

Bound love 671

Chapter 671:

She looked Elyse up and down with great disdain. “Everyone in the family knows that Grandma hates the violin the most, but this woman brought it up just to get on her nerves. It’s really irritating.”

Elyse glanced calmly at Thea without responding. Then, turning to Felicia, she said composedly, “Grandma, if you change your mind, you can let me know. I’m always available.”

With that, Elyse turned and walked away.

Pearce, taken aback by her resolute departure, quickly followed. “Where are you going? This is your home now. Where else would you go?”

Elyse responded calmly, “Back to your house. My violin teacher is expecting me for practice.”

Pearce looked surprised. “But today is a welcome party in your honor. If you leave now, what about the guests?”

Elyse’s amusement was evident as she looked at Pearce. “Pearce, are you really this oblivious, or are you just pretending? Can’t you see that Grandma doesn’t want me here? Neither does the rest of the family. This party no longer concerns me.”

Pearce’s face flushed with embarrassment as he realized Elyse was fully aware of the situation. “I thought you didn’t notice. It seems I was wrong.”

Elyse laughed lightly. “Pearce, you really don’t need to worry so much.”

She walked out of the doors with a smile. “I never intended to return to the Benson family. I came out of curiosity about where my father grew up. But now, with him being

a taboo subject here and no one speaking of him, this place holds no significance for me.”

Pearce grasped the underlying message in Elyse’s words. He furrowed his brow and asked, “So you don’t see this as your home? This is where your father grew up,” Pearce continued. “It was his home and, more importantly, your home.”

Elyse averted her gaze and responded with a smile, “I understand. Wherever you are is my home.”

Pearce saw Elyse’s reluctance and wanted to offer more comfort, but he hesitated, remembering her past struggles.

In the end, he sighed and said, “Regardless of anything, you are my family. This will always be your refuge. If you don’t trust them, then trust me. I will always support you.”

Elyse raised an eyebrow, a playful smile on her lips. “Pearce, could you ask Grandma to listen to me play a violin piece? It would mean a lot to me.”

Pearce’s face turned pale. “Why are you so fixated on this? She truly detests the violin,” Pearce explained. “If you mention it in front of her, she’ll scold you without end.”

Elyse smiled, “That’s precisely why I’ve made it my wish. Pearce, can you help me make it come true?”

Pearce’s expression soured. “Are you trying to use me?”

“No,” Elyse replied. “It’s just that you have a way with her. I’m certain she doesn’t want to see me right now.” Elyse looked with resignation at the house before them.

Pearce, after a moment of contemplation, sighed and gave in. “Fine, I’ll speak to her on your behalf.”

Seeing Pearce’s reluctance, Elyse blinked innocently, “Thank you, Pearce. You’re truly the best.”

The flattery had its effect on Pearce. No matter what Elyse asked for, he would find a way to deliver.

Elyse got into the car Pearce had arranged and rolled down the window. "I'd love to stay, but since Grandma has kicked me out of the house, you'll need to handle the party on your own."

Pearce glared at her with feigned frustration. "You seem quite pleased to leave, despite everything I've done for you. Is this how you repay my kindness?"

Chapter 672:

Elyse chuckled. "I know you've been kind to me, Pearce. I'll remember it."

After leaving the Bensons' estate, Elyse felt an overwhelming sense of relief wash over her.

She had a low opinion of the Benson family, except for Pearce, and she didn't feel any sense of belonging with the Benson household. Her willingness to visit the Bensons' estate was born out of sheer curiosity, not a desire to rekindle old ties or reclaim a place in their midst.

She was acutely aware of her lack of a true home. Relying on others for security had only ever led to heartbreak and abandonment. She understood, with resolute clarity, that she was her own sanctuary.

Seeking distraction, Elyse instructed the driver to take her to the mall.

As the car veered towards the bustling shopping center, her mind wandered to more mundane concerns. Once inside the mall, Elyse began to shop.

