

## Bound love 261

Chapter 261:

After Theo departed, Freda sank into deep contemplation in the chair. She discerned Theo's sincerity; his words weren't a jest but earnest truth. His desire to reconcile with Elyse despite her marital status resonated deeply. Yet, Freda grappled with discomfort; relinquishing Theo wasn't an option. She believed in his inherent goodness. In that moment, the phone's ring interrupted her thoughts; it was Zandra.

Apologizing profusely, Zandra lamented, "Freda, I'm sorry for Theo's actions. I failed to rein him in, and I regret the distress he's caused you. I've scolded him on your behalf and even gave him a slap to bring him to his senses. I won't condone his behavior."

Freda was taken aback. She originally believed that Theo did not wish to see her when he approached her wearing a mask. "Mrs. Ward," Freda began, "whether or not you discipline him is inconsequential now. Theo and I were incompatible."

"That's not true. Don't give up so easily," Zandra implored. "I want no one but you as my daughter-in-law."

After Theo left home, tranquility had enveloped Zandra. Contemplating Theo's potential reunion with Elyse, Zandra pondered the Owen family's response. Despite Jayden's diminished influence, he still bore the Owen name. Theo's actions would sting the Owen family's pride. Regardless of Elyse's standing within the Owen family, Theo's actions would sow discord. Though the Ward family held sway, they paled in comparison to the Owens. Zandra hesitated to jeopardize the Ward family's reputation over Elyse. Thus, the alliance between the Jimenez and Ward families must proceed unhindered.

Freda remained unaware of Zandra's deep contemplation. She merely presumed Zandra harbored genuine affection for her. Hence, she remarked, "Mrs. Ward, Theo's resolve is unshakable."

Urgently, Zandra countered, "Freda, don't lose hope. My son's endeavors will falter. Elyse assured me she'd renounce Theo and remain loyal to Jayden. Moreover, she's bound in marriage. How could she abandon Jayden for Theo?" With a note of helplessness, she continued, "My son bears the blame. His emotions cloud his judgment. He'll realize his error once Elyse rebuffs him. You're his best option."

Freda found herself swayed by Zandra's persuasion. Freda hesitated to relent too readily. And she couldn't easily forgive Theo's transgressions. "Mrs. Ward," Freda began, "Theo's actions deeply wounded me. I must mull over your words carefully. This concerns my future. I cannot rush into a decision."

"It's prudent to take your time," Zandra reassured her. "But reconsider, Freda. Theo is emotional and persistent. If his relationship with Elyse seems to be going nowhere, wouldn't it be a positive turn if he directed his feelings towards you?"

Freda found herself swayed by Zandra's words. Theo possessed striking looks and came from a respectable family lineage. Observing his interactions with Elyse, Freda gleaned that he prized emotions and accountability. Contemplating the prospect of marrying him and earning his affection, Freda envisioned a promising union. Though tempted by the prospect of a favorable match, Freda remained resolute. "I comprehend your point, Mrs. Ward. Yet Theo's sincerity will determine my stance."

Perceiving Freda's hesitation, Zandra expressed satisfaction. "Fear not. With you by his side, he'll realize your worth."

With Freda's decision unchanged, Zandra felt reassured regarding the marriage alliance. Freda resolved to ascertain Elyse's sentiments. If Elyse harbored hopes for Theo, would she succumb to his pursuit? Freda's sole recourse lay in ensuring Elyse's heart remained unmoved by Theo's affections. When Theo faced rejection from Elyse, Freda willingly offered solace and affection.

Meanwhile, Elyse wandered the bustling streets seeking solace in vain. Ignoring Jayden's incessant calls, her mind spiraled into chaos. Avoiding Jayden at all costs, she grappled with his persistent hold over her. As she reached an intersection, a car halted beside her, its occupants Jayden's loyal guards urging her homeward.

"Mrs. Owen, please come home with us. Mr. Owen is waiting for you."

"I refuse," Elyse retorted icily, poised to flee. After uttering those words, she pivoted, ready to make her escape. Jayden's directives commanded the bodyguards' actions. While they typically heeded Elyse's wishes, in conflict with Jayden, their allegiance lay with him. In no time, Elyse found herself coerced into the car.

Seated within, she gazed at the passing scenery, her resentment simmering. Upon reaching home, she encountered Jayden's wrathful stare in the study. Forced, she mustered a smile. His lingering anger puzzled her. What warranted his ire?

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Jayden twirled the pen in his hand before placing it down and leaning back in his chair. He scrutinized Elyse and asked, “How much longer do you plan to be angry with me?”

Feeling frustrated by Jayden’s attitude, Elyse replied unhappily, “Do you think it’s all my fault? Am I getting upset for no reason?”

Jayden frowned. “Haven’t I assured you that you’ll always be my only woman? I can give you everything you could ever want. Why aren’t you content?”

Instinctively, Elyse wanted to convey that what she truly desired wasn’t material possessions or what Jayden thought was best for her. But she found herself unable to say it to him. What she really wanted was Jayden’s love. What she genuinely craved wasn’t to be a superficial addition to Jayden’s life but rather a true companion with whom she could share a real connection.

