

Bound love 491

Chapter 491:

Darren glanced at Vicky and remarked, “You’ve rehearsed this repeatedly. There’s no need for such smugness now. Can’t you hold back a bit?”

Vicky let out a dismissive snort and responded with a grin, “Why should I hide my confidence? Haven’t I been doing just that for years?”

Darren was about to respond when Elyse’s performance began, capturing his attention and silencing his conversation with Vicky.

Vicky, too, was intrigued to see how Elyse would handle the piece.

From what she recalled, Elyse had always struggled to showcase her performance skills effectively. Despite her practice, she never seemed to master that particular piece.

But to everyone’s surprise, Elyse had put on a shocking performance. She played the violin with remarkable fluidity, capturing the essence of the piece brilliantly. It perfectly showed the essence of the struggle between good and evil.

Seeing this, Darren realized Elyse had likely mastered the piece as well and remarked, “It seems Elyse has improved.”

Vicky clenched her teeth, inwardly cursing how swiftly Elyse had improved, leaving no room for anyone to catch up. However, she soon saw the upside. If she continued to refine her own skill, she could consistently challenge Elyse. Having a formidable rival throughout her life seemed appealing.

Darren expected Vicky to retort, but instead, she just rolled her eyes at him and walked away.

He touched his nose and asked, “What’s wrong with her? Why didn’t she argue back? Does she feel intimidated and unwilling to engage?”

Meanwhile, on stage, after completing her performance to resounding applause, Elyse bowed graciously to the audience before exiting the stage, clearly pleased with her performance.

Once she was near, Darren taunted, "Looks like you're set to take first place again."

Elyse winked at him and replied, "That will depend on the judges' fairness."

Darren laughed heartily and made his way to the stage. He hadn't practiced the piece extensively, yet he felt confident about securing his place.

As Elyse left the stage, she began searching for Fiona. Not finding her, she tapped her head, pondering if Fiona might have gone to the restroom.

Unexpectedly, even after several contestants had performed, Fiona had not returned.

Elyse couldn't contain her anxiety and started searching everywhere for Fiona, but she was nowhere to be found. Darren was also on the lookout for Fiona, but he couldn't find her either.

As the ninth contestant concluded his performance, Elyse's worry escalated to the point of tears. She exclaimed in distress, "Where is Fiona? It's her turn to compete. Without her participation, how will she be ranked?"

Observing Elyse's growing anxiety, Darren remarked, "Have you considered that maybe she chose not to compete and left quietly?"

"That's impossible! She wouldn't just leave," Elyse immediately responded, dismissing the idea.

With a solemn expression, Darren countered, "Did you not realize Fiona wasn't listed in the qualifiers before the extra round?"

This revelation left Elyse speechless. She hadn't noticed that detail.

Darren sighed deeply and guided her back toward the backstage just as the ninth contestant was stepping off the stage.

At that moment, a staff member announced, "Miss Fiona Evans, please come to the stage for your performance!"

Despite repeated calls, there was no response. The staff member turned to the audience and asked, "Does anyone know where Fiona is?"

"I've searched everywhere but haven't found her," Elyse replied quietly.

The staff member checked his watch and stated firmly, "If she does not appear shortly, she will be deemed to have forfeited her performance."

Elyse felt powerless to alter the situation and watched helplessly as the staff member went to consult with the judges.

Gavin was seated behind the judges. He was taken aback by the announcement.

Elyse decided to avoid Gavin's gaze and stayed backstage, not wanting to confront him unless he inquired about the situation.

The competition proceeded to conclude without Fiona. After deliberation, the judges confirmed the results for the nine participants.

Announcements were made: "First place, Elyse Lloyd; second place, Vicky Aston. At third place, Mariana Dury. At seventh place, Darren Reynolds. And finally, Cassidy Lipson takes the eighth place."

As Elyse reappeared on stage, her victory felt bittersweet. Although she secured the championship, Fiona's unexpected withdrawal dampened her spirits.

Vicky was standing beside her with a forced smile. She remarked, "It seems like you are my only true competitor here. Even Darren doesn't measure up."

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“You underestimated Darren. If he masters the piece, you’ll realize you have more than one resilient rival,” said Elyse calmly.

“Humph! I doubt it!”

Vicky looked at Elyse, who was now standing at the end of the line, then turned to look at Darren, who appeared quite pleased with his result, his grin broad and almost too bright.

Vicky looked on, her disdain palpable. What was so great about seventh place? Darren was such an idiot. She glanced at Elyse, who was in first place—a spot she once held—and felt a surge of complex emotions.

The judges and Karl began to distribute the competition certificates for the top eight.

