

Bound love 421

Chapter 421:

Freda knew Jayden's background all too well.

In her view, Jayden was nothing but a castaway from the Owen family, carrying their name as a mere facade of authority. With a pointed finger and aggressive tone, Freda accused Elyse, "I saw you hugging my boyfriend. Is your man not keeping you satisfied, so now you're eyeing mine?"

But with Jayden standing by her side, Elyse stood her ground fearlessly, hands on her hips. "If that's what you think, then show me some evidence that I hugged your boyfriend. Otherwise, you're just spreading lies!"

Freda was seething, ready to retaliate, but Theo intervened, holding her back.

When Freda turned to Theo, puzzled, she said, "Don't be scared. I've got your back."

But Theo's eyes held no emotion as he looked at Freda. There was no gratitude for her support. To him, she was just another face in the crowd.

"This is all a misunderstanding. Let's just call it quits and go our separate ways," Theo suggested, his tone final.

His expression conveyed a sense of injustice, but he showed no interest in digging deeper.

He seemed to have taken a heavy blow but was unwilling to investigate further, leaving everyone with the impression that he was a noble soul.

Elyse, looking at Theo in shock, couldn't believe how convincing his act was.

He played the innocent victim to perfection.

As the crowd dispersed, Elyse couldn't resist a jab, "Now you're playing the sympathy card?! You were clearly scheming against me. Why not own up to it?"

Freda couldn't stand by while Elyse took shots at Theo. She fired back, "What do you mean, scheming? Can't you get your facts straight? What about you is worth Theo's time to scheme over?"

As Freda's agitation rose, Theo stepped in to calm her down. He fixed Elyse with a serious gaze and said, "I genuinely love you. If you don't trust me, there's nothing more I can say. You just think I'm putting on an act."

Elyse scoffed. Wasn't it the truth? Hadn't Theo once again proven that he'd abandon her when the going got tough?

She could see right through Theo's facade. He lived in his little bubble, detached from reality.

But Elyse wasn't about to be fooled.

After everything she'd been through, she knew Theo's true colors all too well.

She didn't want anything to do with him. With Jayden by her side, she turned on her heel and walked away.

Theo, not getting the response he wanted, still attempted to follow, but Freda held him back.

"Please, don't go. Elyse is with Jayden now. She won't even spare you a glance. Let's just leave!" Freda pleaded, her voice filled with pain.

Freda was hurting so badly. She was present when Theo attempted to force Elyse. She was aware that Theo had meant to hurt Elyse in that situation, but Elyse's fast thinking had allowed her to get away unharmed.

Freda couldn't stand it when the person she liked was called a "harasser" by others, but she also didn't want to frame Elyse.

With the crowd dispersed, Freda didn't want Theo to get caught up with Elyse again. She pleaded, "Let go. Elyse doesn't need you anymore."

But Theo pushed her away impatiently, spitting out, "Don't think helping me once earns you any brownie points. I've told you before, I'm not into you. So stop wasting your time!"

Freda felt like she'd been slapped in the face, her disbelief written all over her features.

Theo shot her a disgusted look, brushing past her to chase after Elyse.

Left standing there, Freda couldn't make sense of it all. What had she done wrong?

If her recent actions didn't win Theo over, at least they shouldn't have made him detest her.

As the realization hit her, she began to laugh bitterly, a hollow sound echoing in the empty corridor. She laughed until tears streamed down her face, collapsing against the wall in despair.

As she touched her face, it was covered in tears.

"Why, Theo? What did I do to deserve this?"

She covered her face, in tears as she was unable to contain her emotions any longer.

The corridor's lights turned off one by one, leaving Freda alone and sobbing in the dark.

Theo caught up to Elyse as she hurried out of the concert hall.

She leaned over and gave Jayden an open kiss before he could even call her name.

His fists clenched, rage bubbling up inside him. “Elyse! Have you no shame?”

Chapter 422:

Startled, Elyse abruptly stood upright. Before she could fully understand what was happening, Theo swung his fist and knocked Jayden to the floor.

Initially, Jayden planned to dodge and tackle Theo in response. However, realizing Elyse was beside him, he decided against revealing that his legs were fine. Moreover, after receiving much sympathy from Elyse previously, he chose to continue playing the victim.

Consequently, Jayden let Theo’s fist approach before awkwardly tumbling out of his wheelchair onto the floor.

Elyse, witnessing Jayden’s fall, let out a scream, dropped the flowers she was holding, and rushed to his side.

“Jayden, are you okay? Please, tell me you’re not hurt. Don’t frighten me like this,” she pleaded, tears streaming down her face.