Yet their marriage had been based on practicality, each fulfilling their own needs. Jayden provided protection and support, while Elyse fulfilled her role as his wife, preserving his reputation.

It became clear to Elyse that her desires might have been too ambitious. She longed for Jayden’s affection, but their relationship was founded on practicality rather than passion. In her view, Jayden had fulfilled his marital duties adequately, while her longing for affection seemed excessive.

Noticing the myriad emotions flickering across Elyse’s face, Jayden asked, “What’s on your mind?”

Elyse met his gaze with a mixture of emotions. She recognized that despite the transactional dynamic of their relationship, she had slowly become ensnared in feelings of love nurtured by Jayden’s care. “Elyse,” Jayden called her, puzzled by her silence.

After a moment of deliberation, Elyse replied, “It’s my mistake. I won’t repeat it.” With that, she swiftly turned on her heel, opened the door, and left the study.

Jayden couldn’t ignore the disappointment clearly written on Elyse’s face. Panic surged through him as he observed her crestfallen expression. Hurrying out of the study, Jayden ran into Driscoll.

Despite his hesitation, Driscoll said, “Mr. Owen, Miss Bates has expressed her desire to visit you and Mrs. Owen.”

Upon hearing this, Elyse paused, glancing at Jayden, awaiting his decision. After a moment of consideration, Jayden agreed. “Let her in,” he said. Then he turned to Elyse and said, “Stay in the living room with me.”

Elyse complied, her expression stoic as she headed into the living room.

Observing Elyse’s compliance, Driscoll initially felt relieved, thinking that Elyse and Jayden might have resolved their issues. However, her lackluster gaze made him uneasy, sensing that the tension between them had only deepened. Corrie came in promptly, holding a gift box and wearing a wide smile.

Without delay, Jayden asked her directly, “What brings you here?” Handing the gift box to Elyse, Corrie replied, “I’ve come to apologize. My incident at Ms. Lloyd’s party was embarrassing for her, so I’m here to extend my apologies.”

Elyse bit her lip, feeling a subtle accusation in Corrie’s words. Jayden nodded curtly. “Very well. You may leave now.” However, Corrie remained seated and added, “Also, I want to express my gratitude to you, Jayden. Even after our breakup, I’m touched by how you’ve continued to look out for me.”

Jayden sneered. “There’s no need for thanks. I was just concerned about the potential trouble you could cause at my wife’s birthday party if you died.”

Corrie pretended not to notice his sarcasm and smiled gently. “I understand. We shared a lot in the past, and I know you care about me.”

Driscoll’s expression changed, surprised by Corrie’s behavior. Why was Corrie acting so phony? It appeared that she was attempting to manipulate Jayden into confessing his feelings for her. Driscoll glanced at Elyse warily, concerned she might misunderstand Jayden’s intentions. He was relieved to see Elyse remain composed, silently absorbing Corrie’s words without reaction.

Jayden said indifferently, “You can leave now.” But Corrie remained seated, displaying a sense of pride. After her behavior the previous day, her family assumed she still had a connection with Jayden. Besides, she was also seeing Brook recently. Today, even her grandfather showed interest in her love life for the first time. If things continued like this, she believed she could not only gain

advantages within her family but also amass more shares and wealth. Perhaps she could even climb the ladder to a top executive position within the Bates Group. Corrie increasingly saw the Owen family as a perfect pathway to her ambitions.

Glancing at Elyse, Corrie deliberately raised her eyebrows and said to Jayden, "Please let your mother know I've got a date. There's no need for her to push the idea of us being together again." With a touch of sadness in her tone, Corrie continued, "It's obvious that we can't be together anymore."

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Corrie appeared to be persuading, but in reality, she was boasting. She was showing off her closeness with Tess in front of Elyse. Corrie intentionally directed her comments at Jayden, knowing that Elyse would understand. "I never imagined your mother would favor me so much, even hoping for us to marry," she said with exaggerated gestures. "Apparently, she publicly expressed her desire for you to divorce Ms. Lloyd and marry me. Now, everyone sees me as the ideal daughter-in-law in her eyes."

While saying this, Corrie glanced at Elyse, who remained silent. Corrie then took Elyse's hand and said, "This must hurt you deeply, right? I empathize, being a woman myself. I understand your position."

When Elyse observed Corrie's affected demeanor, a slight twitch appeared at the corners of her mouth, yet she refrained from responding.

Corrie went on, "If you feel wronged, just say so. I will make sure to set boundaries with Jayden so you won't get hurt."

Elyse found Corrie's behavior truly repulsive. But she maintained her composure, seemingly unaffected by Corrie's words. She believed that if she placed herself correctly and regained control of her love for Jayden, she would not be hurt in this relationship.

Quietly, Elyse withdrew her hand. She had a strong dislike for Corrie, and even the slightest contact would make her uncomfortable.