Karl approached Elyse with a warm smile. “From now on, you’ll need to strive on the international stage. Aim for the top,” he encouraged.

Elyse nodded earnestly. “Trust me, I will.”

As the award ceremony concluded, the audience started to leave, and the media swarmed the contestants for interviews.

After her interview, Elyse noticed Gavin approaching with a gentle smile that made her heart skip. She kept smiling and walked toward him.

“Where is Fiona? How could she just quit the competition?” Gavin asked.

“I’m not sure,” Elyse responded truthfully. “After my performance, I looked for her backstage, but she wasn’t there. I even went outside and searched for a long while but found no sign of her.”

“Did you try calling her?” Gavin inquired.

Elyse nodded. “Yes, but her phone was off.”

Gavin’s smile faded. He took a few deep breaths to steady himself.

He then gently touched her hair, smiling as he spoke. “You did wonderfully today. I didn’t expect such a stellar performance.”

“Thank you for your help and guidance,” Elyse replied, her voice filled with gratitude.

“My pleasure.” Gavin returned the smile apologetically. “I had planned a celebration with you and Fiona after the competition. Now, I need to attend to Fiona’s situation. We’ll schedule your celebration for another time.”

“I’m not in a hurry. You should go find her now,” Elyse suggested, understanding the urgency.

Gavin nodded, swiftly grabbed his coat, and hurried out.

It was already two in the afternoon. After changing, she stepped out of the concert hall carrying a shopping bag and her violin case. She moved at a leisurely pace. By the time she reached the exit, only Jayden and Tracy were there waiting, along with Shaun.

Shaun was holding onto Tracy as if he was afraid she would escape.

Elyse initially wanted to approach Tracy, but then she looked at Jayden, who had come to watch her compete. Realizing he had made an effort, she decided to acknowledge his gesture. She then turned and walked towards Jayden.

Jayden, sensing her lingering anger, said nothing. He silently took the violin case from her hands and held her hand.

Shaun, gripping Tracy to prevent her escape, turned to Jayden and said, “I hope you treat your wife well and keep her from visiting my place again.”

Jayden managed a strained smile and replied, "Thank you for looking after her."

Feeling the pangs of hunger in her stomach, Elyse remained composed, recalling Tracy's words from the day before. "Jayden, we need to talk when we get home."

Jayden averted his gaze and nodded silently. "Okay. We'll talk then."

They headed towards the parking lot together, tailed by Shaun and Tracy. Shaun's car was parked near Jayden's.

Meanwhile, Corrie, who had been waiting in the parking lot, observed Jayden and Elyse while holding an intercom.

As the car came into view, Jayden quickened his pace, eager to open the door for Elyse.

Elyse walked slowly, and within moments, Jayden was nearly twenty meters ahead.

The man beside Corrie spoke up, "It's time. Arrange for the car accident soon, and make sure Jayden is finished."

"Wait. I have a new plan. Let the drunk driver hit Elyse," Corrie suddenly proposed.

The man objected, visibly upset. "Mr. Owen's order was to take Jayden's life."

Corrie's eyes gleamed coldly. "If we kill Elyse, Jayden will not want to live on."

Chapter 493:

Tracy was desperately trying to break free from Shaun's grip. Despite her efforts, Shaun held on tenaciously, enduring her scratches and bites, refusing to let her go.

Tracy's strength was waning as she fought with all her might.

Just then, a car suddenly hurtled out from the road. It barreled over the lawn, toppled a trash can, and sped into the parking lot. It moved so swiftly that it left only a blur before Tracy's eyes.

Tracy's gaze followed the car, and she saw it hurtling towards Elyse!

"Elyse, watch out!" With a scream, she dashed towards Elyse. Shaun, sensing the danger, quickly followed suit.

Elyse, preoccupied with her rumbling stomach, was oblivious to the approaching vehicle.

However, Tracy's scream startled her. She turned around just in time to see the car charging at her. For a moment, she was frozen in shock, unable to comprehend the peril she was in.

"Elyse!"

Jayden's shout pierced the air, and Elyse instinctively looked towards him, her confusion deepening.

Jayden, confined to a wheelchair, had thrown aside what he was holding and was now sprinting towards her with astonishing speed.

Elyse stared at his legs, a bewildering thought striking her. Had he deceived her all along?

As the thought formed, Jayden reached Elyse, enveloped her in his arms, and rolled them both across the ground, narrowly evading the oncoming car.

"Are you alright?" Tracy screamed, her voice frantic. She was on the brink of losing her composure. She had seen Jayden move with extraordinary speed, rescuing Elyse just in the nick of time. No ordinary person could have moved that fast.