Theo snorted in disdain. “How dare you, pretending to be helpless, steal a kiss from my girl? You think you’re her husband, but remember, she’s only with you temporarily.”

Ignoring Theo’s bitter words, Jayden clutched at his injured spot, feigning agony. “I might be injured.”

He then added with a grimace, “It really hurts.”

Gathering her strength, Elyse wiped her tears, pulled out her phone, and quickly dialed her driver, urging him to come immediately.

After ending the call, she reassured Jayden in a trembling voice, “Don’t worry. I’ll get you to the hospital as soon as the driver arrives. You’ll be okay.”

Leaning on her shoulder, Jayden shot Theo a smug look when she wasn't watching.

Theo, noticing this, grew even more furious. "Jayden Owen, cut the act. You're perfectly fine. Stop playing the weakling."

Elyse reached her breaking point. After setting Jayden down, she stood up abruptly and slapped Theo across the face.

Her voice was sharp as she warned, "Theo Ward, this is the last time I'm telling you. Stay away from me, or don't blame me for being rude next time."

Theo was left breathless, pointing at Jayden in disbelief. "He's perfectly fine. He's just putting on a show. And you hit me because of him? Do you have any idea how much that hurts?"

Elyse faced Theo squarely, her tone unwavering. "Can't you understand human language? Get out of my face. I don't want to see you again."

Theo stood there, dumbfounded. It was in that moment he realized Elyse's feelings for him had shifted completely.

She didn't love him anymore; she despised him. It was Jayden who had turned Elyse against him.

Consumed by fury, Theo wanted to lash out at Jayden, but he restrained himself, knowing he couldn't do anything in Elyse's presence.

"Mrs. Owen, I'm here," the driver called out as he opened the door and stepped out. He spotted Jayden on the ground, looking feeble.

The sight was so alarming that the driver nearly dropped to his knees.

With a blend of emotions, he approached and asked with concern, "Mrs. Owen, is Mr. Owen alright?"

Upon seeing the driver, Elyse felt a wave of relief wash over her. She gestured towards Jayden's legs and explained, "Jayden's hurt. Help me lift him. We need to get to the hospital."

The news of Jayden's injury left the driver baffled; he couldn't see any signs of harm.

Despite his confusion, he complied with Elyse's request. After some effort, he managed to place Jayden in the wheelchair, hurried into the car, and they sped off.

Theo was left behind, overlooked. He silently observed the scene, witnessing Elyse's concern for another man. His heart ached silently, unseen by Elyse.

Chapter 423:

Elyse sat in the car, gently holding Jayden's hand, and asked worriedly, "Are you still feeling unwell?"

Jayden nodded. "Yes."

He then added, "It hurts quite a bit."

The driver glanced at Jayden in the rearview mirror with a look of skepticism.

Elyse seemed oblivious to Jayden's exaggerated discomfort. It was said that Elyse was deeply in love with Jayden, something the driver had previously doubted, but now it seemed evident.

Elyse gently caressed Jayden's cheek and reassured him, saying, "We'll be at the hospital soon. Peyton will check you out, and you'll be okay."

Jayden nodded, shut his eyes, and exaggerated his weakness even further.

At the hospital, Peyton raised an eyebrow when Elyse described Jayden's condition. "He's in a lot of pain, you say?"

Elyse nodded earnestly and urged, "Please check him quickly. He's really suffering."

Peyton touched his nose, looking confused. He glanced at Jayden, who shot him a menacing look.

Realizing the hint, Peyton took control of Jayden's wheelchair, wheeled him into his office, and began to close the door.

Elyse moved to follow them, but Peyton held up a hand and explained as she looked puzzled, "Family members usually wait outside during this type of exam."

Elyse nodded, reluctantly retreated, and sat down on a chair in the hospital corridor.

Just then, her phone rang. It was Gavin. She suddenly remembered that she had left the concert hall abruptly without informing anyone.

She answered and apologized, "I'm sorry, Gavin. I left in a hurry."

Gavin responded, "It's fine. I figured you might have left, so Irving, Fiona, and I left too. Rest up today. Tomorrow we start intensive practice. Hope you're ready."

Hearing this, Elyse turned pale. The previous days had nearly broken her, and those weren't even intensive sessions.

Elyse hung up the phone, her mind filled with dread.

Yet, her immediate concern was Jayden. She was clueless about the nature and extent of his supposed injury.

Back in Peyton's office, Peyton stood with his arms crossed, asking, "Are you actually sick? You don't seem hurt. What's all this about?"

Jayden, sitting relaxed in the wheelchair, responded, "Can't you just note something down in my medical records?"

Peyton laughed, finding the situation humorous. "What's this? Playing the wounded hero?"