Jayden, placing his arm around Elyse's waist, looked down at her, observing her expression. Elyse's face remained impassive, devoid of any expression. Jayden felt puzzled. Wasn't Elyse upset by Corrie's remarks? However, he remained fiercely protective of Elyse. Furrowing his brow, he suggested, "Why don't you speak to my mom directly and ask her to refrain from talking such

bullshit? After a brief pause, he taunted, “By the way, aren’t you supposed to be dating Brook? Doesn’t my mom know about that? If you’re not careful, Brook might just leave you.”

Corrie tensed up, forcing a strained smile. She feigned ignorance, asking, “What are you talking about? Why don’t you go and tell her yourself? Brook won’t tolerate things like this. If you still want to be with him, you should stop these rumors, or he might end things with you.”

Jayden smiled mysteriously. He understood Brook well. Brook might have agreed to date Corrie partly to one-up him.

He could imagine how proud Brook would feel if he could claim his rival’s ex-girlfriend. Now, with Tess’s gossip spreading, the situation might reverse, making Brook look foolish. With his pride, Brook wouldn’t want to suffer such a blow. Plus, if Brook ends things with Corrie, she might struggle to find another suitable match.

Jayden tenderly ran his fingers through Elyse’s hair, finding it soft and silky. After a while, he continued, “I won’t intervene. Handle it yourself. Don’t expect me to come to your rescue.”

Corrie maintained her strained smile and said rigidly, “Can’t you do me this small favor?”

Jayden gave her a questioning look, silently asking, “Why should I help you?”

Undeterred, Corrie pressed on, “This could hurt Elyse. Consider it. How do you think she’ll feel when your mother says those things about her?”

Elyse, who had been quiet until then, spoke up softly, “I’m fine. I trust Jayden won’t divorce me. Even if people talk, I won’t take it personally.” After speaking, Elyse lowered her gaze, remaining silent.

Corrie was taken aback by Elyse’s resigned demeanor. Didn’t Elyse love Jayden deeply? If so, why was she so willing to endure this? Was it because she loved him so excessively that she was willing to tolerate everything? Was her love for him truly unshakeable?

It wasn’t until Jayden heard Elyse’s words that he realized she felt wronged. In their private conversation in the study, he had assured Elyse that he wouldn’t divorce her because he believed he could shield her from harm within their marriage. But what about the threats from the outside? As Jayden pondered this, he had a heavy heart.

Ultimately, he came to the realization that he needed to strengthen himself. Only by becoming powerful enough to withstand any opposition could he truly provide Elyse with peace of mind.

Corrie gazed at Elyse with a smirk before saying slowly, "Since you have such unwavering trust in Jayden, your relationship must be incredibly solid, isn't it?"

Elyse remained silent. Jayden furrowed his brow and asked, "What do you mean by that?"

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Corrie realized she had underestimated Elyse. She had assumed Elyse married Jayden for his wealth and status. Surprisingly, it turned out Elyse genuinely loved Jayden. What was so special about him? He was disabled. No one knew if he was still capable in more intimate aspects in bed. Any sensible woman would hesitate to marry him. Elyse was hopelessly foolish in Corrie's eyes. Corrie rolled her eyes covertly, her disdain for Elyse growing.

Elyse lowered her gaze, pondering how to respond politely to Corrie's question. "I won't divorce Jayden, Corrie. You might as well give up," Jayden's voice echoed suddenly, startling everyone like thunder on a clear day. Elyse was taken aback, looking at him with eyes filled with complex emotions. Jayden had never been open about his feelings, but now he was committing to a lifelong relationship. She was baffled.

Jayden looked directly at Corrie, his voice conveying protection for Elyse, firm resolve, and visible irritation towards Corrie. Corrie was insignificant to him, yet she had the guts to question his marriage. Who did she think she was?

Elyse remained silent for a few moments before lifting her head and saying, "I have never wanted to divorce Jayden either, Miss Bates. There's no need for your tests." Their firm statements nearly wiped the smirk off Corrie's face. She had met with Elyse expecting to rile her up, not to be countered so effectively by the couple. However, Corrie wasn't ready to back down.

Thinking of her gift, she was still full of hope. "Alright, I've said what I wanted to. Please excuse me. Your public displays of affection are too much," Corrie sneakily glanced at Jayden's legs and smiled at Elyse. "By the way, I didn't wish you a happy birthday earlier. A belated happy birthday to you. I hope you two find lifelong happiness."

Elyse forced a smile, "Thank you." Corrie grabbed her purse and exited the house. Watching her leave, Elyse put away her polite facade and headed upstairs. Jayden noticed her mood shift instantly. One moment she was nestling in his embrace, the next she had pulled away. Jayden's expression turned grim.

Driscoll, having observed the entire interaction, adjusted his approach and suggested, "Mrs. Owen seems upset. Why don't you try to soothe her? If this continues, it could strain your relationship."

Rubbing his temples, Jayden replied wearily, "I've tried to soothe her repeatedly. What more can I do? Should I kneel down to her?"