They had been mere inches from the speeding car as it roared past. They had been so close to death! It had nearly struck them!

Tracy rushed to their side, her voice trembling with worry. “Are you okay? Please, tell me you’re fine! Oh my gosh!”

Jayden held Elyse tightly. She felt no pain but noticed her hand was in contact with some sticky liquid.

She raised her hand and saw that it was smeared with fresh and warm blood.

Elyse’s lips quivered. She called out Jayden’s name instinctively.

“Jayden? Jayden, what’s happening to you?”

Jayden didn’t answer. Instead, he collapsed against her.

Tracy noticed the blood on Elyse’s hand. She lifted Jayden’s shirt and was horrified to see the wound. Tears welled up in her eyes. “Elyse, Jayden’s bleeding from his waist. It’s still pouring out. Is he going to die?”

Elyse snapped back to reality. She shook Jayden, desperation in her voice. “Wake up, Jayden. Listen to me. I’m pregnant, and you’re going to be a father. Did you hear that? I’ve been keeping it secret from you for a few days. Are you mad at me? I won’t keep anything from you anymore... Just don’t die.”

As she spoke, tears streamed down her face.

Tracy, realizing what needed to be done, dialed emergency services with trembling hands. The ambulance arrived swiftly and whisked Jayden away.

As Tracy was about to head to the hospital with Elyse, she suddenly remembered something and glanced at Shaun.

Shaun was dealing with the driver. "I'll take care of this. You go to the hospital. I'll catch up with you later."

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Tracy peered swiftly at the driver, who had collapsed onto the driver's seat.

"Let's go to the hospital," she declared. Redirecting her gaze, she guided Elyse toward the ambulance.

Elyse perched helplessly in the ambulance, her hands raised aimlessly. She attempted to grasp Jayden's hand multiple times, yet hesitated each time.

The reality of the situation seemed unbelievable to her, especially the thought of Jayden in a coma.

Sitting motionlessly, tears cascaded down her cheeks. "How could he be hurt so badly? Didn't he feel any pain when he came to me?" she murmured, seeking answers that remained elusive.

Noticing Elyse's despondence, Tracy consoled her. Embracing her friend, she reassured, "He'll recover. Don't frighten yourself."

Elyse, leaning on Tracy, began to weep softly.

Upon their arrival at the hospital, the medical team, already informed, briskly wheeled Jayden toward surgery.

Elyse, moving too swiftly, collapsed heavily to the floor.

Startled, Tracy exclaimed with concern, "My! You're with a child. Take better care of yourself."

Elyse, safeguarding her abdomen as she hastened to follow the medical team, biting her lip, slowly rose with Tracy's help.

They reached the operating room's entrance just as Jayden was being rushed inside for immediate surgery.

Tracy settled Elyse into a bench before pulling out her phone to contact Shaun. She then moved to a quieter part of the corridor.

Elyse curled up on the bench, wrapping her arms around her legs and resting her head against the bench's back. Her gaze was vacant and glossed over with an overwhelming sadness.

Remaining silent, she didn't utter curses or sobs. She merely sat in quiet anticipation of the surgery's outcome. Tears brimming in her eyes betrayed her inner turmoil.

Peyton, recuperating in the same hospital, heard the distressing news and quickly approached in his wheelchair. Observing Elyse's sadness, he approached silently, consumed by remorse.

"Are you okay, Elyse?" he asked gently. Her voice barely a whisper, she replied, "Jayden's lost a great deal of blood, and I feel so helpless. What if we lose him? What will I do then?"

Unable to watch her distress, Peyton admitted with regret, "I'm sorry. Last night, Jayden, Clive, and I were all at a club when we faced an assassin. Jayden got stabbed trying to protect us."

Upon hearing this, Elyse lifted her head slowly, shock and disbelief painting her features. Her voice trembled. "Why didn't you guys tell me sooner?"

Peyton paused, his face a portrait of sorrow. "Jayden didn't want to worry you on the day of your final. He thought the news might upset you and affect your performance."

Suddenly, anger surged within her, but she restrained it and questioned, "Then why didn't he tell me after my competition ended? Did he attend my event pretending everything was fine just to keep me from worrying?"

Peyton shifted under her intense stare, guilt mounting. He looked down, lacking confidence, “Jayden is determined. Once he makes up his mind, it’s final.”

He stole a glance at her, noticing her calm demeanor, and continued, “After dealing with the assailants last night, we took Jayden to the hospital. Despite our efforts to convince him to rest, he insisted on leaving early the next morning because he didn’t want to miss your competition.”

At this, Elyse let out a laugh mixed with tears.