Jayden shook his head, wagging a finger. "You don't get it. It's not often you get a chance like this. I'm doing it to strengthen my bond with Elyse."

Peyton laughed sarcastically, saying, "Really, buddy, you're deceiving your wife again. Don't you worry that it might come back to haunt you one day?"

Jayden gave Peyton a look as if he couldn't believe what he was hearing and retorted, "Deceiving? I call it strategizing."

"Alright, alright, you win. I'm not going to debate this with you," Peyton said as he sat down and began filling out the medical records. He casually prescribed some ointment for external injuries and handed the prescription to Jayden.

He commented, "Anyway, if someone wants to come and give my hospital some business, I'm all for it."

Jayden looked over the prescription a few times, making sure it was correctly filled out, and responded with satisfaction, "Next time I need something, I'll come to you."

Peyton had enough. "Just go already."

When Elyse saw Jayden emerging from the doctor's office, she rushed over and asked, "How are you? Is it serious?"

Jayden shook his head. "Just a surface injury. A bit of this ointment and I'll be good in a couple of days."

Relieved, Elyse let out a sigh of relief, grateful that Jayden's condition wasn't serious.

Chapter 424:

Peyton glanced at a relieved Elyse and asked curiously, “Jayden’s got thick skin. What’s got you worried about him?”

Elyse, who was browsing the medical records, looked up at Peyton’s question and replied, “He isn’t as tough as you think. He can also be quite fragile, so be kind to him.”

Jayden cocked his head, looking at Peyton with a mix of defiance and smugness.

Peyton tugged at his ear, wondering if he’d misunderstood. “Do you really think Jayden is fragile?” Peyton asked.

Elyse paused, realizing her words weren’t precise enough, and clarified, “He’s someone who gets hurt easily.”

Peyton fell silent, observing Jayden trying to suppress a chuckle, then glanced enviously at Elyse. He suddenly felt trapped watching the public display of affection.

Jayden composed himself and said sternly, “Let’s hurry and buy the ointment so we can go home early.”

“Okay.” As she put away the medical records, Elyse gave Peyton a sweet smile and said, “Thank you for your effort. You should come over to our place next time.”

Peyton pocketed one hand and waved with the other, smiling at Elyse.

He believed Jayden spent his days doing nothing of consequence, merely deceiving his wife.

Elyse and Jayden exited the hospital and climbed into the car to head home.

Elyse checked her phone and found a message from Gavin inquiring about her tune choice for the semifinal. This caught her off guard, and she chatted with Gavin, clueless about what to pick.

Beside her, Jayden felt neglected and tapped his fingers irritably on the armrest. Moments later, he leaned over and asked, "Who are you texting with?"

Elyse was engrossed in her chat and overlooked Jayden's frustration. She answered casually, "I'm figuring out the tune selection with Gavin. Once we decide, the grueling practice begins."

Not well-versed in the music industry, Jayden usually didn't involve himself in Elyse's career unless she faced problems and needed his support.

"Is choosing the right tune that important?" he asked.

Nodding, Elyse opened a video from a previous Champions Cup and scrolled through it casually, explaining, "I need to pass the semifinal to reach the final. The final determines how many can compete internationally. Everyone shows their true capability in the final to secure a spot for the international competition."

Jayden rested his chin on his hand, pondered for a moment, and then asked, "Do you have a tune that you're particularly good at?"

Elyse looked up seriously and said, "I excel at smooth tunes, but in the competitive scene, I need to perform technical pieces to score well."

The competitive arena was not like her solo concerts, where technical prowess often determined the rankings.

Yet this was her weakest area.

Thinking about this, Elyse felt a growing sense of dread. She resolved to start practicing intensely once they got home, fearing defeat in the competition.

Seeing Elyse's serious expression, Jayden underestimated the gravity of the situation. He assumed she would relax and enjoy her usual routines once back home.

Once they arrived home, Elyse asked Driscoll to call her for dinner later, then took her violin case to the small garden.

In the room, Tracy was depressed. She went down the stairs upon hearing the music and entered the living room. She asked curiously, “Elyse made it to the next round, didn’t she? Why is she practicing the violin so diligently?”

Jayden expected Elyse to dote on him, especially since she had been inseparable from him since she found out that Brook had beaten him.

Now, having been assaulted by Theo, Jayden wondered why he wasn’t receiving the same level of attention.

The more he dwelled on it, the angrier he got. By nightfall, he had lost his temper.

The bedroom light was off. As Elyse lay half-asleep in bed, a heavy weight suddenly pressed down on her.

She opened her eyes and asked groggily, “What are you doing?”

“I’m claiming what you owe me,” Jayden replied harshly.

