hurt her son.

But Jayden sensed what she was about to do and stopped her. He said with a hint of annoyance, "It's fine. He can stay."

Seeing Jayden's agreement, Tess's mood improved. She tilted her head up slightly, regaining her pride, and declared arrogantly, "Just guide your brother. The Owen Group will belong to us one day."

With that, she left, leaving Bryce, Jayden, and Elyse behind. Elyse, with a mix of emotions crossing her face, finally turned to Driscoll and instructed, "Prepare a guest room for him."

Driscoll nodded respectfully and directed a servant to get the room ready. Meanwhile, Bryce lounged on the sofa as if he owned the place, giving Jayden a disdainful look. "Like it or not, you have to help me. I'm the future of our family now."

Elyse was puzzled by how Bryce had been raised to look down on his own elder brother. She frowned and stood up, clearly unhappy. “You think this is your house? Why should he help you? If you’re the future of the family, prove it yourself.”

Bryce was taken aback by Elyse’s defense of Jayden. He snapped, “B\*tch, you have no right to interfere in our conversation. This is my home, and I’ll speak if I want to,” Elyse retorted sharply.

A dark look crossed Bryce’s face. He resented Elyse; he blamed her for Joanna’s death. His voice low and cold, he declared, “You’ve never been and will never be my sister-in-law. I refuse to accept you.”

Chapter 174:

“In the future, someone might take my place, but for now, I am your sister-in-law,” Elyse declared with a sneer, her tone casual. Turning to Driscoll, she spoke with icy detachment, “Since he loathes me so, he’ll dine in his own room. I’m certain he wouldn’t care to share a meal with me.”

Driscoll paused, his eyes shifting to Jayden. Jayden responded, “Why are you looking at me? Elyse runs the house here.”

Bryce’s face contorted slightly, a mix of shock and dismay. “So you’re excluding me from the dinner table?”

Elyse, hands trembling, said, “Of all the family, you alone refuse to accept me. Naturally, I will accommodate your wishes.”

Bryce glowered at Jayden, scoffing, “I had no intention of sharing a table with you anyway.” He then stormed off upstairs, likely in search of his room.

Jayden looked over at Elyse, remarking, “Bryce is devoid of any redeeming qualities. He’s a fool and wicked to boot. Don’t fret over him. Our mother has indulged him for too long.”

“I can see that,” Elyse replied, her face unreadable yet filled with silent jubilation over Jayden’s supportive words.

As usual, Jayden made his way to the study, his routine unchanged by Bryce’s arrival. Elyse, meanwhile, carried her violin to the garden for her practice session. She was determined to practice diligently, hoping to catch Cody’s attention.

As she was immersed in her practice, an empty plastic water bottle suddenly fell from above and struck her on the head. “Ouch!” she exclaimed, rubbing her head in pain. She looked up to see Bryce walking away with a smug expression. It was clear he had done it intentionally.

Furious, Elyse grabbed the bottle and went in search of Bryce. He had retreated to his room and refused to come out. Driscoll, hearing the commotion, approached to inquire about the incident. A glint of shrewdness appeared in his eyes as he reassured her, “Don’t worry, I’ll inform Mr. Owen about what occurred.”

With the upcoming selection competition on her mind, Elyse decided to ignore Bryce’s provocation. She turned and walked away.

Driscoll watched the door to Bryce’s room, sighed, and then made his way to the study on the first floor. Upon reaching the door, he knocked, entered, and found Jayden by the window, absorbed in reading a report.

Without looking up, Jayden inquired, “What’s wrong?”

Bryce intentionally hit Mrs. Owen with a water bottle. “Should we really allow him to stay here?” Driscoll asked, puzzled.

“I’ll have him leave on his own accord in a few days,” Jayden responded, still not looking up from his report. He then added, “Is she alright?”

“She is quite upset,” Driscoll responded truthfully.

Jayden’s voice took on a chillier edge. “Inform the chef not to prepare any meat for Bryce. He’s gotten too heavy. A little weight loss won’t hurt. If he refuses to eat, let him

stay in his room and think over his actions. And if he dares to come out looking for food, make sure he regrets it.”

“Yes, sir,” Driscoll replied and exited the room with a respectful nod.