Peyton, unsure how to console her, added awkwardly, “Believe me, Jayden deeply cares for you. He kept this from you out of love.”

Instead of anger, Elyse’s response was laughter tinged with disbelief. “Do you really think that’s love? He didn’t share any details about his activities or his injuries. He chose not to disclose anything to me, even hiding the fact that he wasn’t actually disabled.”

Tears filled her eyes as she pressed, “Is that really love?”

Stumbling over his words, Peyton replied, “Do you know—do you realize Jayden has been pretending to be disabled?”

Elyse confirmed with a nod, “Yes. If none of this had happened, how long would you have kept it from me?”

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Peyton was at a loss for words. With a bitter tone, he explained, “You have to trust me on this. I urged Jayden to tell you the truth more than once. It was his choice. He was adamant that knowing would put you in danger. He didn’t want to involve you.”

Elyse’s sadness deepened as she questioned, “Does he truly want to protect me from danger, or is he just unwilling to share his secret, afraid it will draw us closer together?”

Peyton was at a loss. He wasn’t Jayden and couldn’t fathom his thoughts.

After a long pause, he awkwardly suggested, “When he wakes up, let’s confront him and demand an explanation!”

Elyse smiled bitterly. “Does he think I’m a fool? He feared for my safety but forgot my role in his life. I’m his wife. Just being with him puts me at risk. How could he believe hiding the truth was the best way to protect me?”

Peyton forced a smile. “I don’t understand it either. I wish I did.”

Elyse reflected on her past with Jayden, realizing how many things hadn’t made sense. She had never noticed that he was pretending to be crippled. The man she married was perfectly healthy. But he didn’t trust her. This reality suffocated her.

Overwhelmed, she began to sob loudly. Tracy, having returned, tried to comfort her.

She held Elyse, trying to soothe her. “Elyse, don’t get so upset. Remember, you’re pregnant. It’s not good for the baby.”

“Exactly. Jayden isn’t dead. There’s no need to cry so desperately,” Peyton chimed in.

But then, a realization dawned on him. Grabbing Tracy’s sleeve, Peyton asked anxiously, “What did you just say? Who is pregnant?”

Realizing there was no longer any point in hiding it, Tracy admitted, “Elyse is over two months pregnant. She’s in a fragile state, and I’m really worried about a miscarriage.”

Peyton stared at Elyse, then at her belly, stunned. Finally, he rubbed his temples and said, “This is too much to take in. I need a moment.”

Tracy rolled her eyes, thinking this man was so lame.

After much contemplation, Peyton slapped his thigh and exclaimed angrily, “I warned him long ago that he must wear a condom! Jayden must have ignored my advice and did whatever he pleased!”

Now, his wife was pregnant! Moreover, Elyse had now discovered his deepest secret.

He was certain when Jayden woke up, he would undoubtedly face Elyse's questioning.

Peyton took a deep breath, composed himself, and then dialed Driscoll's number.

Upon learning that Jayden was in the operating room, Driscoll was shocked and assured Peyton that he would head to the hospital immediately.

In the next moment, Driscoll was informed that Elyse had been pregnant for over two months.

Driscoll fell silent for a long time before finally saying he would head to the hospital to look after Elyse.

After ending the call, Peyton swiftly sent messages to Tobin and Clive, updating them on the situation.

Having arranged the necessary follow-ups, Peyton called the doctors and nurses, instructing them to thoroughly examine Elyse.

Tracy, relieved, thanked Peyton. She then helped Elyse to lie down and rest, recognizing the importance of protecting her during this critical time.

With Jayden in a coma, it fell to Peyton to ensure Elyse's well-being.

Elyse, however, was reluctant to leave the operating room, insisting on waiting for Jayden. Peyton gently persuaded her, saying, "Jayden will be fine. Right now, the baby you're carrying is at risk. You don't want to lose the child you and Jayden are expecting, do you?"

Tracy added, "Exactly. If you care about the baby, you need to have a check-up to ensure the baby is healthy."

Moved by their words, Elyse, though in tears, agreed to follow the doctor and nurse downstairs for the examination.

Tracy sighed in relief and then, in a low voice, informed Peyton, “Shaun mentioned earlier that there seems to be something suspicious about the driver who caused the accident. He suspects the driver is hiding something and was unsure whether to take action or gather more information.”

Peyton’s demeanor hardened. “Tell Shaun to involve the police and find a secure place for the driver.”

Tracy nodded. “I’ll instruct Shaun to hand the driver over to you.”

Chapter 496:

Shaun arrived at the hospital after handing over the drunk driver to Peyton’s guy.

When Tracy noticed his facial injuries, she was taken aback and said, “What happened to you? Your face is bruised, and you are filthy all over.”