Driscoll stayed silent, not daring to make a sound. Jayden was under a lot of pressure lately. Debora had just returned from overseas, and the future of the Owen Group hung in the balance. He had to monitor it closely. At the same time, the person who had harmed him a year ago had been revealed. He was resolved to eliminate this threat. He had considered sharing these developments with Elyse but decided against it after some thought. If he shared his troubles, he knew it would only make another person worry about him. He was familiar with how caring Elyse could be. Whenever she found the time, she would massage his legs. When she first mentioned the massage, he had thought she was kidding and would give up in a few days. However, she still hadn't stopped it. He had to acknowledge that he had underestimated her persistence.

"Don't worry. She'll come around. Everything will be fine," Jayden said casually. Driscoll merely grunted in response, not daring to express his disagreement. He doubted that Elyse would recover her spirits so quickly.

From his own 20-year marriage, he knew all too well that ignoring his wife's feelings usually ended badly. Jayden hadn't yet learned this harsh lesson. Driscoll looked at him with compassion, hoping he wouldn't have to learn it the hard way.

Elyse returned to the bedroom, leaned back against the door, and sighed. She was unsure of what she wanted. After being in a daze for a while, she sat down on a chair. Shortly after, there was a knock at the door. Opening it, she found Driscoll there with a gift box. He explained, "This is Miss Bates' gift. You left it in the living room."

"What good could come from anything Corrie gave her?" Elyse pursed her lips. She was certain that Corrie's visit was not well-intentioned. Whatever was inside the gift box was likely part of her scheme.



Driscoll sensed her reluctance and suggested cautiously, "If you'd prefer, I can dispose of it for you."

Raising an eyebrow, Elyse took the box and replied, "It's fine. That's her way of extending a gesture. I'll accept it."

Driscoll looked puzzled but nodded and left. Elyse shut the door again and took the gift box to her dresser. Her instincts told her that Corrie wouldn't have sent anything pleasant, but curiosity got the better of her. With a resolute expression, she opened the gift box. Seeing the thing in it, Elyse scoffed.

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Elyse was stunned when she saw what Corrie had given her: a sexy, lacy lingerie set that left little to the imagination. Inside the gift box was a card that read, "Ms. Lloyd, Jayden prefers a naughty kitten in bed." Elyse, with a blank expression, ripped the card in two and tossed it back into the box alongside the underwear. She then took the gift box downstairs, handing it to Driscoll, saying, "I've inspected the gift. Could you handle it for me?"

Perplexed, Driscoll couldn't fathom how she had finished so quickly. Still in the living room, Jayden curiously asked, "What did Corrie send you?" Elyse replied with a cold sneer, "Your favorite naughty kitten."

Jayden frowned. "Who said he liked kittens? Rabbits were more his thing." Elyse let out a dismissive snort and swiftly headed back upstairs. Jayden, with an impassive face, signaled to Driscoll, "Give me the box." Driscoll obediently passed it to him.

The moment Jayden opened the gift box, his expression darkened. Driscoll closed his eyes and stayed silent, pretending he hadn't noticed. Jayden pieced the torn card together and recognized the writing. A cruel grin crossed his lips. Driscoll sighed and remarked, "Miss Bates is too reckless. Her family has had it too easy lately. They need a little struggle."

Jayden slammed the box shut, his aura chillingly cold. Driscoll knew Corrie had really overstepped this time. As Jayden's supposed ex-girlfriend, she should've stayed quiet. Instead, she tried to stir up trouble with Elyse. Elyse had already been mad at Jayden, and now this gift would only make things worse. Driscoll could see Jayden was in for a rough time. Elyse turned in early that night.

Jayden silently moved to the bed but didn't dare touch her, afraid she'd sit up and ask if he really liked naughty kittens.

Darren wasn't really into kittens, but he definitely had a soft spot for rabbits. Elyse was just as adorable as rabbits. Elyse, however, simply rolled over, seemingly unaware he was there.

The next morning, as soon as Elyse stepped into the rehearsal room, she was immediately stopped. Darren was leading the orchestra members, holding a bouquet of flowers as they gathered around her. With a smile, Darren announced, "Congratulations! You won the first leg of the tour, and it's a fantastic start."

Elyse was momentarily stunned but soon took the bouquet with joy. "We couldn't have done it without everyone's effort." After chatting with them for a bit, Elyse realized just how successful their last performance had been. Tickets for the upcoming stops had already sold out, and she was gaining popularity.

Darren then gently pulled her aside out of the room. "You've really turned things around this time," he said.

"What do you mean?" Elyse asked, a little confused.

With his smile deepening, Darren explained, "Now that you're getting popular, lots of people will buy tickets just to see you. So, you've been selected as one of the dual concertmasters."

He gave Elyse a pat on the shoulder and added, "You're right up there with Vicky now. She didn't leave you in the dust. You've caught up to her."

Elyse couldn't believe how successful she had become. It all felt like a dream. "The announcement about the dual concertmasters will be made at noon," Darren blinked at her with a grin. "I'm the director's apprentice, remember? So, I gave you a heads-up."

Elyse just stared at him, speechless.

"Are you so excited you're speechless?" he teased, amused.

Elyse was at a loss for words. "Does Vicky know about the dual concertmasters?" she finally asked.