At dinner, as Elyse was seated at the table, she suddenly heard Bryce cursing followed by the sounds of objects being violently smashed. She frowned slightly, ready to rise and investigate, but Jayden stopped her. “Leave him be. He often loses control like this.”

“But if anything happens to Bryce while he’s here, your mother will blame you,” Elyse said, concern lacing her voice.

Jayden pulled her back to her seat and offered her a piece of fish. “He’s prone to smashing things when angry. You might as well get used to it.”

This made Elyse think of her sister Mabel. Mabel also likes smashing things to vent her anger.

Jayden patted her head gently. “They’re both spoiled. It’s best to just ignore them.”

Elyse found wisdom in Jayden’s words and continued eating thoughtfully. Unbeknownst to her, Bryce’s fury stemmed from finding only boiled cabbage on his plate — a deliberate move by the chef following Jayden’s orders.

“What does Jayden think he’s doing? Is he trying to starve me?” Bryce muttered, glaring at Driscoll with deep-seated hatred.

Driscoll spoke with respect. “There’s been a misunderstanding. He hopes that you will lose some weight. After all, having a CEO who is overweight does not present well for the company’s image.”

“Bullshit! Jayden just wants to starve me to death,” Bryce retorted. He attempted to rush out but was restrained by two bodyguards, his anger erupting into a scream.

“You need to spend the next few hours reflecting in your room,” Driscoll instructed, giving a covert wink to the bodyguards. They caught on quickly and secured the door from the inside.

Bryce was left stunned. He tried to open the door, only to realize it was locked. He pounded on the door, yelling, “Jayden, is this how you treat me? Am I not your brother?”

## Chapter 175:

Bryce knocked on the door for what felt like an eternity, but no one bothered to answer.

Meanwhile, his stomach growled in protest. He glanced back at the boiled cabbage on the table. Disgust filled his eyes, but hunger pushed him to pick up the plate and eat. One dish didn’t satisfy his hunger, leaving him even more frustrated. “Let’s just see. One day I’ll trample you two, and you’ll be begging at my feet,” Bryce seethed, his anger boiling over as he hurled the plate to the floor, shattering it. With that, he turned and headed to bed, his stomach still empty.

In the dead of night, he jolted awake, groggy and disoriented. Fumbling for his phone, he realized it was already midnight. He dragged himself out of bed, muttering, “I’m starving.” Hunger still gnawed at him. He wanted to get something to eat, so he stumbled to the kitchen. When he opened the door, he found that it was unlocked. He proceeded downstairs in a cheerful mood, not realizing that the first-floor living area was noticeably darker than normal. There was no moonlight coming in through the window.

Rummaging through the fridge, he searched for anything to eat. Suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder. Ignoring it, he continued his search. Another tap, this time on the opposite shoulder, made him turn around. “Who’s there? Quit bugging me,” Bryce snapped, but there was no one behind him. Confusion washed over him, and he mumbled, “Must be losing my mind from hunger. It’s just my imagination, right?”

He resumed his search, but another touch, this time on his back, sent shivers down his spine. Bryce spun around, but there was still no one there. “Who’s playing games? Show yourself,” his voice trembled with fear. Memories flooded back from his childhood of a similar haunting experience. A ghost stroked his face, kicked his butt, and followed him when he woke up at midnight. He was so terrified back then that he hurried into the bathroom and collapsed on the floor. That ghost was his nightmare growing up. Had the ghost returned to him after all these years? “Is it you? Back to haunt me again? Can’t you find someone else to bother?” Bryce’s voice quivered as he spoke to the silence.



With no response, the room seemed to close in around him, his breath the only sound. Suddenly, a hand grabbed his ankle, sending a shockwave of fear through him.

In another part of the house, Elyse was jolted awake by Bryce's blood-curdling scream. "Something's wrong. What's happening?" she asked, turning to Jayden, only to find his side of the bed empty and cold. It looked like Jayden was still in the study. Did he not return to sleep?

Panic rising, she wrapped herself in a shawl and hurried downstairs to find several servants already gathered there. She turned to walk to Jayden when she spotted him, and as she did, she noticed Bryce weeping. Bryce was trembling, repeating the word "ghost" over and over. Elyse was confused and asked, "Is he okay? Why is he speaking incoherently?"