Almost immediately, Elyse felt her nightgown being tugged. Her eyes snapped open to see Jayden’s handsome face closing in, and then he kissed her.

“Stop, stop! When did I owe you? Haven’t you been overindulging yourself lately? You’re supposed to be healing. Shouldn’t you be abstaining?”

Flustered, she quickly pushed Jayden away.

Jayden scoffed, “Abstain? All I know is I want you, and you’re going to comply.” He moved towards her aggressively once more.

Suddenly, Elyse found herself exposed. Her body pressed closely against Jayden’s, adapting uncomfortably to his.

While enduring Jayden's advances, she marveled at his energy for lovemaking, given his injury.

With this thought, she suddenly pinched Jayden's arm and demanded fiercely, "Are you really hurt...or not? Are you just pretending?"

Elyse's words were broken as Jayden realized she was getting wise to his lies. It seemed he couldn't rely on this tactic much longer.

Chapter 425:

As the sun rose, Elyse awoke, feeling a weakness in her legs. She lingered in bed for a while longer but eventually got up with reluctance.

She had risen an hour earlier than usual.

Seeing her descend the stairs, Driscoll was taken aback and asked, "Mrs. Owen, are you heading to the studio? The cook hasn't made breakfast yet."

Realizing her early start, Elyse shook her head and replied, "It's okay. I'll skip breakfast at home. Please have the driver take me to the studio."

Driscoll immediately went to prepare the car.

Upon reaching the studio, Elyse promptly began practicing after finishing the sandwiches she had purchased on the way.

When Fiona arrived on her usual schedule, she felt uneasy seeing Elyse so immersed in practice.

Approaching Elyse, Fiona offered a wry smile. "I wasn't anxious initially, but seeing your intensity sparked a crisis in me."

She then sighed, feeling overwhelmed. “You’re incredibly competitive!”

“Fiona, I’m not very skilled. If I were as skilled as you, I wouldn’t need to practice this much,” Elyse responded, managing a smile despite feeling inadequate.

Fiona playfully poked Elyse’s waist and countered, “You’re not telling the truth. I think you’re the hardest-working violinist here.”

After a brief exchange, Elyse lost herself in her practice again.

Inspired by Elyse’s dedication, Fiona took her violin outside the studio and began to practice alone.

Gavin and Irving arrived later. They were surprised to find Fiona playing in the small garden and asked, “Did you start practicing this early?”

Fiona sighed helplessly and explained, “Elyse was here before me.”

Gavin and Irving exchanged puzzled looks and entered the building.

Irving, with a frown, asked Elyse, “What time did you get here?”

Pausing her practice, Elyse checked her watch and answered uncertainly, “Around half past six.”

Shocked, Irving asked further, “Have you been practicing for hours?”

Gavin, concerned, added, “Did you manage to eat breakfast? I know the competition means a lot to you, but don’t overdo it.”

Elyse reassured them with a blink and said, “I’m fine. I ate a hearty breakfast.”

Due to exerting a lot of energy the previous night, she had eaten more than usual that morning.

Understanding her resolve, Gavin turned to Irving and said, “You focus on teaching her the techniques. I’ll discuss the essential strategies with her this afternoon.”

Irving crossed his arms, gave Elyse an evaluative look, and nodded in agreement. “Alright. I’ll take good care of teaching her.”

Elyse looked puzzled and apprehensive at the thought of Irving being her temporary instructor.

She feared that her morale would collapse if Irving taught her.

Noticing her distressed expression, Irving arched an eyebrow and asked, “What’s with that look? Don’t you want me to be your temporary instructor?”

Elyse hesitated, nodding first, and then shook her head as she asked timidly, “Why isn’t Gavin guiding me?”

While Gavin was strict, he was never overly harsh.

Irving, on the other hand, was known for his biting critiques. Elyse doubted she could endure more than an hour of Irving’s sharp comments!

With a grin, Irving retorted, “Come on, don’t be dramatic. You should be thankful to have guidance from someone like me!”

Elyse felt utterly hopeless.

Inside the chaotic private room of a bar, Freda lay on the sofa clutching her stomach and sweating profusely.

Flushed and reeking of alcohol, Alena was sprawled on a bar blanket, snoring intermittently.

Freda felt groggy from the alcohol and sleepy, but discomfort in her stomach kept her awake.

Overwhelmed by sadness the day before, she had invited Alena to the bar for a distraction. They had invited several male escorts to join them, and she had drunk excessively.

Freda turned to Alena for help, only to realize that Alena was too sound asleep to be roused.

Left with no other option, Freda reluctantly called Theo.