Darren shrugged casually. "She found out yesterday, but I have no clue how she took the news. If you're worried she might stir up trouble, just be ready."

Elyse looked worried, and Darren tried to reassure her. "I get that you're concerned about Vicky, but competition is brutal. She was overconfident before the tour and didn't take care of herself in the cold rehearsal room, hardly wearing anything. She blew her own chance."

After a moment's pause, he continued, "But you grabbed this opportunity, didn't you? That's just how fate works. Her arrogance cost her the competition."

Elyse thought for a while and then nodded. "You're right. I'd have seized the opportunity too if I'd had a second chance."

#### Chapter 266:

Shortly after Elyse and Darren returned to the rehearsal room, Vicky walked in. The moment people saw her, they quieted down. They all knew that Elyse had taken the concertmaster position from Vicky, who was clearly upset. Nobody wanted to provoke her.

Vicky immediately approached Elyse, staring directly into her eyes. Elyse wasn't sure why Vicky had come, but she didn't flinch. The two locked eyes, both refusing to back down. Finally, Vicky gave a wry smile and said, "Congratulations, Elyse."

Elyse remained silent, her demeanor only fueling Vicky's anger. Vicky had endured a miserable weekend. Not only had Elyse taken the concertmaster position, but Elyse had also been showered with praise. The orchestra even wanted Elyse to be a concertmaster. But there could never be dual concertmasters, and Vicky despised the situation.

"You should work hard to hold onto your spot," Vicky said coldly.

"Don't worry, I will. No one will be able to replace me," Elyse responded, her eyes resolute and confident, which only made Vicky feel worse.

“You’ve taken my place. You are quite proud of yourself, aren’t you?” Darren had heard enough and couldn’t stay silent. He stepped forward, his face stern. “Enough. The manager will be here soon.”

Vicky shot him a glare before storming off. Unfazed, Darren walked a little further away with Elyse and whispered, “Keep your distance from her. You’ll soon be the new concertmaster. Get ready for the tour.”

Grinding her teeth, Elyse fumed. “She missed her performance because she got sick, but she blames me.”

Darren grinned. “Naturally, Vicky had to pin her failure on others. She would never admit her own mistakes.”

At that moment, the manager walked in, ignoring the tension in the rehearsal room. “I have an announcement. Today, the TV station will interview us about the upcoming national tour, and we need to pick a few people for the interview.” She then listed a few names.

After finishing, Vicky asked in disbelief, “Why am I not on the list? Aren’t I the concertmaster?”

The manager looked at Vicky, a bit embarrassed. “They want to focus on interviewing people who performed last week.”

Vicky’s expression darkened upon hearing this. It meant they were only interested in talking to Elyse. She shot Elyse a glare, scoffed, and stayed silent. The manager moved on to organize the training session. In the morning, all the members headed to the canteen for lunch. Afterward, they received a new announcement: Elyse was now recognized as one of the dual concertmasters. The word spread quickly. The members who used to shower Vicky with attention now flocked to Elyse instead. Elyse felt uneasy being surrounded by so many people, as she’d never been this popular before. Vicky, on the other hand, found herself utterly alone. The shift was glaringly obvious.

“She’s the orchestra’s new star now. Everyone’s going to try and impress her,” Rebekah crossed her arms as she approached Vicky. “Why do you keep coming to me then? Shouldn’t you go to her?” Vicky snapped, frustration evident in her voice.

With a sneer, Rebekah replied, “I don’t even want to talk to her. Don’t worry. This is only temporary. We’ve got time, and you know she’s not as good as you.”

Vicky's mood improved, knowing she still had Rebekah's support. Now, she took Rebekah more seriously. Rebekah then asked, "Doesn't this bother you? You should be the concertmaster, but she stole your spot. Now, they only want to interview her."

Of course, Vicky felt frustrated, but she didn't know what to do. Even her instructor couldn't intervene, so she just watched from the sidelines. After a moment's thought, Rebekah leaned in closer and whispered, "I've got an idea."

Vicky looked at her with suspicion, trying to gauge her intentions. Narrowing her eyes, Rebekah uttered softly, "If you agree, she'll lose the interview, and you'll take her place. No one will know you're doing it."

Vicky's expression darkened. "Take her place? Are you implying I'm not as good as her?"

Realizing her mistake, Rebekah quickly shook her head and clarified, "Last week, she replaced you. She owes you. This was supposed to be your interview, right?"

Chapter 267:

Vicky, convinced by Rebekah, firmly agreed to her plan. "Does Elyse Lloyd really think she's good enough to be concertmaster alongside me? She has overestimated herself," she remarked confidently.

"Exactly," Rebekah sneered. "How could she become the concertmaster?" She threw a sharp look at Elyse. From the start, Elyse had stood on the same level as Rebekah. But as time went on, she had left Rebekah far behind, reaching a level comparable to Vicky. To Rebekah, it was all like a horrible nightmare, and she was determined to change the situation.