Concerned, Elyse turned to Jayden, who explained, "He was so scared he had wet his pants by the time I found him." Seeing Bryce's wet pants and catching the unpleasant smell, Elyse quickly took charge. "Driscoll, get someone to take Bryce to his room, change him, and call the family doctor. We need to make sure he's alright," Elyse frowned and carefully made arrangements.

As the servants led Bryce away, Elyse turned to Jayden, asking, "Why were you still in the study? Why didn't you come back to bed?" Jayden took her soft hand in his, giving it a gentle squeeze. "Miss me? Let's go back to our room."

Blushing, Elyse pushed him playfully, asking, "What's wrong with Bryce? How could he think there was a ghost in the house? I've never heard anything like this before." Jayden pulled her close, planting a kiss on her lips. "Forget about him. There are no such things as ghosts. It's just his imagination."

Before Elyse could say anything, Jayden kissed her again and then led her back to their room.

The next morning, Elyse found Bryce asleep on the sofa while two maids were folding blankets. Confused, she asked Driscoll, "Did Bryce sleep here last night?" Exhausted, Driscoll replied, "Yes, he refused to go to his room. We had to make a bed for him here, and we all slept in the living room with the lights on."

## Chapter 176:

Elyse looked at Bryce, who was snoring on the sofa, her eyes filled with complex emotions. Recalling the previous night's events, she was unsure how to approach him. It was the first time she had witnessed someone wet his pants out of fear.

Jayden led her to the dining room, advising, "Leave him be. Hurry and eat. You're going to be late." Elyse shot him a sharp look. If it hadn't been for their sexual encounters last night, she wouldn't have overslept.

Noticing the reproach in her eyes, Jayden handed her a glass of milk. "Drink this to soothe your throat. You sound hoarse." Elyse startled, instinctively touched her throat, and glanced around anxiously at the servants. Thankfully, none had overheard Jayden's comment, and she breathed a sigh of relief.

"Why are you so shy?" Jayden couldn't help but be amused by her reaction, finding it increasingly interesting. After a brief look at him, Elyse took the milk and a sandwich, retorting, "I'm not as daring as you." She ate quickly and left home in a rush.

An hour later, Bryce woke up, yawned, and asked Driscoll for breakfast. Jayden, sitting on the opposite sofa reading the newspaper, remarked casually, "You want breakfast? Aren't you worried about being late?"

Bryce grabbed his phone to check the time. It was only thirty minutes until half past nine, the start of the workday. He couldn't afford to be late. If his performance at work was poor, his grandpa wouldn't consider him a viable candidate for the leader of the company.

Panicking, he hurried to change his clothes. "Jayden, what should I do? Should I take a day off? Maybe I can skip today and go to work tomorrow?"

Jayden glanced up from his newspaper and responded indifferently, "Sure, if you're not concerned about how it looks, you can always take leave." Bryce hurriedly put on his shoes as Driscoll arrived with breakfast. "Here's the breakfast you requested."

"I don't need it now," Bryce declared, too agitated to think about food. He grabbed his phone and dashed out. Driscoll watched Bryce's hasty departure with concern. "He's no match for the cunning individuals in the company."

“He needs to learn some lessons,” Jayden remarked. He had already advised Bryce to steer clear of the business fray, but since Bryce hadn’t heeded his advice, he wasn’t inclined to repeat himself.

Meanwhile, as soon as Elyse arrived at the practice room, she was summoned by Merlin. Standing in his office, she felt the unusual pressure emanating from him and had a good idea why he had approached her.

“I heard you met privately with Bart and Grace yesterday. What did you discuss with them?” Merlin asked, his expression unreadable by the window.

After a moment of silence, Elyse replied, “We discussed the selection process tomorrow. Understanding my opponents beforehand is crucial for my chances of success.”

Merlin scoffed. “You spoke with them, and afterward, they all rejected my offer. Surely, you said something to influence them.”

Elyse remained silent, seeing no reason to confess, particularly not at such a critical moment.

Just as Merlin was about to add more, Darren burst into the room with a troubled expression. “I need a word with you. Please ask her to leave.”

After a brief pause and a hard look at Darren, Merlin signaled for Elyse to exit.

Breathing a sigh of relief as she stepped out, Elyse couldn’t help but turn back, intrigued by what Darren was about to say.