“A gang of people came out of nowhere and tried to murder me just as I was about to hand over the driver to Peyton’s guy,” Shaun remarked with a shrug. “Despite their attempts, they failed, but I must admit that interacting with them was not without its challenges.”

With that, Shaun reached for Tracy’s hand, prepared to take her away.

In an angry outburst, Tracy stated, “I want to stay with Elyse.” She was reluctant to leave. “At this moment, I am her only comfort. This is not the time for me to abandon her!”

Shaun firmly said as he clenched his fist, “You have to go back with me. A bunch of people’s eyes are now fixated on Jayden. Until they get what they want, they won’t give up. If you continue to stay here with Elyse, you’ll definitely be implicated.”

Tracy felt infuriated. "I don't give a damn whether I'm involved or not. Elyse is my best friend. She's now pregnant. I must keep her safe."

"You have no idea what to do! How the hell are you going to keep her safe? It will jeopardize your safety," Shaun exclaimed with a sullen expression on his face. He then took Tracy over his shoulder. "Return with me!"

"No! I will not go back with you, bastard! Put me the hell down!" Tracy fought fiercely, but her strength paled in comparison to Shaun's, and she could only be forcibly taken away by him.

Peyton also recognized at that point that the guy who pulled the strings behind the assassination was someone who would not give up until he achieved his goals.

That individual had a genuine desire to murder Jayden!

"Shit!" Peyton cursed a few times, then pulled out his phone and hastily texted Clive, asking him to keep Elyse company as soon as he finished with the whole driver situation.

After Driscoll finished packing up some essentials, he visited the hospital an hour later and saw Elyse seated in the VIP ward.

She sat on a chair, the color gone from her face. Her eyes were empty and deep, giving the impression of a lost kid trying to find her way home.

Driscoll filled the wardrobe with all the bags he had taken over. "Are you okay?" he questioned as he approached Elyse.

Elyse felt his presence and glanced up to see Driscoll. She said, her visage expressionless, "There you are! He's still in the ER, but his condition has stabilized. After his wounds are treated, he will be sent to this ward."

Driscoll gave Elyse a troubled glance. Since he was reluctant to bring up the delicate subject, he asked, "Have you had your physical examination? Did you get hurt?"

“The doctor said I’m fine,” Elyse responded to Driscoll’s questions with a blank face.

He lifted his hand and patted Elyse’s shoulder, soothing her softly. “Don’t worry too much. Mr. Owen will be just fine, I promise.”

With a slight nod, Elyse sat in the ward for a while longer.

Jayden was still in a coma when nurses and physicians wheeled him into the ward about thirty minutes later. The doctor gave Elyse and Driscoll some instructions before leaving.

Elyse stood near the bed and studied Jayden’s face.

After taking the bill from the nurse, Driscoll informed Elyse, “I have to go take care of the bills.”

With a nod, Elyse motioned for Driscoll to go on.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, she gave Jayden gentle strokes on the face with her eyes welled up.

“Jayden, how come you kept your secret from me? Is there another reason, or do you just not trust me? For whatever reason you did what you did, you made me feel so awful,” Elyse murmured to Jayden. Her complaints sounded somewhat adorable.

Jayden had fed her lies. She was depressed, but much more so when she realized he was unconscious and had suffered severe injuries. She didn’t want to see him lie here, so pitiful and helpless.

She found herself unable to stop herself from loving him.

Just then, the door of the ward was pushed open by someone.

Elyse immediately looked up and saw Corrie.

A frown suddenly appeared on her face. “Why are you here?”

Corrie responded, “I’m here to see Jayden, obviously.”

Taking a glance at him, she continued, “Something bad happened to him. Can’t I visit him?”

Chapter 497:

As soon as Elyse’s eyes landed on Corrie, her mood soured.

Yet, something felt off to her. The news of Jayden’s accident couldn’t have traveled so quickly.

Peyton, who had arrived shortly after the incident, had surely kept it under wraps and hadn’t let slip that Jayden was hurt.

Yet, Corrie, who hadn’t been in touch with any of them, seemed somehow in the know about Jayden’s condition.

Furthermore, Corrie had shown up a mere ten minutes after Jayden was wheeled out of surgery.

Piecing these observations together, suspicion towards Corrie began to creep into Elyse’s thoughts.

As Corrie moved slowly towards Jayden’s bedside, Elyse intercepted her just in time.

Corrie, blinking, looked visibly annoyed and said, “What’s this about? Jayden and I go way back. Why can’t I check on him?”

Elyse, though pale, held a steely look in her eyes. Her voice was firm and commanding as she responded, “You’re not welcome here. Please leave.”