In the crowd, Elyse was blissfully unaware of the looming danger. After chatting with some orchestra members, she made her way back to the rehearsal room. Three hours later, reporters from the TV station arrived, and Elyse stepped into the restroom before heading to the conference room.

When she tried to leave the stall, she found the door locked from the outside. Realizing someone had deliberately locked her in, she shouted, "Who's there? Let me out!"

Rebekah stood outside, smirking, remaining silent, wishing Elyse would be stuck in the restroom until the interview was over.

Elyse had been in the restroom for quite a while and hadn't returned. The manager grew anxious and quickly sent someone to find her. Just then, Rebekah walked in and mentioned, "I just came back from the restroom, and Elyse wasn't there."

Surprised, the manager exclaimed, "Where could she be? The reporters are already here! How will the interview continue without her?"

Vicky stood silently among the crowd, waiting for the manager to call her. Once summoned, she could step up and heroically save the situation. After checking her wristwatch, the manager made a decision. "Where's Vicky?"

A slight smile played on Vicky's lips before she quickly composed herself. Emerging from the crowd, she said, "I'm here. Take Elyse's place in the interview," the manager instructed. "Make sure to uphold Celestial Sounds Symphony's reputation."

"Got it," Vicky replied confidently. She held her head high as she left the rehearsal room.

Watching this unfold, Darren exchanged confused glances with Grace and other friends, wondering where Elyse could be and whether she didn't care about the interview.

Meanwhile, trapped in the restroom, Elyse was unaware that Vicky had taken her spot in the interview. Despite her efforts, she couldn't find a way out. After a moment, she lifted her gaze toward the only escape above the door. If she could climb out of the stall, she would be free. It was her only option right now.

Elyse tried repeatedly. She managed to step on the toilet and began to pull herself up. With her upper body emerging through the gap, she glanced down instinctively. The door loomed almost 8 feet below. Despite the fear, she took the plunge. She tumbled to the floor, her body wracked with pain.

Once the pain subsided, she staggered to her feet, wincing. Right then, Grace walked in and saw her struggling upright. "What happened?" she asked bewildered.

"I got locked in the stall," Elyse said, rubbing her ankle as the pain sharpened. She realized it had twisted.

Grace probed, "Who did it?"

"I have no idea," Elyse felt anxious about her interview and asked, "Has it started yet?"

"Yeah, it's been going for a while. We couldn't find you, so I came to look," Grace explained as she helped Elyse out of the restroom.

At the doorway, Darren noticed her limp and asked worriedly, "Should we take you to a doctor?"

Elyse shook her head. "No, I'm going to the interview," she insisted.

"Vicky's doing it for you," Grace added helplessly.

With determination on her face, Elyse insisted, "I'm going too. Even if they send me away, I'm not missing it."

Darren and Grace couldn't stop her, so they led her to the conference room.

Inside, Vicky spoke confidently, responding to the reporters' questions, while several orchestra members sat silently around her. They were used to playing background for Vicky in these situations.

Suddenly, Elyse entered the room, trying her best to conceal her injured ankle, though her awkward gait caught attention. A reporter recognized her. "You must be Elyse Lloyd, one of the concertmasters, right?"

Elyse nodded with a smile. The reporter invited her to sit next to Vicky.

Barely containing her irritation, Vicky asked with feigned concern, "Where were you? We couldn't find you when the interview started."

Elyse replied apologetically, “Sorry, my fault. I’ll take whatever punishment is necessary, but can I still join the interview?”

The reporters nodded. “Absolutely. We have plenty of questions for you.”

Chapter 268:

The reporters didn’t care about Elyse’s late arrival, leaving Vicky unable to exploit the situation. Instead, she sulked in silence. Once Elyse returned, the reporters directed all their questions to her, excluding Vicky from the conversation. But Elyse, unlike Vicky, didn’t hog the spotlight. She made sure to acknowledge other orchestra members and even mentioned those practicing in the rehearsal room. She suggested genuinely, “If you’re curious, I really recommend checking out our rehearsal. You’ll see how hard everyone’s working. Without that dedication, our first performance wouldn’t have been such a success.”

Vicky resisted the urge to roll her eyes at Elyse’s display of sincerity but held back because of the cameras. She was the only one not happy. With the reporters present, everyone felt comfortable talking openly without needing to cater to Vicky.

After the interview, they guided the reporters to the rehearsal room. At first, the rehearsing members were confused, but soon their excitement grew upon realizing the reporters were there to film them. Once the video was taken, the reporters left.

Their manager arrived shortly afterward and asked Elyse in a harsh tone, “Where were you just now? How could you vanish at such an important moment?”

“I’m really sorry. It was my fault,” Elyse admitted softly, her voice tinged with seriousness.

The manager gave her a few final words before dismissing her. With a nod, Elyse limped back. She couldn’t tell who had locked her in, but she wouldn’t let that person off easily if she found out.

Vicky had been assigned as the concertmaster for the next performance. Elyse followed the manager’s instructions, blending into the group for practice. She still had responsibilities even without being a concertmaster.

Half a month later, Elyse wrapped up her second performance as concertmaster. By now, she’d already gathered a following of fans.



