

Bound love 461

Chapter 461:

Pearce had left, yet the turmoil he stirred remained. Elyse avoided Jayden's gaze, insisting, "Pearce isn't who you think. There's surely a reason behind his actions."

Seated in the wheelchair, Jayden gripped the armrests tightly, his knuckles whitening.

An expressionless chuckle escaped him, sending a shiver through Elyse.

She could sense his anger and reached out to grasp his hand, her voice trembling, "Please, let's not fight. You're in your wheelchair, and you might get hurt if the two of you fight."

"Were you worried I'd lose?" Jayden asked, his lips tightening.

Elyse, unsettled by his cold tone, was at a loss for words.

Observing her slight tremble, Jayden softened slightly. "Are you scared of me?"

Elyse shook her head, unable to articulate her mixed emotions or how things had escalated to this point.

Despite his care for her, Jayden felt her fear as ingratitude. Frustrated, he entered another elevator that had just arrived.

Elyse hurried after him but was left behind as the doors shut, his expression unreadable and cold.

"Baby, your dad now despises me," Elyse murmured to herself, collapsing to the floor in despair.

In the hospital ward, Peyton overheard her sobbing. He hobbled to the ward's entrance on his crutch and found Elyse distraught.

"Elyse, why are you still here? Didn't you go with Jayden?"

Elyse shook her head, burying her face in her hands, tears streaming down her face.

"And where's Jayden? Why would he leave you like this after an argument? That's insane!" Peyton leaned against the wall, urgently dialing Jayden's number.

Meanwhile, Jayden, filled with remorse, paused in the hospital's main hall. Torn between returning and leaving, he was uncertain of his next move.

Soon after, he received a call from Peyton. He hesitated to answer, reflecting a deep frown. Clearly, he thought Elyse should have come to apologize first.

Jayden ignored the call initially.

Only after Peyton rang again did he pick up reluctantly.

Peyton's voice boomed through the phone before Jayden could even speak. "Your wife is here crying. What kind of man leaves his wife like this? Don't you care about her anymore? Come get her, or we're done as friends."

After Peyton hung up, Jayden paused to collect his thoughts, then headed towards the elevator.

Upon exiting the elevator, Jayden found Elyse crying on the floor. He let out a heavy sigh.

"Jayden, are you seriously leaving your wife alone like this?" Peyton was furious, his anger palpable. Was Jayden out of his mind? Why must he upset his wife who loved him deeply?

Peyton yelled, "Apologize to her and take her home. Otherwise, make sure you regret it by introducing her to all my male friends!"

Jayden stepped from the elevator, glaring at Peyton for his excessive words.

He then turned to Elyse, his tone cold, "Why are you crying? Didn't you stand by your actions? You defended that guy."

Elyse, tears flowing, replied shakily, "You got me wrong, I didn't defend Pearce. I just thought maybe there was a misunderstanding, so I let him go."

Looking up with tear-filled eyes, she pleaded, "So, you hate me now? Don't you want to be with me anymore?"

Jayden's expression softened slightly. "What? No, I never thought that. You're just being too emotional, and it's not helping."

As they spoke, Elyse felt an increasing distance growing between them, her tears unabated.

Chapter 462:

"Well, get up and let's go home." Jayden pulled Elyse to her feet but maintained a distance between them.

Elyse sensed a subtle shift in their dynamic, which deepened her pain.

After they stepped into the elevator, Peyton grinned as he slowly made his way back to the ward.

"I am truly their savior and protector! Without me, they would have already broken up." Reclining in his hospital bed, Peyton grabbed his phone and started boasting to his friends about his role in their relationship.

Once outside the hospital, Elyse attempted to reconcile with Jayden, but he was visibly upset. Throughout the drive home, he remained silent, ignoring her attempts at making amends.

Confused and hurt, Elyse watched as Jayden exited the car upon their arrival and headed straight for the study.

Standing outside the locked door, Elyse felt utterly lost.

Driscoll noticed the tension immediately and approached with concern, "Are you alright? Was there a disagreement?"

Elyse managed a sad smile after a pause. "He despises me now and doesn't want to be with me anymore."

Driscoll, taken aback, replied, "Why so negative? Nothing is beyond resolution. He is simply upset and maybe he's in the study catching up on work. Don't overthink it."