She passed by a high-end clothing store. Reminded of her upcoming competitions, she entered, curiosity piqued by the elegant displays.

As she perused the racks for suitable outfits, she sensed someone approaching from behind. Swiftly turning, she found herself face-to-face with a stranger.

With a raised eyebrow and a hint of confusion, Elyse asked, "Do you know me?"

The woman looked her up and down, rolling her eyes with disdain. "It really is you, the girl who recently returned to the Benson family."

Elyse, puzzled by the recognition from this unfamiliar face, replied, "Who are you? I don't think we've met before."

"Of course, you don't know me," the woman said with a sneer. "I'm Claire Lipson, a good friend of Thea." Claire crossed her arms and stared at Elyse with a mix of arrogance and suspicion. "What are your intentions for reuniting with the Benson family?"

Elyse was baffled. "Intentions? What do you mean?"

Claire rolled her eyes, exasperated. "Stop acting clueless. Everyone knows you aim to fight for shares and inheritance. You even want to take Thea's place, don't you?"

Elyse remained silent. She had heard rumors that Felicia planned to distribute her shares among the younger generation, stirring up internal conflict in the otherwise harmonious Benson family. But what did that have to do with her? She didn't want anything from them.

The idea of replacing Thea was even more absurd. She hadn't even planned to live with them.

Taking a deep breath, Elyse replied, "Who told you I wanted to replace Thea? That's a funny assumption. Tell them I don't care. I'm just here to pay a visit and will leave soon."

Claire's tone grew sharp and sarcastic. "What a huge lie. You claim you don't want anything, but who would believe that? You're playing the game well, pretending to want nothing while actually aiming for everything."

Elyse realized Claire was unyielding. No matter what she said, Claire wouldn't believe her, so there was no point in arguing further.

Her expression darkened. "Move aside, or don't blame me for being rude."

Noticing Elyse's shift in demeanor, Claire quickly retorted, "I knew you were pretending. I'm warning you, Thea is Felicia's favorite granddaughter. Don't think you can replace her."

Elyse, growing impatient, said, "Tell Thea I won't take what rightfully belongs to her. You all should stop bothering me."

Chapter 673:

Seeing Elyse's angry expression, Claire smiled mockingly. "Wow. Who taught you this trick of retreating to advance? Your parents? What's your dad's name again? Rickey? I heard he was a good-for-nothing fool. Did he put you up to this?"

As soon as Elyse heard Claire insult her father, her face turned grim. She seized Claire by the collar and, locking eyes with her, gritted her teeth. "Who do you think you are to insult my dad? He's the best in the world. Say anything bad about him again, and I'll make you regret it."

Elyse waved her fist in warning before striding out of the store without a backward glance.

For the first time, Claire had been threatened like this, and her heart pounded in her chest. As she regained her composure, she noticed the store employees secretly laughing at her.

She had intended to teach Elyse a lesson for her good friend Thea, but she ended up humiliating herself. Embarrassed, Claire quickly ran out of the store, hoping to find Elyse and confront her, but Elyse was already out of sight.

Looking around and feeling humiliated, Claire stomped her foot angrily. “Damn it! I’m so pissed! Elyse, how dare you threaten me? I won’t let you get away with this.”

When Elyse returned home, she saw Cody playing the violin in the yard. Setting aside her earlier frustration, she rushed over to him and listened intently to his performance.

Gavin emerged from inside, holding a violin, and asked with curiosity, “Weren’t you going to visit the Bensons? Why are you back so soon?”

Elyse pouted and replied, “It wasn’t enjoyable, so I came back early. I’d rather practice the violin here.”

Cody paused his playing and exchanged a glance with Gavin. It was clear that the Benson family wasn’t nice to her.

Cody pressed a violin into Elyse’s hands and said, “You came back quite early. The competition is coming up, so buckle down and practice. Don’t let anything distract you.”

Elyse nodded, soaking in his words, before diving into a serious practice session.