Once the door shut behind Elyse, Darren addressed his uncle. “It’s actually good that Grace and Bart are still in the competition. Why are you questioning Elyse about it?”

Merlin, suddenly realizing Darren’s involvement, shook with anger. “Do you think I’m doing this for anyone else? This is all for you. Your performance is too erratic. If they perform better, how can you expect to win? Vicky, in particular, is far more stable than you. If I don’t step in, you’re likely to rank last.”

Darren felt a deep sadness upon hearing this. It seemed his uncle believed he needed such drastic measures to win.

“I appreciate your intentions, but I don’t want to win first place like this. I doubt Cody would take me on as his apprentice under these circumstances. Let me just compete fairly with them. Please, no more interference,” Darren pleaded, bowing slightly, his tone serious.

## Chapter 177:

After leaving Merlin’s office, instead of heading straight back to the practice room, Elyse lingered in the corridor, waiting for Darren.

A few minutes later, Darren emerged, wearing a long face. As soon as the office door closed behind him, Elyse hurried over, concern etched on her face. “Are you okay?”

Darren shook his head, his expression somber. “I’m fine. But I’ve told the director, and he’s not going to pull any strings for me anymore.”

Elyse nodded understandingly. “Right now, only a handful of us know about this. If it gets out, everyone in the orchestra will be demanding answers from him.”

Darren heaved a sigh of relief. “Yeah, I don’t need my uncle risking his own neck for me. It’s a shame, really. I had plans to play along. I was going to call him out in tomorrow’s selection process for breaking the rules. But you’ve put a stop to that,” Vicky said regretfully.

Hearing the sound, they turned to see Vicky leaning against the wall, arms crossed, a mischievous grin on her face. Vicky had known Darren for ages; after all, her instructor was the assistant director. She laughed at Darren without restraint. “Everyone thinks you’re just average. If your uncle wasn’t the big shot here, you wouldn’t even be in the running against me.”

Darren frowned. “So you know everything?”

Vicky chuckled. "If you don't want me to know something, don't do it. There are no secrets as long as I'm around."

Elyse remained silent. She knew the director and the assistant director had been at odds for ages, and even their apprentices were in on the rivalry. Vicky sauntered over to them, casting a disdainful glance at Darren before fixing her gaze on Elyse. She stood tall in high heels, looking down at Elyse with contempt. "And I didn't expect you to be so soft-hearted, letting your competitors off the hook like that. You're the most irritating person in this whole competition."

Elyse sneered. "My actions ruined your plans and your instructor's chances of promotion, didn't they? As a matter of fact, you don't want fair competition; you just want to benefit from it."

"Fair competition? You think you can compete fairly with me? The rules only give you the illusion that you stand a chance against me," Vicky raised her chin defiantly, especially at Elyse. "You think your little talent is enough to beat me."

Unhappy with Vicky's attitude, Darren decided to confront her. "Well, considering she's tied with you for first place, it seems you're not that much better than she is."

Vicky hated it when someone brought that up. She shot Darren a venomous look. "Not convinced, are you? Just wait and see. I'll show you," she spat before striding away in her high heels.

Watching Vicky's arrogant departure, Elyse felt a surge of irritation. "So what if Vicky's instructor was the assistant director?"

Glancing at Vicky's retreating figure, Darren shook his head. "Vicky's always been like this. Arrogant and full of herself. Even though she's mellowed out a bit, she's still the same old Vicky."

Darren had first met Vicky at a party Merlin had dragged him to. Since Merlin and the assistant director had always been at odds, Darren and Vicky had been set up against each other in a clash over who would play the violin better. After that party, Darren had gained another enemy: Vicky. The two of them had been secretly battling it out for years. While Vicky, who was usually so overconfident, never played below her abilities, Darren occasionally did poorly.

Darren rubbed his temples, thinking about the past. “Even though Vicky’s got a temper, she’s talented. She might actually beat me tomorrow.”

Elyse looked at him for a moment before speaking. “You’re being too hard on yourself again. You need to have more faith in your abilities. I know you’re gifted.”

Darren looked at her thoughtfully. “Do you really think I’m gifted?”

“Think about it. Even when you’re not at your best, you’re still in the top five,” Elyse said. “If you can get over this self-doubt, you’ll do better.”

Darren nodded, deep in thought. “I’ve never looked at it that way.”