"I've angered him and he won't forgive me. He's going to leave me," Elyse said, shaking her head in despair.

Driscoll struggled to understand her bleak outlook, knowing how much Jayden cared for her. Despite his anger, Driscoll couldn't imagine Jayden truly ignoring her.

Yet Elyse felt otherwise, convinced he no longer cared for her.

Driscoll tried to reassure her, "Please don't overthink and jump to conclusions. You can't think straight right now."

Elyse thought Driscoll's words made sense; maybe she was just overthinking. Things might not be as dire as she feared.

However, she couldn't shake off her feelings of doom. Could her pregnancy be influencing her thoughts?

Subconsciously cradling her stomach, Elyse decided to return to her room and rest, as Driscoll had suggested.

Perhaps because she was truly exhausted, Elyse fell asleep the moment she lay down.

Downstairs, Driscoll carried a cup of coffee into the study.

Jayden was seated at his desk, scrutinizing a document, his expression icy. It was clear he was in a foul mood.

After a moment's hesitation, Driscoll placed the coffee on the desk and ventured, "Sir, Mrs. Owen is quite distressed. Perhaps you should check on her?"

Jayden scoffed and replied sharply, "Why should I bother? She doesn't need me. I've indulged her too much as it is."

Driscoll gave an awkward smile, recognizing the depth of Jayden's anger—otherwise, he would have sought Elyse out already.

"But this situation seems different. She firmly believes you don't want her anymore," Driscoll pressed.

Jayden's frustration flared. "She thinks I don't want her just because I haven't spoken to her?" He slammed his hand on the desk. "She's overthinking things again. If I wanted to leave her, I would have filed for divorce a long time ago."

Jayden declared, his voice rising in irritation, "Leave her be. She's creating problems where there are none."

Driscoll opened his mouth to respond but then thought better of it.

Realizing Jayden's temper had reached a peak, Driscoll decided to drop the matter. He would try persuading him again after he had calmed down.

Sighing internally at the recurring disputes between the couple, Driscoll exited the study.

After he left, Jayden's agitation grew. He tossed his pen down and found himself unable to focus on the documents anymore.

Jayden felt this time he had to set things straight with Elyse. She had been embraced by another man and seemed unaffected by his presence.

It was clear she didn't take his feelings seriously, showing little regard for him.

He saw her as his alone, and the idea of any other man close to her was unacceptable.

"I'll make sure she remembers who her husband is!" he muttered to himself, leaning back in his leather chair with a look of dark possessiveness in his eyes.

Chapter 463:

When Elyse awoke that morning, exhaustion weighed heavily upon her. She glanced around, noticing the neatness of the other side of the bed. Jayden hadn't returned the previous night.

Her heart filled with a wave of bitterness as she gently touched her belly and murmured in sorrow, "Sweetie, your dad is really upset with me. Do you think I'll actually be kicked out?"

Her baby, still too undeveloped to understand, offered no reply.

Elyse remained seated for a few moments to ease her tiredness before she slowly made her way downstairs.

Upon seeing her, Driscoll greeted her with concern, "Good morning. Are you feeling better today?"

Managing a smile, Elyse replied, "Yes, much better, thank you. Where's Jayden?"

With a hint of embarrassment, Driscoll answered, “He left for work early this morning.”

Elyse hesitated, then asked, “So, he’s still upset with me and hasn’t forgiven me, right?”

Driscoll found himself at a loss for words. Jayden’s demeanor when he left didn’t appear angry, but he hadn’t spoken to Elyse since last night.

From Driscoll’s hesitation, Elyse concluded that forgiveness was still far off.

She had been too afraid to confess her pregnancy to Jayden following his outburst, fearing his reaction might be to suggest ending it. She couldn’t bear the thought of losing her child.

With her thoughts in disarray, Elyse was unsure of her next steps.

Seeing her distress, Driscoll offered words of comfort, “Please don’t lose heart. I know Mr. Owen well. He may appear stern when angry, but he’s truly compassionate at heart. He’s bound to forgive you soon.”

A smile lit up Elyse’s face as she looked toward the study and responded, “I’m confident he will forgive me.”

Driscoll nodded in agreement. “Why don’t you have some breakfast? The kitchen has made cherry jam from the freshly picked cherries, which are quite tart this season and better suited for jam.”

Surprised, Elyse inquired, “When did the cherries arrive?”