The melody flowed from the instrument, filling the evening air. Meanwhile, Cody busied himself in the kitchen, whipping up dinner for Elyse and Gavin.

Outside, bathed in the golden light of the setting sun, Gavin perched on a swing in the yard, keeping Elyse company with his silent presence.

Suddenly, the doorbell shattered the peaceful scene with a jarring ring. Gavin rose to his feet. “Keep playing,” he instructed, his voice firm. “I’ll get it.”

Elyse, nodding, continued her practice.

Gavin strode to the door, throwing it open to reveal a group of imposing men clad in black. A frown creased his brow. “Who are you?”

“Does Elyse Lloyd live here?” rumbled the leader, his voice gravelly. “Mrs. Felicia Benson sent us. Apparently, Miss Lloyd has some transgressions to answer for.”

Gavin’s frown deepened. He tried to slam the door shut, but the men were quicker. They wedged themselves into the doorway, their bulky forms proving too much for Gavin’s lone resistance.

The commotion reached Elyse’s ears. She halted mid-song, her gaze darting toward the doorway. Her heart hammered in her chest as she saw several menacing figures approaching, their movements purposeful.

“Who are you?” Elyse demanded, her voice laced with apprehension. “I don’t know you.”

“Apologies, Miss Lloyd,” the leader intoned, “but Mrs. Felicia Benson’s orders are absolute.”

The mention of Felicia caused Elyse to falter. Hesitation flickered in her eyes, but ultimately, she decided to comply.

Chapter 674:

Gavin, however, bristled. “This is preposterous! She has no right to send goons to kidnap you. You’re not going anywhere. Stay put!”

Elyse gestured toward the men in black, “But they’re already here. How can we possibly force them out?”

Frustration etched itself onto Gavin’s face. He cursed under his breath, regretting the moment he opened the door.

Elyse set the violin down with a sigh. “I can go with them,” she said, surprising both Gavin and the men in black.

Seeing her obedience, the men ushered her toward a waiting car without further ado.

An hour later, the car pulled back into the familiar driveway of the Bensons' residence. Elyse disembarked, the sight of the house failing to spark any warmth within her.

The men in black escorted her into a room.

Inside, she found Felicia, along with Thea and Claire Lipson. Claire stood beside a well-dressed woman who bore an undeniable resemblance to her. It was clear — this was Claire's mother.

Elyse met Felicia's gaze with unwavering defiance. "What can I do for you?"

Felicia sipped her tea before replying. "There seems to be a misunderstanding, Elyse. Did you forget?"

Elyse furrowed her brow. "I can't recall any mistakes. Why don't you just come out with it?"

Felicia's smile vanished, replaced by a steely glint in her eyes. She slammed the teacup down with a resounding thud.

"You publicly bullied Claire! You came back for a single day and already caused a scene with your arrogant behavior!"

Elyse's gaze flickered to Claire. "You claim I bullied you?"

Claire, intimidated by Elyse's intense stare, cowered behind her mother, offering no response.

Thea jumped in, "You deny bullying her? Look at her! She's scared of you, hiding behind her mother like a child. What did you do to her?"

Disregarding Thea's theatrics, Elyse turned directly to Claire. "In my view, she's evidently acting guilty when she's aware that I didn't bully her."

Claire flinched under Elyse's scrutiny. Perhaps she had exaggerated the situation, but in the end, it didn't change the narrative. In Claire's eyes, Elyse's lack of deference constituted bullying.

Felicia's fury boiled over. With a resounding slap on the table, she roared, "How dare you! You bully a guest and refuse to apologize? I must handle it according to the family rules!"

Elyse, puzzled, watched as a maid brought in a long ruler. Her heart raced, wondering where this would lead.

Felicia pointed at Elyse. "Hit her palms. She bullies and denies it. Hit her palms."

What? Hitting her palms?

Elyse's face paled. "I did nothing wrong. Why should I be punished? I won't accept this."