In her heart, she hoped desperately that Theo would answer and come to take her back to school from her miserable state.

Though her face remained expressionless, a glimmer of hope flickered within her. Perhaps Theo would take pity on her?

But as the phone continued to ring unanswered, that faint hope faded.

Theo would not answer her.

Chapter 426:

Tears streamed down Freda's face, dripping onto the sofa. She could no longer hold them back.

Staring blankly at the damp cushions, pain welled up in her heart. She had known Theo wouldn't care for her, yet she had humiliated herself by trying over and over again.

Freda felt ridiculous, like an actress in her own tragic play.

Glancing at her phone, she saw it was seven in the morning. Theo was surely awake, but he continued to shut her out.

Confronting this harsh reality, Freda set her phone aside and tried to steady herself. She wasn't much of a drinker, yet last night she had overdone it. Perhaps all she needed was to lie down and rest.

However, rest brought no relief. Soon after laying down, nausea overwhelmed her despite her stomachache subsiding.

Unable to fight the urge to throw up, Freda stumbled up, hurried out of her room, and rushed to the restroom.

Clutching the tile, she retched, expelling everything she had consumed the night before.

Exhausted, she slumped onto the floor, her gaze falling on the watch wrapped around her wrist—a limited edition worth a million dollars. The irony of vomiting in such close proximity to something so valuable made her feel even more miserable. And Theo was the reason for her misery.

How could he not reciprocate her feelings? She was the heiress of the Jimenez family after all. He had to have feelings for her, she reasoned desperately. The more she dwelled on it, the more it dawned on her how much she was diminishing herself for love, trapped in a downward spiral despite her status.

Leaning on the tile, Freda sobbed. The bar was quiet in the early morning, allowing her the freedom to cry unrestrained, without fear of mockery.

After a long while, when her tears finally subsided and a chill set in, she got up. She walked out of the restroom, her high heels clicking against the floor, steadying herself against the wall as she moved.

As Freda rinsed her mouth at the sink, she sensed someone approaching and instinctively moved aside.

Kaelyn removed her sunglasses, eyeing Freda with a sneer. "It seems you've been through quite the ordeal over a man, just like another ordinary woman caught in a hopeless love affair."

Freda's body tensed, and her expression darkened. "I think you're mistaken. You don't know me," she said, her voice laced with disgust.

Kaelyn ignored Freda's dismissal, playing with her sunglasses as she smiled slyly. "Theo Ward's quite the scoundrel, isn't he? Believes you're not up to par with his ex, yet he's hardly a catch himself."

Freda looked up, her annoyance growing. "Who are you? How do you know all this?"

Recognition dawned on Freda as she scrutinized Kaelyn. "Aren't you that actress? Weren't you just banned in showbiz? How do you know about me?"

Kaelyn shrugged nonchalantly. "That's not important. What matters is your situation with Theo. Doesn't it infuriate you? He's overlooked you and crushed your heart, yet you love him more than anyone."

She leaned in closer, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "If I were you, I'd make Theo regret everything."

Freda eyed Kaelyn warily. Her studies in psychology told her Kaelyn had an agenda. Drawing back, she said coolly, "I don't know you, and I don't care to. Please leave, or I won't be polite."

Kaelyn arched an eyebrow, pressing further. "What if I told you I could make Theo change his mind about you? Would you still dismiss me?"

Freda hesitated, torn between her desire for Theo and her better judgment. "Theo has fallen for someone else—a married person. He ignores my calls, doesn't even glance my way."

Kaelyn's look of pity deepened. "You are too tame. He's infatuated with a woman who once lost to me. I can help you win him over."

Confused and intrigued, Freda asked, "Who are you, really?"

“One of Theo’s ex-girlfriends,” Kaelyn revealed, her smile loaded with implication, seemingly unfazed by the gravity of her admission.

Chapter 427:

Freda looked at Kaelyn with wide eyes. “You’re Theo’s ex-girlfriend? Why has no one ever mentioned this?”

Kaelyn offered a smile as she clarified, “It’s quite simple. Theo and I dated back in college. After we broke up, I went into show business. You know, they like to keep these things under wraps.”

As she noticed a stray hair on Freda’s face, Kaelyn reached out to remove it and continued with a smile, “Since it was never brought up on purpose, nobody knows about my past with Theo.”

Freda was stunned by the revelation, staggering back until she leaned against the wall, murmuring in bewilderment, “How many girlfriends has Theo had? Was he ever truly sincere?”

Kaelyn’s voice softened with a touch of sympathy. “Don’t think about it too much, Theo isn’t worth your energy. He has someone amazing like you but fails to appreciate it. Instead, he’s fixated on that Elyse, who just keeps him on the hook.”