Driscoll explained, “Mr. Owen had us order some for you. Finding fresh ones was a challenge, so they didn’t arrive until nearly 9 PM last night. The chef even remarked on how sour they were.”

Curiosity piqued, Elyse asked, “Is there any fresh cherry left? I’d like to try.”

“There are some left, but they’re quite tart,” Driscoll cautioned.

Elyse shook her head dismissively. “That’s fine, I’d still like to taste them.”

Driscoll nodded and quickly had a servant bring some cherries to the dining room.

A plate of fresh cherries, glistening red against the white plate, was placed before Elyse, sparking her appetite. She picked one up and took a bite.

Driscoll watched, expecting her to spit it out, but to his surprise, she kept eating. He asked, “Aren’t they too tart for you?”

Caught off guard, Elyse paused for a moment before responding, “Oh, yes, they are quite tart, but I can handle it.”

She quickly finished the plate of cherries, licking her lips and seemingly eager for more, her earlier irritation forgotten.

Driscoll stared in astonishment. “If you’d like more, I can have another plate brought to you.”

“That would be wonderful,” Elyse replied with a nod. “I’d love more. They are delicious.”

Driscoll himself went to the kitchen to fetch more cherries. He wondered if perhaps the cherries were actually sweet and the chef had mistakenly tasted a sour one.

Curious, he picked one up and bit into it. Grimacing, he exclaimed, “Jesus! This cherry is incredibly sour.”

Yet, Elyse seemed to love them and didn’t find them too sour at all. Driscoll couldn’t help but think how peculiar her taste was.

Chapter 464:

Corrie had been visiting several hospitals over the past few days. She knew Enzo went for regular checkups monthly, but she didn't know which hospital he used, so she had been searching everywhere. She was also aware that Jayden had someone watching her, making it crucial to keep her activities secret.

One day, her persistence paid off. She spotted Enzo entering a hospital for his checkup.

"Mr. Owen, I'm Corrie Bates. I need to speak with you. Can you spare a few minutes?" She hurried over in her high heels, her voice pleading.

Enzo looked at her, momentarily puzzled, but then he remembered who she was.

His butler stepped forward protectively, glaring at Corrie. "Who do you think you are? Get out and leave us alone."

Corrie, glancing around anxiously to ensure Jayden's men weren't watching, begged, "Mr. Owen, please. I just need a few minutes. It's about Jayden. I'll leave right after."

Jayden's name caught Enzo's interest, and a shadow passed over his eyes. He raised his hand to stop his butler. "Alright. Where do you want to talk?"

Corrie pointed to a nearby doctor's office. "Let's talk in there." She looked at him with anticipation.

Enzo nodded. Pressing on his walking stick, he headed into the office, his butler close behind.

Corrie, ensuring she wasn't seen, quickly followed and shut the door behind them.

The office was empty. Enzo found a seat and asked in an aged voice, "What do you want to tell me?"

Corrie took a deep breath to steady herself. "It's about Jayden. You've all been deceived by him. He's lied to everyone."

Enzo thought about Jayden but couldn't recall anything suspicious. "What has he lied about?"

"He is not actually crippled. He's been pretending," Corrie said excitedly.

She pounded the desk for emphasis. "I found out his secret by accident. Fearing I'd expose it, he had someone watch my parents. If I dare to reveal it, they'll be killed. Mr. Owen, please help me," she pleaded. "I've always been loyal. Please, help me."

"Loyal?" Enzo didn't ask more about Jayden's secret. Instead, he repeated the word as if he had heard something ridiculous. "Who are you loyal to?" he asked.

Corrie was taken aback. Awkwardly, she answered, "I'm loyal to the Owen family. My family relies on yours for survival. Besides, I'll marry Brook. I will always be loyal to the Owen family."

Enzo nodded, seemingly satisfied with her answer. "I guarantee your parents' safety."

Corrie breathed a sigh of relief and asked curiously, "Mr. Owen, what do you plan to do about Jayden? He's hurt everyone with his deception."

Enzo stood up, adding, "You don't need to concern yourself with that. By the way, you are Brook's girl, right? Finally, he's done something right."

Corrie was delighted by his remarks. She finally felt free from Jayden's threat and had found a powerful ally. She believed her parents would be overjoyed with the news.