After the performance, Elyse joined the team as they left the concert hall. As soon as she stepped outside, she was swarmed by a crowd of enthusiastic young fans, all eager to snap a photo with her. A few staff members stepped in, guiding her to the bus while someone joked, “Looks like we’ve got a real star concertmaster on our hands.”

Flustered by their teasing, Elyse blushed and clutched her violin case as she found an empty seat and quietly sat down. She didn’t notice the dark, bitter expression on Vicky’s face. Vicky had her share of fans and had risen to fame before Elyse; she believed she was the real star concertmaster. She was upset, but now wasn’t the time to show it.

“Hey, Elyse, you’re trending,” a girl next to Elyse said, pointing at the screen. “Everyone’s praising your performance.”

Elyse glanced over but quickly shifted her attention to another trending topic, “Mabel’s New Album.” Elyse immediately felt uneasy. How could Mabel release a new album so suddenly? Did she get someone else to write new songs for her?

She quickly pulled out her phone and plugged in her headphones. As she listened to Mabel’s songs, her face went pale. These were her songs. How did Mabel get a hold of them? It never crossed her mind that Mabel would have taken her original works and released them on her album.

As she watched the fans praising the album and Mabel, Elyse was furious. Those were her works.

In the late afternoon, instead of heading home, Elyse asked the driver to take her straight to Mabel’s agency. After identifying herself to the receptionist, she was informed, “Mabel isn’t in right now. She’s got a packed schedule lately. Can I help you with anything else?”

Elyse asked, “Is Mabel’s agent here? I’d like to speak with her.”

Though puzzled, the receptionist tried her best to relay the message. Soon enough, Mabel’s agent appeared, still on her phone. She approached Elyse in a business suit and high heels, only hanging up after a few minutes.

“Ms. Lloyd, I remember you. How can I assist?” she asked before fetching two glasses of water. One was for herself, and the other was for Elyse.

Elyse looked at the glass, her expression sullen. “Are you aware that the songs on Mabel’s latest album were composed by me?” she asked sharply.

Chapter 269:

Aylin Watts, the agent, hesitated for a moment with her hand on the glass before asking nonchalantly, “You mean you wrote the tracks on Mabel’s new album?”

“Absolutely. I wrote them. I even crafted her debut song that launched her career. Weren’t you aware of that?” Elyse responded assertively.

Aylin responded with a smile, “Oh yes, I recall now. You were the composer.” She took a sip of water, pausing before adding, “Mabel is fortunate to have such a supportive sister. Thanks to your efforts, she’s made quite an impact in the music industry.”

Elyse sensed an underlying implication. She narrowed her eyes and probed cautiously, “Aylin, what exactly are you implying?”

Quickly, Aylin clarified, “I’m simply acknowledging your contribution. Mabel is lucky to have a sister who backs her musically.”

Elyse offered a sarcastic smile, “If that’s true, why didn’t you attribute the composer’s name to me instead of altering it to Mabel?”

Aylin gently patted Elyse’s hand and said, “Don’t overthink it. We maintain Mabel’s image as an original artist in the industry, so it’s essential she appears as the songwriter.”

Elyse withdrew her hand sharply and wore a devilish grin. One look was all she needed to figure out that Aylin was trying to scam her. “So, Mabel is using my works without my permission. That sounds like theft to me.”

Caught off guard by Elyse’s assertiveness, Aylin attempted to grasp her hand again, but Elyse resisted. With an awkward laugh, Aylin suggested, “You’re family after all. Let’s not be too harsh. We can discuss this.”

Elyse nodded in agreement, “Yes, let’s discuss.”

Feeling relieved, Aylin heaved a sigh. “Exactly, you’re sisters. Why the hard stance?”

“I want the new album canceled, and she needs to apologize,” Elyse demanded firmly.

Aylin was taken aback, unprepared for Elyse’s tough stance. The album had already been released, and there was no way they could cancel it now. Moreover, canceling would mean the company’s investment in the album would be wasted.

Aylin rolled her eyes and shifted her tone, “You’re right. The mistake was indeed on our part. We should have finalized the composer’s credit before releasing the songs.”

She then subtly led the conversation to a different topic. “However, you possess a superior appearance and talent compared to Mabel. Have you ever considered pursuing a career as a star with our company? I assure you, under my guidance, you could surpass Mabel.”

A glimmer flickered in Elyse’s eyes as she queried, “Are you suggesting I sign with your company?”

Sensing Elyse’s interest in potentially joining her roster, Aylin quickly exited the meeting room. She returned shortly with a document, which she presented enthusiastically to Elyse. “Here’s the exclusive contract for an artist I’m prepared to offer you. Exceptionally favorable terms.”

Elyse skimmed the document briefly, then looked up to meet Aylin’s eager gaze. “If I sign this contract, will you assist me in reclaiming my songs?”

Aylin confidently thumped her chest, “Absolutely. I’ve always seen your potential. Remember, I reached out to you a year ago, but you declined. I’m just as serious now.”