Freda latched onto the critical details and urgently grasped Kaelyn’s hand, seeking confirmation. “You mentioned keeping him on the hook? Has Elyse been keeping Theo on the hook all this time?”

Kaelyn was slightly surprised. “You weren’t aware? Elyse is quite the seductress. She knows exactly how to keep a man hooked.”

Pretending to contemplate, Kaelyn added, “You’re familiar with Jayden Owen, right? He’s disabled. Ever wonder why Elyse chose to marry him?”

Freda appeared distressed. She couldn’t grasp why Elyse would choose to marry Jayden. No sensible woman would willingly marry a man with disabilities.

Kaelyn clarified, "She did it to make Theo feel guilty. Her marriage to Jayden was a ploy to stir up Theo's remorse."

Kaelyn's face hardened as she scoffed, "She pretends it's all about love to maintain her good image, but I see through it. She's playing both of them."

Freda was speechless. She had always believed that Theo was the one relentlessly pursuing Elyse, unaware of the deeper motives at play!

Freda's mind was in a fog, still feeling the aftereffects of her hangover. She muttered, "I'm a bit tired. Let's pick this up another time."

Kaelyn pulled a business card from her purse. "Since you don't have your phone on you, here's my card. Contact me when you clear your head."

Freda accepted the card, looking uncertain. "But why are you sharing all this with me?"

Kaelyn acted shocked. "Don't you want to expose Elyse's true intentions and show Theo who she really is? If he continues to be captivated by her, it will destroy him. Can you just watch that happen?"

Freda was at a loss for words. She eventually did not refuse the business card and slipped it into her pocket.

As Freda walked away, Kaelyn folded her arms and leaned back against the wall, her smile turning into something sinister and menacing.

"Elyse, my greatest regret is not killing you back then. You keep taking what should be mine."

Kaelyn's eyes seethed with bitterness and hatred.

Elyse had caused her detention, and she was determined not to let that stand.

Freda returned to the private room and settled onto the sofa. As she drifted off, she mulled over Kaelyn's words. She hadn't realized Elyse was that manipulative.

She resolved to expose Elyse for what she was and protect Theo from her lies.

As she dwelt on this, a smile crept onto her face. Indeed, she was the one who could save Theo. No one else could—only she could.

Chapter 428:

Theo was having breakfast in his office and catching up on messages he hadn't answered from the night before.

As he was doing this, a call from Freda came through, prompting a flicker of disgust across his face. Rather than hanging up, he let the phone ring until it stopped on its own.

Zandra had been eager to forge a union with the Jimenez family through her son's marriage, seeking their resources and connections. Thus, Theo couldn't sever ties with Freda entirely.

After responding to his messages, he switched to a news app and spotted the top story about the advanced contestants at yesterday's Champions Cup selection competition.

A photo of Elyse accompanied the article, and upon seeing it, his eyes brightened. He quickly saved the photo to his favorites.

Just then, the door to his office swung open, and Zandra entered, her high heels clicking on the floor. She gave her son a complex look.

Since their last argument, they had made an effort to avoid each other, barely speaking even over the phone.

She hadn't seen Theo in a long time and missed him.

Concerned about his recent date with Freda, she had come to check on him.

Containing her emotions, she tapped her fingertips on the table and asked stiffly, "How was your date with Freda yesterday?"

Theo replied calmly, "I did all I could do. Whether she's satisfied, I couldn't say. Nor do I care."

Hearing his indifferent response, Zandra sighed. "I think Freda really likes you. Why don't you consider her? After all, sincere love is valuable."

Theo's reply was cold. "That's true for me too. Elyse is my only love, and I don't want anyone else."

Seeing Theo's stubbornness, Zandra decided not to push any further. It would only irritate him.

She knew well that Elyse had no interest in Theo. Her heart belonged to Jayden.

As long as Elyse's feelings remained unchanged, that was all that mattered.

"All right, but for the sake of the resources from the Jimenez family, you'd better treat Freda well and take her out more often to keep her happy. Only then can our cooperation continue smoothly," Zandra advised.

Theo frowned and replied, "I know. I don't need you to remind me. I'll do what's necessary."

Zandra observed his cold yet handsome face, noting how much he resembled his father.

A mix of emotions flickered in her eyes as she asked softly, "Have you been in touch with your dad recently?"

Theo's demeanor softened considerably. As long as the conversation steered clear of Freda, he was more open to dialogue. "Dad is doing well. He's in the forest, found some

rare plants, and stayed to observe them. The signal there is poor, so he gets news quite slowly.”

Zandra leaned against the table, arms crossed, imagining her husband engrossed in his botanical studies.