Enzo left the hospital and settled into his car. His butler immediately closed the door and said, "Mr. Owen, Jayden is outrageous. How bold of him to pretend to be a cripple! He has deceived us for more than a year."

Closing his eyes, Enzo exhaled. "I don't understand why he did it. However, he has broken many of our family's rules."

The butler gritted his teeth. "He has always been unruly. You wanted to make him the sole heir, but he even rejected your offer."

Enzo responded calmly, "He's indeed unruly, but he's the most talented and brilliant."

The butler couldn't argue. It was true.

"What a pity! I had hoped he would change his mind. However, he has disappointed me again." Enzo slowly opened his eyes, a murderous look in them. "I will not show mercy this time."

Chapter 465:

At noon, Pearce arrived at Blue Sea Muse Studio. Irving was outside smoking when he noticed Pearce approaching. Raising an eyebrow, Irving blocked his path, asking, "Who are you? What do you want here?"

Pearce, not recognizing Irving, asked politely, "Is Elyse Lloyd here? I'm a friend and would like to see her."

"Now?" Irving questioned, frowning with a cigarette between his lips. "She went to get some snacks but should be back soon. Try the intersection over there. You might catch her."

Pearce followed Irving's direction, thanking him before setting off.

He searched but didn't find her. Then he heard someone retching nearby.

Following the sound, he found Elyse by a trash can, vomiting.

Slowly approaching, he heard her muttering, "Why did Fiona wear that awful perfume today? I really can't stand it."

"Elyse? What's wrong? Did you eat something bad?" Pearce asked, concerned.

Startled, Elyse looked up and immediately remembered the previous day's events.

"Why are you here?" she demanded. Wary of a repeat of yesterday, Elyse stepped back. She didn't want another hug with Pearce.

Despite his excitement at seeing her, Pearce restrained himself, not wanting to scare her.

"Just stay there. Don't come any closer," she said, stepping back further.

Pearce, feeling hurt, replied, "Why don't you want me near you? I don't intend to harm you."

"What do you want? I need to get back to my violin practice," Elyse said.

Trying to stay calm, Pearce said, "Okay, just take it easy. I have something to show you."

He pulled a document from his pocket and handed it to her.

Elyse read the paternity test results carefully. Looking up, in confusion, she asked, "What does this mean? Is this true?"

Pearce nodded firmly and took a step closer, explaining, "When I first saw you, I had doubts about your identity. You mentioned having parents, so I didn't question further. It wasn't until you revealed they weren't your biological parents that I started to think you might be the person I was searching for."

Seeing the confusion on Elyse's face, Pearce continued excitedly, "I couldn't find any direct link to your biological parents, so I had to prove it another way. Do you remember when I plucked a hair out of your head?"

Elyse nodded, recalling the incident and resenting him for it.

“You are my cousin!” Pearce exclaimed. “I’ve been looking for you. You’re part of my family!”

Elyse stood motionless, unable to process the shock.

Pearce’s eyes turned red as he pressed on, “Your father is my uncle. He ran away from home and we lost contact with him. You are his only child, the daughter of my uncle Rickey!”

After a long silence, Elyse finally asked, “Rickey? Is he Rickey Owen?”

Pearce asked, “How do you know his middle name? Actually, his full name is Ricky Owen Benson. The Benson family is prominent in Cambape. You are a part of us.”

Elyse was speechless. She had always seen Pearce as a friend, but now he was claiming to be her cousin, and she suddenly had numerous relatives. It was overwhelming.

Understanding her shock, Pearce gave her a moment to absorb the news.

Then he remembered something crucial and approached her again. “You need to come back with me to meet your family members,” he urged.

Elyse instinctively pulled away, saying in a daze, “I can’t go with you.”

Pearce was baffled. “Why? The Lloyds are awful. Do you still miss them?”

“It’s not about them,” Elyse replied, her voice soft but resolute. She wanted to stay because of her unborn baby.

Chapter 466:

Pearce was confused. “Come back with me. You are part of my family. We can’t leave you out here alone.” He grabbed Elyse’s hand again, trying to lead her away.

Elyse resisted, struggling against his grip. “Pearce! No. I can’t go back with you!”

“Why? Don’t you want to see your real family members?” Pearce asked, bewildered.

“Because... I’m pregnant. Jayden is the father,” Elyse admitted through gritted teeth.