Giving him an encouraging pat on the shoulder, Elyse smiled. “Beat Vicky tomorrow. Show her what you’re made of.”

Chapter 178:

After offering Darren some encouragement, Elyse retreated to violin practice with a heavy heart, determined to refine her skills until she felt satisfied. Upon her return home, she unexpectedly encountered Kieran. Surprised, she inquired, “What brings you here?”

“I’m here to see Jayden,” Kieran replied tersely, striding into the living room without further ado.

Perplexed, Elyse hastened her steps and settled beside Jayden, her gaze lingering on Kieran with curiosity. Unmoved by her presence, Kieran remained fixated on Jayden, his expression tinged with weariness. “Where have you taken my sister?” he asked.

It dawned on Elyse that Kieran’s visit was prompted by concern for Judy. Rather than interjecting, Elyse remained silent beside Jayden, observing the tense exchange.

Setting his book aside, Jayden met Kieran’s gaze squarely. “What’s your motive for seeing her?”

“She’s been absent for too long. I only just learned she came here. Regardless of her transgressions, I implore you to release her,” Kieran pleaded earnestly, his demeanor verging on submission.

“Judy is following her own path. Why must you interfere?” Jayden’s brow furrowed with displeasure.

Kieran was taken aback by Jayden’s response. He knew Judy harbored feelings for Jayden. Had she resorted to drastic measures to gain his attention? Could she be toiling away at some nightclub now? Various scenarios raced through Kieran’s mind, but he never imagined Judy serving as a maid.

Kieran remained detached from the other Foster family members, treating them merely as tools for his own ends. Even when Joanna passed away, he showed no inclination to repatriate her remains. However, he harbored genuine concern for Judy’s sudden disappearance. As his sole sibling, she had been the recipient of his affection and care throughout their upbringing.

Kieran’s affection for Judy ran deep. His concern for her compelled him to humble himself before Jayden. He implored in a tone softened with deference, “Mr. Owen, I plead with you for any leads. I just want to bring my sister home.”

Jayden remained silent, then glanced at Elyse, gently squeezing her hand. “What’s your take on this? Should we...?”

Elyse’s eyes widened in surprise as she looked at Jayden. Why had he sought her opinion? She had only intended to observe silently. However, Kieran swiftly addressed Elyse, saying, “I owe you an apology, Mrs. Owen. I once offended you. If you still harbor resentment, direct it towards me. Spare my sister from harm.”

Bemused by Elyse’s puzzled expression, Jayden leaned in to whisper, “Remember, he once pledged to marry you.” It was only then that Elyse recollected Kieran’s earlier declaration. Yet, it had long faded from her memory, never having held much significance. After a moment of contemplation, she turned to Jayden and declared, “Inform him. He can take his sister home.”

“Have you reached a decision?” Jayden inquired.

“Yes, I’ve made my decision.” Fearing that Kieran might linger indefinitely if left uninformed about Judy’s whereabouts, Elyse opted to disclose her location. “She is at my grandpa’s residence,” Jayden murmured to Kieran.

Kieran stood in stunned silence for three heartbeats, his mind reeling with possibilities he never imagined. “Go fetch her, though I wonder if she’ll consent to go with you,” Jayden remarked with a meaningful smile.

Before Kieran could grasp the implication, he expressed gratitude to Elyse and hastened to find Judy. Upon his arrival, he promptly rapped on the door, and as it swung open, he conveyed his intentions to the butler with clarity. With no impediments in his path, he soon saw Judy.

Judy, having just concluded her dinner and sought solace in her chamber, expressed her surprise upon seeing Kieran. “Kieran, what brings you here?”

Kieran gently clasped her hand and scrutinized her with tender care. A wave of relief washed over him as he observed her well-being, putting his mind at ease. With a solemn expression, he produced a document, furrowing his brow. “Why have you affixed your signature to this contract, Judy? As a member of the esteemed Foster family, why have you chosen to serve as a maid here? Your actions cast a shadow upon our family name.”

In a fit of anger, Kieran seized Judy’s hand. “Come home with me at once. Don’t degrade yourself in this manner!”

“I refuse to return. I will soon be with Jayden,” Judy protested defiantly.

“Are you out of your senses? What obsession drives you toward someone incapacitated?” Kieran’s disbelief was palpable. Aware of his sister’s fondness for Jayden, Kieran was taken aback by the extent of her fervor.