Elyse's defiance only ignited Felicia's fury further, her piercing voice slicing through the air like a blade. "Hold her down. This stubborn girl deserves to be taught a lesson. Does she really think she can act arrogantly in front of me?"

Elyse's expression darkened, feeling anger surge through her veins. She had simply wanted to visit the Bensons; she had never intended to be pulled back into the family fold.

Chapter 675:

She shoved the maid away and put her hands behind her back. "I said I didn't do it, so I didn't. Don't you dare hit me."

Noticing the way Elyse was protecting her hands, Thea's eyes gleamed with a cunning light. "Grandma, look! She's trying to hide her hands; she's probably scared that if they get hit, it'll ruin her ability to play the violin."

With a sneer, she added, "Elyse, you're a part of the family now, so you'd better steer clear of provoking Grandma. She detests the violin."

Felicia's eyes darkened at the mention of the violin, a sore spot that Thea's words ruthlessly jabbed.

Her voice dripped with venom as Felicia pointed at Elyse. "Still thinking about playing the violin? Hit her palms so she can never play the violin again!"

Elyse's face drained of color at these words, but before she could protest, the maid raised a ruler high and brought it down with savage force.

Elyse, realizing she couldn't evade the blow, twisted her body, letting the ruler crash against her back instead.

The maid did not hold back and struck Elyse with all her might.

The crack of the ruler splitting echoed through the room, silencing everyone.

The maid, staring wide-eyed at the broken pieces on the floor, trembled.

She glanced nervously at Thea, but the latter was too busy reveling in Elyse's punishment to notice.

Claire, her hand covering her mouth, stood frozen in shock. She had never anticipated such brutality; she had thought Felicia would simply demand an apology from Elyse, not resort to violence.

A pang of guilt gnawed at Claire's conscience.

Elyse, gritting her teeth, absorbed the blow. At first, the impact was just a dull thud, but soon the spot flared with searing pain, as if her skin was being ripped apart.

Despite the agony, she steadied herself and remained silent, refusing to give these people the satisfaction of a pained cry. Once she regained her composure, her gaze turned icy as she stared down Claire.

Claire quickly averted her gaze. Why was Elyse looking at her like that? It wasn't like she was the one who hit her!

Elyse sneered and asked with chilling indifference, "Now that I've taken the hit, can we settle the matter between us?"

Claire, her voice trembling with uncertainty, asked falteringly, "What're you talking about?"

Elyse's lips curved into a smirk. "You claimed I bullied you. Did I physically harm you? Slap you, maybe? Or perhaps, I robbed you?"

Claire feigned toughness and crossed her arms over her chest, retorting, "None of the above—but you did insult me."

"And what, pray tell, did I say to insult you?"

Claire's mouth opened, but no words came out. She stood there, stunned and speechless.

Sensing something was off, Claire's mother stepped forward, her expression darkening. She had come to the Bensons' estate seeking justice, spurred on by Claire's accusations of Elyse's bullying.

Cambape was a city where a few elite families wielded fragmented power, and though the Lipson family was not the most elite, they still held a respectable reputation.

And to let a Benson bully their daughter without consequence was unacceptable.

But now, it seemed things were not as they seemed.

Chapter 676:

Claire's mother narrowed her eyes at the guilty-looking Claire and asked in a low but clear voice, "What exactly did Elyse do to you? Tell me, and I'll back you up."

Claire glanced desperately at Thea for help, but Thea's stony silence was all she got. Claire could only stomp her foot in frustration, feeling the heat rise to her cheeks.

Her mother's voice cut through the tension, sharp and insistent. "Speak up. Don't be afraid. How did Elyse offend you? Did she say anything insulting?"

Claire's eyes lit up, seizing the lifeline. She nodded vigorously and gushed, "Yes, yes! She insulted and humiliated me!"

Elyse, with a cool and collected demeanor, asked calmly, "And how did I do that?"