Corrie attempted to muster a smile, “I’m not just Jayden’s former flame but also his cousin’s future wife. Why are you blocking me? We’re practically family.”

Elyse scoffed, “You’re not even married to Brook yet. How can you claim to be part of the family? Even if you’ve married Brook, you’ll need my permission to enter.”

Corrie kept up her strained smile. “There’s no need to be so cold. You’re starting to act like Jayden. Did he rub off on you?”

Elyse replied icily, “I’ve always been this way. Please leave now, or I’ll have to be unpleasant.”

“Fine, I’ll leave!” Angered and unwilling to engage further, Corrie stormed off. But as she reached the ward’s door, she paused and turned back to face Elyse.

With an odd smirk, Corrie said, “Elyse, I just saw you at the Gynecology and Obstetrics Department taking a check. Are you pregnant?”

Elyse’s expression grew even stormier. “My personal affairs are none of your concern. Just keep to yourself.”

Corrie gazed at Elyse’s abdomen, her smile lingering. “Fine. I won’t pry. But I still wish you all the best. May you have a safe delivery.”

A flash of malice sparked in Corrie’s eyes. She bowed her head, masking her emotions, and hurriedly exited the hospital room.

Once Corrie had actually departed, Elyse let out a sigh of relief and sank into a chair to collect herself.

The moment Corrie entered, a wave of dread had washed over her, sending goosebumps cascading across her skin.

After wrapping up his tasks for the day, Theo grabbed a cup of coffee from his desk and savored a sip. He pulled out his phone to catch up on the day’s headlines.

Besides the usual financial updates, he found himself drawn to the entertainment section, especially since Elyse had made it to the final of a competition.

Curious, Theo typed Elyse's name into the search bar and discovered a slew of articles about her.

The headlines were eye-catching, and he clicked on one at random. His smile broadened when he read that Elyse had clinched first place in the finals.

As he continued scrolling, Theo learned that Elyse had faced some foul play during the competition, orchestrated by Freda.

Recalling his last unpleasant encounter with Freda, Theo realized she held a grudge against him. What he hadn't anticipated was her directing that resentment toward Elyse.

Poor Elyse! She was caught in the crossfire, entirely innocent.

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Seething with rage, Theo dialed Freda's number. Despite the incessant beeps for a whole minute, she never answered.

His expression darkened as he realized Freda was resolute in making things difficult for Elyse.

Determined, he called Zandra.

She almost answered immediately, but before she could greet him, Theo said, "I must end things with Freda Jimenez. If you insist on this marriage, perhaps you should marry her yourself."

Concerned about the nascent collaboration with the Jimenez family's company, Zandra hastily inquired, "Why the sudden change? Didn't you pledge to back the collaboration?"

Theo despised how his mother constantly used the collaboration to manipulate him. Without it, he would have already ended things with Freda.

“I need to see Elyse. I can’t wait any longer,” Theo declared solemnly, his fingers tapping the keyboard as he scrolled through news and photos of Elyse’s championship on his laptop.

Hearing Elyse’s name again, Zandra fumed. She snapped, “Can you not endure a little longer? I’m thinking of your future. You will inherit the company. To marry Elyse, you need to become powerful.”

Pausing, she added, “Remember, Elyse has married Jayden Owen. If you lack power, how will you ever win her back?”

Her words struck a chord, plunging Theo into a rare silence.

Sensing his hesitation, Zandra softened her tone. “Theo, just hold on a bit longer. Once the Jimenez family’s interests are fully tied to ours, you can break up with Freda.”

Theo sighed, his eyes reflecting inner torment. Nodding, he conceded, “Alright, I’ll endure it a while longer.”

He ended the call, rubbing his face vigorously to alleviate his exhaustion before returning to his work.

Freda wrapped her arms around her legs, her phone resting on the rock before her. She watched its screen light up with an incoming call, then fade back to darkness.

Her heart remained unmoved.

She knew exactly why Theo was calling; she had anticipated it. And this call was also part of her plans.

Yet, it was her father who had thwarted her plans.

Never had she imagined her own father would undermine her happiness.

Bitterness welled up within her.

With Elyse's victory in the competition, Freda knew she had lost her leverage. How could she now compel Theo to yield?

"I thought it was Fiona sitting on the rocks. But it's you."

A voice echoed, both familiar and strange, causing Freda to turn in surprise.

"You—you're Gavin Cramer, Elyse's senior," she recognized him and quickly stood, gazing at him warily.

Tensely, she asked, "What do you want? Are you here to settle a score? Let me tell you I will never apologize to Elyse. You might as well give up."