“Kieran, it has been a struggle to hold on this long. If I relent now, I may never have another opportunity,” Judy revealed her determination, unyielding. Upon learning of the possibility of being with Jayden, Judy relinquished her resistance and applied herself diligently to her duties as a maid.



However, Kieran remained unconvinced, seeing through Jayden's schemes. "It's merely a deception to tether you here. Have you forgotten the principles our parents instilled in you?"

#### Chapter 179:

Tears welled up in Judy's eyes as she pleaded with Kieran, her voice trembling. "Kieran, can't you just wait? I'll see Jayden soon and tell him how I feel. He will understand my efforts, I know he will."

Kieran's gaze held a mix of emotions as he looked at Judy, a knot forming in his stomach. He hadn't realized just how deeply Judy's feelings for Jayden ran. But he couldn't condone it.

Taking a firmer hold of her, Kieran implored, "Judy, remember you are a Foster. You have responsibilities. Dad is trying to find the right match for you. Come back with me."

With a determined tug, Kieran pulled her out of the room. Despite her best efforts to break free, Judy found herself powerless against Kieran's insistence. The realization that her hopes and efforts were slipping away brought about a rush of emotion. Her eyes turned red as she choked out, "Kieran, why are you doing this? Can't you see I just want to be with the man I love?"

A flicker of compassion crossed Kieran's face. However, he said, "Don't be stubborn, Judy. We have duties as Fosters." Therefore, he was determined to protect her and ensure her happiness as much as possible.

Judy couldn't fathom Kieran's concerns for her. She bristled against his actions, but his resolve was unyielding, leaving her powerless to resist.

Meanwhile, Driscoll gripped the landline phone, his expression tense as he listened to the caller's words. With a heavy sigh, he finally hung up and reported, "Kieran has taken Judy away. She left in tears."

"Tears? Does she like being a maid?" Elyse's surprise was palpable.

Jayden mirrored her surprise.

Driscoll pondered for a moment before speaking. “Word has it she was promised by the housekeeper a return here if she worked diligently. Judy believed it.”

Jayden nodded thoughtfully. “That was a smart move.”

Elyse frowned, mulling over the situation. Suddenly, her gaze sharpened as she fixed Jayden with an accusing look. “It means she loves you so much she is willing to work as a maid for you.”

Jealousy hung thick in the air.

Sensing Elyse’s mood, Driscoll decided to stay silent, not daring to interject.

But Jayden was oblivious to this fact. In all honesty, he didn’t expect Elyse to be jealous of Judy. He had already reassured her, believing her jealousy had been put to rest. He couldn’t have been more wrong. Elyse’s jealousy had not been quelled.

“That’s true. She might love me, but it’s merely surface-level. I still haven’t deciphered the Foster family’s intentions. I’ll need to investigate further,” Jayden declared solemnly, unaware of Elyse’s growing anger.

“You want to pursue this further?” Elyse asked through gritted teeth.

Driscoll closed his eyes, feeling the weight of the situation. What was his master thinking? Why hadn’t he learned not to mention another woman in front of his wife?

As he watched Elyse’s fury mount, realization suddenly dawned on Jayden. He asked, “Are you jealous?”

“I’m not,” Elyse retorted, crossing her arms and turning away in a huff, refusing to meet his gaze.

Jayden frowned. Hadn’t they resolved this? Why was she jealous again?

At that moment, Bryce returned from work, breaking the tension between Jayden and Elyse. "I'm home! Let's eat. I'm absolutely famished!" he exclaimed, oblivious to the sour expressions on Jayden's and Elyse's faces.

As he settled onto the sofa and ordered, "Jayden, I need someone to accompany me tonight. Whoever is up for it will sleep on the floor."

Upon hearing this, Jayden scoffed and said, "Are you really so afraid to sleep alone?"

Bryce fired back, "Your place is haunted. What did you do to get it haunted? Moreover, I'm the only one who is suffering from it."

Jayden replied nonchalantly, "No one is staying with you tonight. You are sleeping alone."

"Don't push me too far, Jayden," Bryce slammed his hand on the table, his humiliation evident.

"No one is pushing you. We are just keeping your little accident last night a secret," Jayden teased.