Pearce was stunned, taking a moment to process the news. “Right. You’re married. Your husband is that lunatic I saw yesterday,” he finally said, accepting the facts. “That lunatic made you pregnant?”

Elyse, feeling helpless, retorted, “Why are you so harsh? Jayden is not a lunatic.”

Pearce rubbed his forehead in frustration. “Are you blind? If Jayden isn’t crazy, then what is a crazy guy like?”

“Pearce, I’ll get angry if you speak ill of him again!” Elyse warned, looking at him unhappily.

“Alright, alright. I won’t mention him anymore. I’m just frustrated. I put in so much effort to find you, and all you care about is that man,” Pearce grumbled, clearly in a bad mood.

After a pause, he glanced at Elyse’s belly. “Have you told Jayden that you’re pregnant?”

After hesitating for a long moment, she shook her head.

“Doesn’t he care about your pregnancy?” Pearce’s fury was evident.

In a low voice, Elyse replied, “He told me he didn’t like kids, so I didn’t dare tell him. I’m afraid he might ask me to have an abortion, and I don’t want to.” She began to cry as she spoke.

Pearce felt a deep sympathy for her. He tried to comfort her. “Why are you crying so sadly? I didn’t say anything to upset you. If you cry like this, I feel like a terrible cousin.”

Elyse shook her head. "I don't know. My mood has been all over the place these past few days. I can't stop myself from crying."

Pearce sighed, "You really are pregnant. Emotions run high when you're expecting due to the pregnancy hormones." He then asked, "When do you plan to tell your husband? He deserves to know about his baby and take responsibility, right?"

Elyse sobbed. "I haven't decided yet. He was angry with me yesterday. I want to wait until he calms down."

Pearce was taken aback. "Why was he angry with you?"

Looking embarrassed, she said, "Because you hugged me."

Pearce's anger flared, and the veins in his forehead bulged. "I'm your cousin. Can't I hug you? If Jayden's jealous of that, he's incredibly narrow-minded. Divorce him, I'll find you a better man."

Elyse protested, "I don't want a divorce."

Pearce looked at her and sighed helplessly. "It's my fault for finding you so late. If I'd found you earlier, you wouldn't have fallen for Jayden. It's all my fault."

Elyse felt ashamed as she wiped away her tears, hearing Pearce's words.

Pearce understood that her unusual dependence on Jayden stemmed from a deep need for love. But it didn't matter. He was here now as her family, and he vowed to take good care of her.

Elyse glanced at her watch. "Pearce, I need to get back to the studio. The final is the day after tomorrow, and I want to win first place."

Pearce sighed, watching her determination. She had perfectly inherited his uncle's talent, perhaps even surpassed him.

With tenderness in his eyes, he said, “Okay. I’ll be there to watch your performance.”

Elyse blinked curiously. “Aren’t you afraid I’ll lose?”

Pearce raised an eyebrow. “How can you lose? You will win, and you will take first prize!”

Elyse looked at Pearce, touched by his unwavering support. For the first time, she felt the strong backing of her family. It felt wonderful to have someone cheering for her. She no longer felt alone.

Chapter 467:

In the doctor’s office, Corrie found solace before exiting. Unexpectedly encountering Enzo was smoother than anticipated. The once formidable elder appeared more approachable than imagined.

Considering it wise to display loyalty before Enzo, Corrie believed she could rely on him for aid in future troubles.

“Haha, Jayden, you threatened me first. I won’t let you slip away either!” As she strolled through the hospital garden, laughter bubbled uncontrollably from her.

Abruptly, a stone struck her back.

Pain shot through her as she turned to find Peyton seated in a wheelchair, his leg bound high in a cast.

Though his demeanor was chilly, the sight of him in the wheelchair added a touch of levity.

“You’re quite audacious. What happened to your leg? Did you aspire to wheelchair-bound camaraderie with your dear friend Jayden?”

With a regal air, Corrie crossed her arms, exuding arrogance.

Peyton, still clutching a stone, regarded her coldly. “Frankly, I’m not particularly fond of you. You must have noticed, right?”

With a contemptuous sneer, Corrie retorted, “Your affection holds no value to me. I’ve no desire for love from a doctor or Jayden’s lackey.”

Approaching Peyton, she bent down with a smile. “Word has it you took a hit for Jayden this morning. Find his friendship stirring? I find it repulsive. What has he ever done for you?”