Gavin stood casually, hands in his pockets. He could see the fear in Freda's eyes, a smile playing on his lips.

"Miss, it's wise to leave some room for yourself; otherwise, you may find yourself embarrassed in the future."

"Here to avenge Elyse, are you? Who do you think you are?" Freda's voice tried to project calm.

"You're mistaken. I was searching for another junior of mine and saw a woman sitting on the rocks from a distance. I thought you were her." After a pause, Gavin looked Freda up and down and said in a helpless tone, "I didn't recognize you until I got closer."

Freda sneered, "Disappointed, aren't you?"

Gavin nodded honestly. "Yes, a bit."

Freda's teeth clenched with fury. She wanted to tear Gavin apart but realized just how tall he was.

Gavin exuded a gentlemanly demeanor, one that others might find approachable. Yet, standing so close, Freda felt overwhelmed by his powerful presence.

She quietly took a step back, still trying to appear fierce. "You'd better leave. Don't blame me if I get rude."

Gavin's interest was piqued. "And if I don't? What will you do?"

Pointing at the river, Freda snapped, "You don't leave, and I'll push you into the water."

Chapter 499:

Gavin glanced at the nearby river, then calmly shifted his attention back to Freda. Her hands were trembling.

He stayed quiet and slowly rolled up his sleeves as he walked toward her.

Freda, feeling uneasy, took a step back. "What do you want?"

"You'll push me over the edge and into the stream. Sounds fair, right?" Gavin said with a smile.

Freda reacted sharply. "Are you out of your mind?"

As she continued to retreat, nearly reaching the very edge, Gavin sighed in frustration and added, "Do you really want to fall into the river and need me to rescue you?"

Freda glanced back and realized she was indeed on the verge of falling into the water. She stopped abruptly, looking at Gavin with a mix of anger and embarrassment.

Gavin glanced at his watch and decided it was time to end the teasing.

“Gotta go. Please be mindful of your safety. Excuse me.” With a friendly smile, Gavin turned and walked away gracefully.

Freda watched him intently, not relaxing her gaze until he was out of sight.

Unbeknownst to her, Gavin had another surprise in store. He pulled out his phone and called Karl, informing him that Freda was by the riverbank and suggesting he send someone to escort her home.

Karl was appreciative of the gesture.

He arranged for his men to take Freda home, discipline her, and allow her some time for self-reflection. Once she understood her missteps, he planned for her to apologize to Elyse and Gavin.

It was then that Freda realized it was all Gavin’s fault. He had orchestrated the apology from the start.

“Curse you, Gavin Cramer! I’ll get back at you!” Freda hunched over her bed. Her stepmother was applying medicine to her bottom. Accidentally, she put too much. Freda let out a cry in pain. “Mommy, that hurts! Please be gentle!”

After wrapping up his scheme, Gavin drove through the city, visiting all the places Fiona might have been, but he came up empty-handed.

Finally, he decided to give it another shot and headed back to the Blue Sea Music Studio.

The evening had settled in. Gavin parked his car on the driveway and entered, only to find Fiona dressed in her competition outfit, a pink feathered dress that made her look both pretty and adorable.

Gavin finally confirmed she was safe and sound, breathing a sigh of relief. In a blaming tone, he asked, “Where were you during the competition earlier? Why didn’t you

participate in the extra round? You even turned your phone off. I've been searching for you all day. Do you realize that?"

Fiona could sense his frustration and felt apologetic, yet she believed she hadn't done anything wrong.

With a slight frown, she avoided his gaze and responded, "Gavin, why are you so upset? I didn't do anything wrong. How would participating in the extra round have benefited me? It was only going to help Elyse. The judges wanted her to win. It was just unnecessary."

Her reply made Gavin furrow his brows. "How can you see it that way? The extra round of competition was a chance for you too. You didn't even make the top eight initially. What if it could have changed that?"

Rubbing her forehead, Fiona answered with irritation, "Do you really think I would have improved my rank in the extra round? I felt like I would just fail again. Can you imagine how that would feel? To lose twice in the same contest? The humiliation, the unwillingness, the helplessness. Can you understand that?"

She closed her eyes as she spoke. "Gavin, you're God's favorite. You can't understand how I feel. Nor can Irving. And certainly not Elyse. She's always been at the top, never experiencing a loss."

Gavin realized Fiona was deeply troubled. She was struggling to cope with her failures in the contest, and her thoughts had become negative.

He tried to reassure her, "Fiona, you are also talented. Right now, you're just unable to face the setback and are overthinking things. Let's talk. Skipping the extra round wasn't the end of the world."