Bryce's embarrassment over last night's incident, where he had wet his pants in front of everyone, struck a raw nerve. It had become the most shameful moment of his life.

Chapter 180:

Bryce protested loudly, "It was just an accident last night! Actually, I'm quite brave. It won't happen again even if I'm scared."

Jayden responded with a smile, "Since you're so brave, you can sleep alone tonight. I hope not to hear from the servants that you've wet the bed tomorrow."

Determined not to be looked down upon, especially by Jayden, Bryce clenched his teeth. With a burst of excitement, he declared, "I can sleep alone. I don't need anyone with me."

Pleased with Bryce's response, Jayden told Driscoll, "That's settled then. You can go ahead and set the table."

Driscoll nodded and headed to the kitchen.

Elyse remained silent throughout but understood that Jayden was provoking Bryce. "Don't be upset. Let's go have dinner," Jayden said, extending his hand to her. His tone was even, neither harsh nor gentle, merely stating a fact.

In his view, any jealousy from Elyse was unwarranted. After all, he hadn't provoked it directly. Yet he failed to see that his marriage harbored many unpredictable elements. Elyse had always lacked a sense of security, where even the smallest incident could unsettle her.

Elyse gazed at Jayden for a few moments before finally relenting and placing her hand in his. After they had eaten, she returned to her room to prepare for the next day's selection.

With the important day ahead, she went to bed early. However, she awoke suddenly at midnight. Reaching out instinctively, she found Jayden's side of the bed empty once again.

Rubbing her sleepy eyes, Elyse was about to head to the study in search of Jayden when she was startled by Bryce's scream piercing the quiet house. "I saw a ghost! Help!" his voice echoed.

Completely unnerved, Elyse murmured, "Why is Bryce screaming about a ghost again? Could there actually be something supernatural in the house?"

She didn't truly believe in ghosts but decided she needed to see for herself. The darkness seemed to close in around her as she moved forward. After a dozen steps, she felt an eerie sensation as if something were following her.

Spinning around abruptly, she saw nothing and breathed a sigh of relief. Just as she was about to continue, two hands suddenly wrapped around her from behind. Before she could scream for help, a large hand covered her mouth.

“Didn’t anyone tell you it’s best not to wander at night?” The man’s voice was close, his breath cold against her ear before he playfully bit her earlobe, sending a shiver through her.

Startled, Elyse quickly realized the man behind her was not the ghost Bryce had screamed about. But who could it be playing such tricks in the dark?

Unknown to her, it was Jayden who had caught her in the hallway. Jayden hadn’t expected Elyse to disregard his advice to rest in her room. Remembering his earlier instructions, he gently held her closer in frustration. If it weren’t for the important selection tomorrow, he might have taken her tonight.

Feeling his hands, Elyse panicked. She struggled in vain, eventually growing tired and breathing heavily in his hold.

“You smell nice. Is that a new perfume?” Jayden asked, his voice calm as he held his wife. The change in her scent intrigued him further, drawing him closer to discover its source. Suddenly, he felt a tear drop onto the back of his hand.

“Huh? Was she crying because she was scared?” Jayden couldn’t help but chuckle softly. It seemed she was more frightened than he’d thought. How brave of her to venture out alone.

He kissed her cheek affectionately with a hint of amusement. “Good night.”

Soon after, a sharp pain at the back of her neck overwhelmed her, and she lost consciousness. Jayden carefully carried her back to the bed, tucked her in gently, and left the room.

His earlier actions had been a deliberate attempt to provoke Bryce into proving himself. However, Bryce was so terrified by Jayden’s antics that he fled to the basement, a place Jayden knew he shouldn’t be because of something significant stored there. Determined, Jayden knew he had to bring Bryce back from there.

The next morning, Elyse awoke feeling disoriented. After a few seconds, the events of the previous night rushed back to her. Panicked, she threw herself into Jayden’s arms and exclaimed, “Jayden, there was an unknown man in the house last night. He tried to assault me.”

Jayden, having anticipated this reaction, responded calmly, “You were beside me all night. Perhaps the commotion with Bryce led you to have a nightmare?”

Confused, Elyse questioned, “Was I asleep the whole time last night?”

“Yes,” Jayden confirmed soothingly. “I held you in my arms as you slept. I assure you, you were safe.”