Claire racked her brain, trying to recall, but then a sinking realization hit her—Elyse hadn't actually said anything particularly offensive.

Elyse, reading Claire's troubled expression, let out a scoff. "What's wrong? Have you finally realized I didn't say anything bad? After all, we only argued because you insulted my dad."

Claire's mother's eyes darkened with fury. "Claire, I thought I raised you better. Where did you learn how to insult others?"

The scolding felt like a slap to Claire's already fragile ego. Her eyes reddened, tears welling up, threatening to spill over.

Observing her pitiful state, Elyse rolled her eyes at Claire's notably feeble mental resilience.

Thea frowned deeply, her voice tinged with discontent. “Mrs. Lipson, how can you doubt your own daughter? I would never question Claire. Elyse must have instigated something to push Claire to the point of retaliation. Claire’s already feeling down. How can you join forces with the very person who hurt her to interrogate her? Do you realize how much damage you’re doing to your own daughter?”

Claire’s mother gave Thea a long, hard look before turning her gaze to her daughter. Her tone softened considerably as she asked, “Is what Thea said true?”

Claire turned her head away, her eyes brimming with hurt. She refused to speak to her mother.

The betrayal stung deeply — her own mother siding with Elyse instead of her!

Elyse, observing the tension, felt a flicker of annoyance but remained silent. Whether she spoke or stayed quiet, she knew these people had already made up their minds about her. She stood there silently, feeling that being with the Bensons was no different from being with Lanny and Glenda.

The suffocating atmosphere made her want to leave desperately.

A few moments of silence passed before Elyse turned around to leave, assuming that the matter had been settled.

Thea, however, refused to let her go. “Stop! Who said you could leave? You haven’t even apologized yet!”

Elyse turned back slowly, her gaze icy as she stared at Thea. A cold smirk played at the corners of her mouth. “If you want me to apologize, fine, but Claire must first apologize for insulting my father.”

Claire’s eyes flared with indignation as she immediately retorted, “Why should I? I wasn’t wrong! Your father’s nothing but a loser who couldn’t make it on his own, so he asked you to come crawling back home to fight for an inheritance!”

Claire’s mother’s face twisted into a grimace. “What nonsense are you spouting? Who put these ideas in your head?”

Claire, taken aback by the sudden scolding, stood there in a daze. Had she said something wrong? Wasn't she just telling the truth?

Elyse, maintaining her composure, turned her gaze to Claire and spoke with measured calmness. "Miss Lipson, I don't know where you heard these rumors, but my father has been dead for over twenty years."

Chapter 677:

Claire's eyes widened in disbelief. She instinctively glanced at Thea, but Thea didn't dare to meet her gaze.

"I... I didn't know," Claire stammered, her face draining of color as her voice dwindled to a pathetic whisper.

Elyse's expression hardened. "Now, do you still expect an apology from me?"

The intensity of Elyse's stare sent a chill down Claire's spine.

Desperately seeking refuge, Claire hid behind her mother. She attempted to feign magnanimity and said shakily, "Well, since you're so pitiful, I won't demand an apology from you."

Elyse, uninterested in wasting any more of her time here, swiftly turned on her heel to leave.

"Stop right there!"

This time, it was Felicia's voice that rang out, sharp and authoritative.

Elyse turned back to look Felicia in the eye. What could she possibly want by detaining her?

“Apologize.” Felicia’s eyes glinted coldly, her voice as cold and unforgiving as a winter storm.

Refusing to back down, Elyse held Felicia’s gaze defiantly. “Miss Lipson already said she doesn’t need my apology.”

“That’s her choice not to pursue it. However, I believe you owe it to her. Apologize.” Felicia’s tone was businesslike, her expression unreadable as she stared Elyse down.

After a tense moment, Elyse broke the silence, her voice steady and unwavering. “I won’t apologize. I did nothing wrong.”