Peyton chuckled wryly. “How swiftly loyalties change. Weren’t you pining for Jayden before cozying up to Brook? Dropped your theatrics already?”

With a scornful glance, Corrie countered, “I’m Jayden’s ex-girlfriend. Why shouldn’t I seek his assistance?”

Shaking his head, Peyton issued a stern warning, “Stop pestering Jayden. Don’t assume you can manipulate him through Louis to get your way.”

With a firm grip on the stone, he crushed it before extending his hand, revealing the broken pieces. “Should you disregard my caution and proceed, I can bring trouble upon your whole family, despite my profession as a doctor.”

Corrie’s expression darkened. Louis had been a distant memory until Peyton’s reminder, stirring an odd sensation within her.

She had assumed Jayden, being cold-hearted, wouldn’t concern himself with Louis.

Disregarding Peyton’s warning, Corrie remained steadfast in her convictions. She believed nothing could hinder her pursuit of desires.

“The admonition of a cripple holds no sway over me. Save your warnings for when your leg heals.” With a graceful sweep of her hand through her hair, Corrie offered a charming smile before departing with a laugh.

Unwilling to engage further with Corrie's antics, Peyton thought maybe only Louis would tolerate her. But Louis was truly unfortunate.

Did he really die when he tried to save Jayden?

Otherwise, why would Jayden still be mourning a year later?

Gazing skyward, Peyton muttered bitterly, "God certainly has a sense of irony."

Chapter 468:

Corrie swiftly left the garden, made her way to the parking lot, and approached her Ferrari. She skillfully opened the door and slipped inside.

Sitting in the driver's seat, she didn't rush to leave. Instead, she pulled a box of cigarettes from her Hermes purse. With a slim cigarette between her fingers, she inhaled deeply, letting the smoke swirl in her mouth before exhaling a cloud of gray.

Staring blankly into the distance, she became lost in thought.

The name Louis hadn't crossed her mind in a long while. Hearing it again moments ago had made her heart skip a beat, something that hadn't happened in ages.

Louis had died because of Jayden.

In that car accident a year ago, Louis had been right next to him.

Pressing her restless heart, Corrie murmured, "You deserved to die, didn't you? Only you perished in that crash. I thought Jayden would be left crippled, living a life of misery. But Jayden turned out fine."

She added bitterly, "Louis, you were really foolish. No wonder only you died in that accident."

After a long pause, Corrie chuckled. “But who would’ve thought Jayden cared about your death? He’s really a heartless man.”

Peyton might see Jayden as a kind man with a conscience, but she knew better. In her view, Jayden was an unruly lunatic.

With a sigh, she said, “Jayden is such a madman. I can’t believe Elyse loves him so much. They must both be abnormal.”

Corrie flicked the ash from her cigarette out the window, suddenly thinking of Elyse. Why had Elyse visited the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department? Was she pregnant?

Corrie’s face grew serious as she pondered. Then, with a burst of laughter, she said, “Don’t blame me, Elyse. Jayden hurt me first. My only way to fight back is through you.”

With a sly smile, she discarded the cigarette and sped out of the parking lot.

Meanwhile, Elyse returned to her studio after Pearce left. Irving approached with a box of cookies, saying, “These are chocolate cookies from my friend. Are you hungry? Want some?”

Elyse caught the scent of chocolate and felt nauseous again. She suppressed it and replied, “No, thanks. I had plenty outside.”

Irving casually set the box on the table. “I’ll just leave it here. Remember to eat if you get hungry.”

She nodded, grabbed her violin, and dashed out of the studio.

She focused on her violin practice. As long as there were no strong smells, she could avoid nausea and play normally.

After two hours of practice, it was lunch break. Gavin and the others invited Elyse to join them.

Without hesitation, she declined, “No, thanks. My friend is coming over today. I’ll eat with her.”

Gavin accepted her excuse without question. “Alright, enjoy your meal with your friend. We’re heading out now.”

Elyse waved them off, then sighed and returned to the studio.

She had no friend joining her for lunch. Alone, she ate her bland porridge.

After slowly finishing her meal, she cleaned her bowl and spoon. Then she headed back to the studio garden to resume her violin practice.

An hour later, Fiona returned with a small cake in hand. Approaching Elyse warmly, she said, “Elyse, let’s share this cake. Gavin and Irving aren’t fans, so I thought of you.”