While speaking, Aylin handed Elyse a pen and urged her to sign the contract. Aylin showered Elyse with compliments, enthusiastically asserting her bright future should she sign the contract.

Yet Elyse was well aware that Aylin was not a good person. Aylin’s urgency for Elyse to sign hinted at underlying motives, prompting Elyse to approach the contract with increased scrutiny.

Thereafter, she methodically began to read each page carefully. Noticing this, Aylin quickly remarked, “I’ve been working with Mabel for a year. Do you think I’d deceive you? Trust me, I wouldn’t scam you.”

Despite Aylin’s reassurances, Elyse remained skeptical. She meticulously turned each page until she came across a specific document buried within the lengthy contract. It explicitly stated that Elyse would relinquish her rights to three original pieces of music to Mabel, granting her unrestricted use and composer credits.

Elyse slammed the document on the table, fixing Aylin with a piercing gaze. “You wouldn’t try to scam me.”

Caught in her deceit, Aylin’s embarrassment was palpable. With no other option available, she admitted bluntly, “The songs have already been released. If you want to cancel the album, you’ll need to accept the financial losses for my company.”

Chapter 270:

Observing Aylin’s shameless demeanor, Elyse realized she had no intention of assisting her. Aylin’s priority was to facilitate Mabel’s song releases, aligning with the company’s interests. Irritated by Aylin’s demeanor, Elyse remarked, “The thief should bear the consequences. Do you expect me to shoulder the losses? Do you think I’m a stupid pushover?”

A flicker of annoyance flashed across Aylin’s expression. Unable to battle Elyse in a game of wits, she replied, “I must report this to the higher-ups. I can’t make decisions independently.”

Elyse’s anger simmered slightly at this admission. “I await your favorable response. After all, you wouldn’t want me to expose this scandal, tarnishing your company’s reputation, would you?”

Aylin managed a strained smile. “Of course not.” Without accepting the water offered by Aylin, Elyse departed.

Now that she was left alone, Aylin dialed Mabel’s number. Despite her years in the industry, it was her first time being duped by someone so young. After several attempts, Mabel finally answered, clearly agitated. “Aylin, do you realize I’m in the middle of filming? Why are you calling me repeatedly?”

With a sneer, Aylin confronted her. “Your sister confronted me at the office. When you presented the songs to me, you claimed your sister gifted them to you and allowed you to claim credit. How dare you deceive me?”

Mabel remained composed, offering reassurance and advising Aylin not to fret. Fuming, Aylin pounded the table, shouting, “How can I not be anxious? Do you comprehend the extent of damage this revelation could cause the company? Are you prepared to accept responsibility?”

Mabel remained unperturbed. “Elyse lacks evidence, Aylin. Don’t be so worried about it.”

What followed was one of pure anger from Aylin. Mabel’s smile was unsettling as she remarked, “I mean, Elyse lacks evidence to prove ownership of the compositions or that I stole them, Aylin. There’s no need to be so anxious.”

Taking a moment to collect herself, Aylin responded, “So Elyse has no leverage?”

“Yes, I can ask my parents to vouch for me. Besides, those three songs couldn’t possibly be Elyse’s creations,” Mabel hastily added. “Aylin, there’s no need to be so anxious.”

Upon Elyse’s return home, she anticipated a swift response from Mabel’s agency. However, days passed without any news. Eventually, she learned that Mabel’s popularity skyrocketed, with the album poised to receive a prestigious award.

Suppressing her frustration, Elyse dialed Aylin’s number. To her surprise, Aylin’s attitude had changed, stating that Elyse was free to take legal action if she desired.

Jayden entered the room at that moment, overhearing the conversation. When Elyse ended the call, he inquired casually, “What’s going on?”

Elyse hesitated, contemplating whether to confide in him. Noticing her inner struggle, Jayden commented, “We may be at odds, but we’re not divorced. If you’re facing difficulties, you should share them with me.”

Elyse’s resolve wavered, her emotions finally overwhelming her. Amid their recent cold war, neither had yielded an inch.

Jayden retrieved the coat from beside the bed, his tone carrying an air of warning as he spoke. “Declining my assistance when you’re in trouble will only exacerbate our issues.”

Confusion clouded her thoughts. Had she inadvertently worsened their situation?

Feeling the weight of Jayden’s stern expression, she hastened to recount the entire ordeal.

Upon hearing her explanation, Jayden pulled her into an embrace. Despite the warmth of her body against his, he suppressed his impulses, stating, “You handled it poorly.”

Perturbed, Elyse questioned, “Why do you say that?”

Jayden explained, “You turned to Mabel’s agency in hopes of resolution, but Mabel and the agency are intertwined. If there’s a conflict, they’ll protect Mabel at your expense.”

Realization dawned on Elyse. It was true that her actions had been rash. She bit her lip and asked, “Then where should I have turned?”

“You should have come to me immediately,” Jayden responded, draping his coat over her legs.

Then, much to her surprise, he slid his hand between her legs, touching a sensitive spot he had long desired during their recent estrangement.

Shaken, Elyse protested, “What are you doing? Let go of me.”