As though expecting such a response, Felicia’s lips curled into a mocking smile. “Such a stubborn girl. You won’t apologize, huh? Fine. I’ll just lock you in the dark room and starve you for three days.”

Claire’s mother, feeling that the punishment was too severe, tried to mediate. “Forget it. It’s just a minor squabble between girls. There’s no need for such a harsh punishment.”

Felicia’s gaze remained cold and unyielding. “Every member of the Benson family knows that actions have consequences. Elyse refuses to acknowledge her wrongdoing, so she will face double the punishment.”

Felicia turned to the maid. “Lock her up. And remember, anyone caught sneaking her food will join her in her starvation.”

As Felicia’s words hung in the air like a death sentence, the maid approached Elyse.

Elyse struggled to free herself, but her movements pulled painfully at the injury on her back, causing her to gasp in pain.

Thea secretly reveled in watching Elyse being dragged away, but she masked her satisfaction with feigned concern. “Grandma, Elyse still seems so defiant. Doesn’t she understand she’s in the wrong?”

“Hmph!” Felicia snorted with disdain. “Starving for three days will make her see the light. I know how to handle a tough one.”

Thea, noting Felicia’s obvious disdain for Elyse, felt a wave of relief wash over her.

Claire’s mother, thoroughly rattled by the scene she had just witnessed, grabbed Claire and quickly left, eager to escape the oppressive atmosphere.

Claire was practically dragged out of the house by her mother, who shot her an angry glare. Feeling indignant, Claire protested, “Mom, what’s with that look? I didn’t do anything wrong!”

Her mother, seething with anger, jabbed a finger at Claire’s forehead. “The Benson family never mentioned Rickey’s death. How come you kept spouting nonsense about him? And how on earth did you learn that Elyse was back? Even I didn’t know!”

Claire’s head hung low under her mother’s sharp scolding.

Chapter 678:

Arms crossed over her chest, her mother stared daggers at her and asked in a low voice, “Was it that Thea girl who told you?”

After a few moments of heavy silence, Claire reluctantly nodded. “We’re good friends, so Thea mentioned Elyse to me.”

“And she conveniently left out the part about Felicia’s plans to distribute her shares and properties? Elyse probably only came back to compete with Thea for a piece of the pie. Do you really think Thea told you about Elyse just out of friendship?” Claire’s mother was exasperated.

As a lady from elite circles, she had witnessed countless schemes and deceptions in her life, and she had shielded Claire from them all. But now, Claire was so sheltered she couldn’t see she was being manipulated.

Claire scratched her head, utterly bewildered by her mother’s words.

Looking at Claire's big, doe-like eyes, her mother's initial anger gave way to a deep frustration. Claire was her daughter, after all. She couldn't just abandon her.

With a sigh, she said irritably, "Go home. And stay away from Thea for a while."

Meanwhile, back inside the Bensons' estate, Elyse was shoved into a pitch-black room by a stern-faced maid. She stumbled forward, crashing heavily onto the cold, hard floor.

The maid, without uttering a word, promptly shut the door with a finality that echoed through the darkened space.

In the blink of an eye, Elyse was plunged into darkness. But she wasn't scared; she was no stranger to cramped, pitch-black spaces, having been confined to such rooms countless times by Lanny.

On the contrary, instead of feeling terror, a strange sense of calm enveloped her.

The injury on her back, however, pulsed agonizingly. She fumbled her way to the wall, her fingertips brushing the cold, rough surface, and slumped down against it, exhaustion quickly dragging her into a restless slumber.

She had no sense of time in the darkness. Minutes, hours, perhaps even days could have slipped by unnoticed until a heated argument outside the door roused her from her fitful sleep.

Groggily, she forced her eyes open just as a tall, imposing figure burst through the door, spilling light into the room.

"My dear niece, I'm here. Don't be afraid," said a calm, reassuring voice.

The man was none other than Pearce's father, Brian Benson.