Fiona didn't respond. After a few seconds, she muttered, "Sometimes, I don't understand why I joined the Blue Sea Music Studio when I'm not particularly talented or excellent. Why could I become Mr. Tucker's student?"

Gavin couldn't just stand by; he walked towards her, intent on having a serious discussion.

But Fiona suddenly snapped, “You’re all so talented. You must have just been tolerating me, right? I don’t need your pity or your sympathy. I can leave the Blue Sea Music Studio. We can part ways.”

Chapter 500:

“Bang!”

The door to the studio was suddenly kicked open, the sound echoing harshly in the silent night.

“Shit! Are you out of your mind? Why didn’t you discuss this with Mr. Tucker first? Others would kill for a spot here.” Irving stormed in, the chill of the night clinging to his leather jacket.

Gavin, visibly taken aback and looking even more exhausted, asked, “Why are you here?”

“Didn’t you tell me Fiona was missing? I’ve been searching for her all day. I just got back and heard her statement. Why can’t I be upset?” Irving snapped.

Fiona, realizing the impact of her earlier words, looked away, avoiding Irving’s intense gaze.

Irving strode over to her, his anger palpable as he stood before her and demanded, “So, you want to quit? You don’t want to be part of this anymore? You think there is a gap between us?”

He fired off the questions, but Fiona remained silent, as if she hadn’t heard a thing.

Irving’s anger dissolved into mocking laughter. “What, having regrets now? You’ve said those words; you can’t unsay them. Fiona Evans, you’re such a hypocrite!”

“Yes, I am a hypocrite. I’m despicable. Elyse is the best, right? Irving Dunn, I’m so tired of your temper,” Fiona retorted, pushing Irving away forcefully as she made to leave the studio.

Irving moved to stop her, but Gavin held him back.

“Enough, calm down. Both of you are angry, and things get said in the heat of the moment. I’ll talk to her.”

Irving, momentarily lost for words, asked, “Should I go home?”

Gavin reminded him, “Call Elyse. She won first prize. You haven’t congratulated her yet, have you?”

Irving slapped his forehead. “Gosh! I forgot. It’s all because you told me Fiona was missing, so I spent the whole day on my motorcycle looking for her around the city and forgot to congratulate Elyse.”

“Hurry up and call her, or she’ll be upset with you,” Gavin urged.

Irving knew Elyse’s temperament well. If she were upset with him over this, he knew he’d have to go out of his way to make amends the next day.

How could he possibly look forward to that? So, after Gavin departed, Irving crossed his legs on the couch and dialed Elyse’s number.

Elyse answered the call with a frail voice, “Hello, Irving, what’s up?”

Irving cleared his throat slightly before replying, “I’m calling to congratulate you, Elyse. Take a few days off to rest at home. When you’re back, I’ll teach you the violin.”

“Thank you, I…” Elyse sounded agreeable, but then her voice trailed off into a retch.

Concerned, Irving inquired urgently, “What’s wrong, Elyse? Are you feeling alright?”

Before Elyse could respond, the sounds of her vomiting took over.

Suddenly, a man's voice emerged from the other end of the call. "This is Clive, Elyse's friend. She's in the hospital. It might be a few days before she can return to your studio; she's quite unwell."

Irving's brow furrowed with concern. "What happened to her? Did she have an upset stomach?"

Clive glanced over at Elyse, who was still bent over the toilet. "No, it's not food-related. She's pregnant."

Irving breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, she's pregnant. That's good. At least it's not food poisoning."

A few seconds later, his voice trembled as he asked, "She's pregnant? You mean Elyse Lloyd?"

Clive responded sincerely, "Yes, I was surprised too. Her condition will become more apparent soon, and it won't stay hidden for long. That's why I felt you should know the truth."

Stunned, Irving struggled to keep his phone steady. "Which hospital is she in now?" he inquired.

"In the inpatient building, Ward 806, Crestwell Healthcare Center," Clive responded.

"I'll be right there," Irving declared. He sprang up so quickly he nearly toppled over, then hurried to his motorcycle and sped off towards the hospital.

After a while, Elyse's nausea seemed to subside. She accepted a tissue from Clive and inquired, "What did Irving say?"

Clive gently patted her back, softening his voice, "He's on his way to see you. I gave him your ward number."

With Clive's assistance, Elyse slowly exited the bathroom and sat on the edge of the bed, looking worn out.

Clive expressed his concern, "Are you hungry? You only managed a bowl of cereal earlier, and you threw that up. You must be feeling pretty weak."

Elyse responded with a nod, rubbing her stomach. "It's rough. I've been vomiting all day. My stomach is on fire," she said, her voice laden with distress.