She finally sighed, nodded, and said, “Okay, I see. As long as he is safe.” Then, she turned and left Theo’s office.

Theo was surprised she didn’t push further for him to give up Elyse and pursue Freda.

Unexpectedly, his mother seemed to have changed, opting not to nag as she usually did. Theo’s mood lifted.

At the Blue Sea Music Studio, Fiona was lounging on the sofa, enjoying a hot dog she had made herself.

She had been practicing for several hours straight and couldn’t endure the high-intensity practicing any longer. Yet, Elyse continued without pause.

Worried, Fiona urged her, “Elyse, stop practicing. Come and eat something.”

Playing the violin required physical stamina, so Fiona made sure to cook something nutritious every day to supplement her diet.

Elyse, however, didn’t respond. She was lost in her music, completely absorbed.

Gavin, noticing this, smiled and said, “Forget it. Elyse is in the zone right now. She got scolded by Irving this morning, and I doubt she’ll stop anytime soon.”

Fiona glanced over at Irving, who was devouring a hot dog.

Feeling their gazes, Irving chuckled. “Why are you looking at me? I wasn’t wrong to scold her. It was her mistake. As her senior, I have a responsibility.”

Fiona frowned and said, "I saw tears in her eyes."

Gavin added, "She was sniffing."

"So what? I did it for her own good. She didn't complain and kept practicing, didn't she?" Irving replied indifferently.

Chapter 429:

Elyse could hear them talking, but she didn't really listen. Instead, she concentrated on honing her skills. She felt genuinely thankful to Irving for his guidance. Although Irving's comments were often blunt, they pointed directly to her oversights and weaknesses. His critiques served as a wake-up call, and realizing her flaws actually felt liberating.

She practiced relentlessly, seemingly tireless in her efforts.

As Fiona ate her hot dog, she watched Elyse, then glanced over at Gavin and Irving. Having worked at Blue Sea Music Studio a year longer than Elyse, Fiona knew how tough Gavin and Irving could be. Yet they had taken a keen interest in Elyse shortly after her arrival. Irving, usually proud and reluctant to teach, had notably softened, offering Elyse guidance he had never extended to Fiona.

Fiona's hands clenched into fists repeatedly, a wave of displeasure and frustration washing over her. Suddenly, the melodious sounds morphed into a jarring noise.

Gavin, Irving, and Fiona turned to Elyse in disbelief. Confused, Elyse looked down at the bow in her hand to see that all the hair had snapped. Her mind went blank for a moment, then she remembered Cody's words: a bow stripped of its hair meant she had truly given her all.

Seeing Elyse lost in thought while gazing at the bow, Gavin spoke with a hint of exasperation. "Why don't you come over here, take a break, and eat something?"

Elyse nodded in agreement.

As she settled down, Fiona stood and took up her violin, playing a somber tune. Irving, watching her intently, noticed her sour expression and narrowed his eyes in concern.

Meanwhile, Elyse was oblivious to the tension. Lounging on the couch, her eyes caught the spread of tempting dishes on the table, igniting her hunger. She momentarily set aside her violin and began to eat eagerly.

Irving, frowning, asked, "Can't you eat a bit more elegantly?"

Elyse shook her head as she continued to eat hastily. Despite her hunger and desire to savor her meal slowly, she felt pressed for time, needing to get back to her practice. Before she could explain, Gavin's stern voice cut through the air. "Fiona, pay attention to your technique. You've slipped up."

His sharp tone startled Elyse.

Fiona, visibly shaken, reacted sharply. Gavin, arms crossed, admonished her further, "You mustn't lose focus during practice. Commit to it fully."

Fiona remained silent, her jaw clenched as she resumed playing.

Elyse dismissed the incident as a minor disruption and, after a brief pause to refuel, returned to her own practice. Their session stretched on until ten o'clock.

Fiona couldn't hold back any longer; she hastily gathered her belongings, maintaining a stoic expression. Before exiting, her gaze lingered on Elyse, who was still deep in practice. Fiona couldn't grasp why Elyse exerted herself so intensely. Both were Cody's apprentices and among the best at the studio. Surely, there was no cause for fear about the semifinal.

Witnessing Elyse's unwavering focus, Fiona felt a sense of obligation to stay longer, especially with Irving and Gavin observing from the sidelines. Yet, after a grueling day of practice, her enthusiasm to continue had waned.

As Fiona was about to leave, Gavin checked his watch and announced in a composed voice, "It's after ten. We should wrap up for the night."