Elyse blinked, trying to clear her foggy mind. Pearce had set up a video call for her to meet his father, and now, seeing Brian in the flesh, she felt a flicker of hope.

She struggled to rise and greet him, but her body betrayed her, sapped of strength.

Weakly, she raised her hand and rasped, “Uncle Brian, I don’t feel so good.”

Brian had just returned from an out-of-town trip. As soon as he arrived, he overheard the maids gossiping about Elyse being locked up, so he rushed to the basement.

Elyse was, after all, the only child of his brother; in his eyes, Felicia’s punishment was too harsh.

Brian barged into the basement, the sight of his niece in such a sorry state igniting a primal, protective anger in him. He quickly knelt beside her, his hand pressing gently against her forehead, which was burning hot. “Do you have a fever?” he asked, concern etching deep lines into his face.

Elyse leaned against the wall, her body trembling slightly as her eyes grew unfocused. “I don’t know. I just feel a bit cold.”

Brian couldn’t stand to see her looking so fragile and weak. Without hesitation, he scooped her up and bolted for the door.

Just then, Thea appeared, blocking his way. Her eyes flashed with resolve as she stood firm.

Chapter 679:

“Move!” Brian spat, his voice laced with urgency.

Thea’s face twisted with anger, but she held her temper. “Grandma said Elyse should be locked up for three days with no food to teach her a lesson. You can’t go against Grandma’s orders.”

As Thea spoke, her gaze flitted over to Elyse. Elyse’s eyes were tightly shut, her face pale and drawn, but otherwise, she didn’t look too unwell.

Thea said with a sneer, “She’s only missed one meal and is already acting like she’s on death’s door. Who’s she trying to fool? Uncle Brian, put her down, or else Grandma will get mad.”

Brian’s eyes narrowed into icy slits. “I told you before, don’t call me uncle. I want nothing to do with you.”

Thea opened her mouth to protest, but Brian brushed past her, carrying Elyse out the door and straight to the hospital.

At the hospital, relief washed over Brian when the doctor confirmed Elyse only had a low fever. But that relief quickly turned to horror when they discovered a ten-centimeter bloody wound on her back, the flesh raw and exposed.

Rage simmered in Brian’s chest when he learned that this was his own family’s doing, his hands shaking as he dialed Pearce’s number.

When Pearce didn’t answer, Brian kept calling, his anger building with each unanswered ring.

Ten minutes later, Pearce finally picked up.

“Hey, Dad. Are you home already? I just finished a meeting. Where are you now? I’ll come to you.”

Grinding his teeth, Brian hissed angrily, “Where am I? I’m at the hospital! Get your ass over here and take care of Elyse!”

Pearce was baffled. How on earth did Elyse end up in the hospital? Everything seemed fine with her the last time he saw her. Nevertheless, he rushed to the hospital at his father’s beckoning and found Elyse in a miserable state.

“I just went to the office for a meeting, yet in that short window of time, they actually dared to hurt Elyse?” he exclaimed in disbelief.

“Didn’t I tell you to take good care of her before I left for my business trip?” Brian scolded, his face contorted in anger. “You said you would, so I went ahead and left her in your care. Now, look at what happened!”

Eyes dark with gloom, he continued, “I have to leave again tomorrow night. With me gone, can you still protect Elyse?”

Pearce pursed his lips into a thin line, his expression sour. After making some calls to get a better understanding of the situation, he gritted his teeth and said, “It turns out this was Thea’s doing. She and her father still haven’t given up on seizing power.”

After checking that Elyse’s IV drip was flowing properly, Brian took a deep breath and regained his composure. “Your grandmother plans to distribute her shares—and she owns 45% of the company. If they get their dirty hands on those shares, Thea and her father will have a real voice in the Benson family and in the company.”

Pearce sank into the plush chair next to Elyse’s hospital bed, running his fingers through his hair in frustration. “Maybe I shouldn’t have brought Elyse back—at least, not at this time,” he mumbled.