Elyse didn’t notice her at first. By the time she did, Fiona was right beside her. The smell of the cake made her dizzy, and she couldn’t help but retch.

Alarmed, Fiona asked, “Are you alright?”

Elyse squatted, covering her chest as she dry-heaved, but nothing came up.

Fiona’s eyes widened with realization. “Elyse, are you pregnant?”

Elyse froze, forcing a smile. “No, you guessed wrong.”

Chapter 469:

Elyse appeared drained and her complexion was as pale as a ghost.

Fiona watched her closely and couldn't shake the feeling that something was off.

She recalled how Elyse had acted out of character recently in the studio. She had insisted on fresh cherries and broke down in tears when they weren't available.

Elyse wasn't typically fussy, which led Fiona to wonder if she was pregnant.

Feeling as though she had stumbled upon a revelation, Fiona stared at Elyse incredulously and pressed, "You're pregnant, right?"

Elyse intended to deny it, but the overpowering scent of Fiona's perfume hit her, causing her to gag again.

Fiona suspected that the cake she brought might be the culprit behind Elyse's sickness, so she moved back a bit.

With a little space between them, Elyse ceased her retching.

In astonishment, Fiona blurted out, "Elyse, you have to be pregnant, and you're keeping it from us!"

Elyse pulled a tissue from her pocket to clean her mouth. Though she hadn't actually vomited, some stomach acid had come up her throat.

Looking miserable, she got to her feet and pleaded, "Fiona, please keep this between us. I'm not ready for Irving and Gavin to find out yet."

Fiona's face was a mask of confusion. "Why keep such big news to yourself? You won't be able to hide it once your belly starts showing."

Elyse felt unfairly judged by Fiona, and her eyes welled up with tears. "Tomorrow is the grand final. I just want to wait until the competition is done before I tell everyone. I only need to keep it secret for a couple more days."

Fiona started to object but stopped herself. The final was just around the corner, and they really couldn't risk any disruptions now.

However, with Elyse being pregnant, Fiona wondered how she could possibly compete.

A hidden spark of pleasure flickered within Fiona at Elyse's dilemma, but she quickly covered it with a show of worry. "Alright, I'll keep your secret for now, but you have to promise to tell everyone after the competition."

Elyse, moved by the gesture, gazed at Fiona. "Thank you, Fiona. You're really kind to me."

Fiona squirmed under Elyse's thankful eyes, feeling as if they were shining a light on the darker, unspoken parts of her conscience.

Later, during the afternoon practice, Elyse found it easier to hide her secret with Fiona's help.

That evening, Elyse had decided not to stick around for extra practice. As she gathered her things, Irving strolled up with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his face. "You seem much more laid-back about the competition this time around. I was expecting you to practice late into the night again."

Elyse made a face and retorted, "I can practice at home too. Don't assume I'm just goofing off when I leave here."

Irving shrugged. "I didn't say that. You're just putting words in my mouth."

Elyse huffed, hoisted her violin case onto her shoulder, and bid farewell to Gavin and Fiona.

Once Elyse left, Gavin looked Fiona's way. "Elyse might be more relaxed, but Fiona seems on edge. Looks like she's gearing up to practice till midnight."

Irving watched Fiona intensely practicing her violin and frowned slightly. “She really needs to put in the effort. She barely scraped into the final last time. I was hoping we’d secure the top two spots.”

Gavin gave Irving a helpless glance. “Keep it down, man. Don’t embarrass Fiona by saying that out loud.”

Irving remained unfazed. “It’s about her skills. If she can’t handle a bit of criticism, she’s not going to get any better.”

Fiona overheard Gavin and Irving’s exchange and did her best to keep her composure. She was determined not to let their words get to her.

Indeed, Elyse coming first place had caught her off guard. Ideally, Fiona had envisioned herself winning first place with Elyse right behind her in second. But now, finding herself at the bottom was eating away at her.

She knew the only way she could move past this setback was by outperforming Elyse in the final.

As Irving listened to Fiona play, his frown deepened. Eventually, he declared, “I’m hungry. I’m heading out. I won’t be practicing with you guys anymore today.”

He could sense the chaos in Fiona’s heart. Her music overflowed with personal emotion which was completely distorting the intended essence of the piece.

Continuing to practice in such a state was unlikely to lead to any improvement.