“Just a moment more. I’d like to practice a bit longer,” Elyse interjected, her forehead creased in determination, her eyes filled with resolve, and a serious demeanor marking her face. Seeing her earnestness, Gavin refrained from further persuasion and shared a glance with Irving. Together, they stood by, watching her continue with full attention.

Meanwhile, Fiona finished packing and stole a final look back, only to see that none were paying her any heed. Feeling a pang of neglect, she bit her lip and silently departed.

Once outside, Fiona’s pace slowed as she spotted a tall silhouette under a nearby street lamp. It was a man in black, casually smoking. It was him! The man from that night!

Overcome with excitement, Fiona quickened her pace toward him.

Observing her approach, Jayden took a final drag from his cigarette, tossed it aside, and crushed it underfoot. He then readjusted his mask, his eyes meeting Fiona’s with an unreadable expression.

Chapter 430:

Fiona never thought she’d see the man who had saved her again. The area teemed with countless workers, and the thought of locating one in particular seemed like finding a needle in a haystack. She had nearly resigned herself to never crossing paths with him again, yet unexpectedly, their paths intertwined once more.

Overjoyed, Fiona inquired, “What are you doing here? Are you out for a stroll?”

Jayden’s brow creased slightly, puzzled by her barrage of questions.

Fiona, undeterred and beaming, pulled out her phone. “I owe you thanks for helping me that night. Could I get your number? Maybe we can meet up again under less dramatic circumstances.”

She gave him a playful wink, confident he wouldn’t decline her direct approach this time.

However, Jayden was not in the mood for conversation; he was there waiting for someone else—Elyse. From his spot, he could faintly hear the music from the studio, knowing Elyse was still diligently practicing inside. He glanced at Fiona, who anticipated his response with an eager expression, and felt a twinge of annoyance.

Ignoring her hopeful gaze, Jayden turned to leave.

Stunned by his apparent indifference, Fiona called after him, “All I want is to thank you, perhaps over a meal?”

Jayden walked on, refusing to even look at her.

Fiona was so focused on him that she accidentally stumbled to the floor. She half-expected him to come to her aid, but Jayden didn’t so much as glance back as he walked away. Picking herself up, Fiona stood slowly, her frustration simmering within her. “How cold of him. He didn’t even want to speak to me.”

Disheartened, Fiona trudged home without the phone number she had hoped to secure.

An hour later, Elyse burst from the studio to find Jayden’s car waiting. As she climbed in, Jayden expressed his frustration. “Why are you out so late?”

Catching her breath, Elyse explained, “I was so engrossed in practice, I lost track of time.”

She then wrapped her arm around his and rested her head against his shoulder. Jayden tried to withdraw his arm, but a stern look from Elyse made him relent, and she clung to him even tighter.

Impatient, he remarked, “Your head is heavy.”

With her eyes closed, Elyse spoke with determination. “Stop it. I’m tired. Let me rest against you for a bit.”

Jayden responded with a hint of annoyance, “Three minutes, that’s all.”

“Fine, fine,” Elyse agreed in a relaxed tone.

Three minutes passed, and Jayden tried to pull his arm away, only to discover that Elyse had fallen asleep, cradling his arm. She appeared genuinely exhausted, sleeping so deeply that even when he playfully pinched her nose, she didn’t stir.

Upon arriving home, Jayden had no option but to carry her to the bedroom. Following behind, Driscoll expressed his concern. “Does she really need to push herself this hard every day?”

“I’m not sure. Just go along with it,” Jayden replied, half-talking as he watched her peaceful face. “Who knows? Maybe we’ll have an international musician in the family soon.”

Driscoll couldn’t help but be taken aback by Jayden’s rare smile. Jayden lingered by her side for a moment, observing her. Even in her sleep, she was restless. Not a moment later, she kicked off her covers. Jayden’s smile faded as he gently pulled the cover back over her.

Elyse didn’t awaken until the break of dawn. With thoughts of practice on her mind, she headed to the studio early. This morning, Gavin and Irving were also there early, ready to coach her.

When Fiona arrived, the two had already been practicing for two hours. Noticing Fiona’s relaxed demeanor, Gavin asked pointedly, “Why aren’t you worried? Are you confident about the competition?”

Fiona felt unjustly criticized, which made her resent seeing Elyse there. Even so, Elyse remained oblivious to Fiona’s growing discontent. By five-thirty, she was packing her things to leave.

Shocked by this, Fiona asked, “Why are you leaving so early today?”

“The competition is tomorrow. I need to get some rest,” Elyse explained as she continued packing. Once ready, she smiled and said to Fiona, “I’m heading out now.” Jayden was coming to pick her up, and she didn’t want to keep him waiting.

After Elyse departed, Gavin approached Fiona and inquired, “When are you planning to leave today?”