Brian shook his head gently. “Don’t overthink it. We brought Elyse back to reunite with her family members, not to pit her against Thea for your grandmother’s inheritance.”

“But it’s obvious Thea sees Elyse as a threat,” Pearce protested with a helpless sigh. “She really went way too far today.”

Brian frowned slightly, a hint of weariness in his voice. “Haven’t you noticed? Thea only dares to bully Elyse because your grandmother silently approves of it.”

“But why? Why would Grandma do this to Elyse? Elyse didn’t do anything wrong. It’s one thing for Grandma not to like her, but to let others mistreat her?” Pearce’s agitation grew at the thought of Felicia’s cold attitude towards Elyse.

Chapter 680:

He had always seen his grandmother as a kind and gentle soul, but when it came to Elyse, Felicia transformed into someone he barely recognized.

“She...” Brian hesitated, a growing suspicion gnawing at his heart, but he wasn’t ready to voice it.

After a moment’s pause, he shifted gears. “Just protect Elyse. She’s been through a lot.”

Pearce nodded earnestly. “Don’t worry, Dad. I won’t let them touch her again.”

“Hope so,” Brian said with a sigh, glancing at his watch before heading back to his car for an upcoming meeting.

About an hour later, Elyse stirred, her eyes fluttering open to see Pearce dozing off by her bedside. Her vision was blurry, and in her weakened state, the emotions she had long suppressed bubbled to the surface.

“Jayden...”

The second this name escaped her lips, Elyse jolted fully awake. Her heart raced as she bit down on her lower lip, refusing to acknowledge the fact that she had just called out Jayden’s name.

Pearce, roused by her sudden movement, yawned and asked, “What did you say just now? I didn’t catch it.”

“Nothing.” Elyse quickly shook her head, trying to regain her composure. Then, she suddenly realized something. “Wait a second. Pearce, why are you here? Where’s Uncle Brian?”

“He’s taking a meeting in the car, but he’ll come back when he’s done.”

Pearce, now fully awake, straightened up in his seat, his expression turning serious. “Listen, Elyse, if any member of the Bensons ever invites you to anything and I’m not around, don’t go.”

Elyse lowered her gaze and clenched the edge of the covers tightly. “I wasn’t invited,” she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper. “I was forced to come. I didn’t want to, but I had no choice.”

Pearce nodded, concern etched on his face. “I know. This whole thing involves the Lipson family. I also know Claire—she’s all looks and no substance, always hanging out with Thea. It’s best if you steer clear of both of them.”

Outwardly, Elyse agreed, nodding along, but inside, she felt a spark of defiance. She wasn’t afraid of them. If anyone should be doing the avoiding, it was those two.

After a moment of silence, Elyse’s curiosity got the better of her. “Pearce, do you have a way to convince Grandma to listen to me play the violin?”

Pearce’s expression darkened immediately. “Why are you still fixated on playing the violin for her? Can’t you play for someone else, like me or my parents? My mom’s out of town, but my dad’s here. I’m sure he’d love to hear you play.”

Elyse shook her head, her determination unwavering. “I’ll definitely play for your parents if they’d like, but things are different with Grandma. She has to hear me play.”

“Honestly, Grandma has a deep-seated aversion towards the violin because of your father,” Pearce confessed, running his fingers through his hair with a troubled look. “Just the sound of it makes her angry. I’m not sure I can help with that.”

“Please, Pearce.” Elyse reached out and gently clasped her cousin’s hand, her voice soft and earnest. “I want to do this before I go abroad for the competition. Pearce, please, help me.”

Pearce’s lips twitched into an uncontrollable smile. Despite his efforts to appear composed, amusement sparkled in his eyes as he caved to Elyse’s request. “What am I going to do about you?” he sighed helplessly. “Since you really want to, fine, I’ll help you.”

Elyse, seeing Pearce struggle to stifle his laughter, smiled warmly. She felt a rush of gratitude for having such a caring family.