Watching Irving walking away so decisively left Gavin taken aback. “You’re just leaving? Aren’t you going to help?”

Irving rolled his eyes. “You handle it, Gavin. I can’t deal with this, and frankly, I don’t want to.”

Fiona stopped playing and looked up at Irving. “Do you hate me?”

She had always felt that Irving was not a big fan of her.

Irving glanced at Fiona's stern expression and sneered, "Why would I like you? Are you really as genuine as you appear to be?"

Chapter 470:

Fiona countered, "You barely know me, and yet you're calling me a hypocrite?"

Irving crossed his arms, his eyes sparking with annoyance. "Really, Fiona? Do you think you're all that benevolent?"

Setting her violin aside, Fiona fixed Irving with a hostile glare. "What have I ever done to you? I bring coffee and snacks to the studio every day. You happily eat what I bring, yet you throw insults my way. Isn't that a bit much?"

"Oh, please," Irving scoffed, miming a gag. "I might as well regurgitate it all." He added with a sneer, "If you were a simple and genuine person, your violin performances wouldn't be all over the place."

Turning to Gavin, he snapped, "And you—stop playing the saint. If you don't like her, just say it. No amount of pretending will mask the discord among us."

Gavin, poised to defuse the situation, paused at Irving's harsh words.

He cherished the team spirit. Yet, the frequent spats between Irving and Fiona were disruptive.

"Forget it, just go. I'll stay and help with Fiona," Gavin decided, realizing further mediation was futile. Irving was stubborn, and Fiona was equally determined.

With Irving gone, Gavin prepared some tea for Fiona, placing a glass before her. "Take a break before we resume practice."

Fiona accepted the drink without objection, her mind drifting to Elyse's situation.

The thought of Elyse's pregnancy made her skeptical about her chances in the final. How could a pregnant woman perform well?

Fiona posed a question, "What will Mr. Tucker do if Elyse doesn't succeed in the final round of the Champions Cup?"

Surprised by her query, Gavin turned to Fiona. "Why would you assume she'll fail? I'm confident she'll perform well enough to compete internationally."

With a strained smile, Fiona responded, "She doesn't seem to be taking her practice seriously. She's always tired, sleepy, and constantly hungry."

Gavin disagreed, shaking his head. "I believe it's just nerves. All these are symptoms of her anxiety. I hope she finds some time to unwind and rest properly."

Fiona knew the truth but was curious to see if Elyse would embarrass herself in the final, so she remained silent.

Meanwhile, Elyse had just gotten home and noticed Jayden was still out. She inquired of Driscoll, "Do you know when Jayden will return?"

Driscoll offered a smile but had little information. "I'm not sure. I reached out to him, but got no reply. He might be tied up in a meeting."

"A meeting at Bayzee Group?"

Pondering for a moment, Elyse said, "Okay, just let me know when he arrives."

Driscoll nodded and returned to his duties.

Half an hour later, Jayden entered the door, heading straight to their room where he found Elyse on the floor, engrossed in her sheet music.

As she turned and smiled at him, Jayden quickly crossed the room and, without a word, grabbed her throat.

Jayden's eyes were bloodshot. "Elyse, you met with Pearce today and you're still claiming there's nothing going on between you two? How do you expect me to believe that?"

Elyse was taken aback by Jayden's confrontation. She reached for his hand, struggling to free herself as pain crossed her features.

"You belong to me, Elyse. Do you get that? You're mine!" His voice was a fierce whisper.

Looking into Elyse's eyes, now tinged with distress, Jayden felt an indescribable ache. Why did she continue to see Pearce when she knew it tormented him?

As Elyse's strength waned, her eyes fluttered back, and she began to faint.

Jayden released his grip abruptly, watching as she crumpled to the floor.

After a moment, Elyse coughed and gasped for air, slowly pulling herself into a sitting position.

Jayden hadn't moved; he was waiting, expecting an explanation.

Rubbing her sore throat, the memory of strangulation still vivid, Elyse wanted to reveal that Pearce was her cousin, her own flesh and blood. But the cold, harsh look in Jayden's eyes made her pause.

The realization that he could harm her so deeply was bewildering. Didn't he love her?

A wave of sadness overwhelmed her. Staring at Jayden, her heart breaking, Elyse murmured, "Jayden, did you ever truly love me? Do you even love me the way I love you?"