

Bound love 681

Chapter 681:

About ten minutes later, Brian concluded his video conference and returned to the ward. When he saw that Elyse was bright-eyed, he exhaled a sigh of relief, a warm smile spreading across his face. “Looks like you’re recovering well.”

“All thanks to you, Uncle Brian,” Elyse replied, beaming at him.

Then, she asked hesitantly, “But you’re the one who took me out of there against Grandma’s wishes. How will you explain it to her?”

Brian gave her a reassuring nod. “I’ll handle her. Don’t worry about that; she won’t blame you.”

Feeling reassured, Elyse’s mood brightened again, and she announced, “I’m feeling better now. Can I go home? I don’t like being cooped up in the hospital.”

Pearce, respecting her wishes, immediately agreed. “If you don’t want to stay here, I’ll take you home.”

Seeing Pearce fuss over Elyse like a dutiful older brother, Brian was deeply touched. It was as though ever since Elyse entered their lives, his son had grown more mature.

After being dropped off at home, Elyse bid farewell to Brian and Pearce. As soon as she opened the door and walked into the yard, Gavin emerged, a smile lighting up his face.

“I heard the door and wondered if it was you,” Gavin said, bounding over to her. “I’m so glad you’re back!”

Gavin patted her shoulder, and Elyse was immediately taken aback by his cool touch. “Gavin, how long were you waiting in the courtyard? You’re freezing!”

“I was worried about you,” Gavin’s eyes lingered on Elyse, his hesitation visible in the furrow of his brows. After several false starts, he finally let out a heavy sigh. “It’s okay, Elyse. Sometimes even blood relatives can’t love you the way you deserve.”

A hush fell between them before Elyse broke the silence, her voice barely above a whisper. “Did Pearce tell you everything?”

Gavin’s smile was tinged with bitterness. “He couldn’t hide it, even if he tried. Come inside. Mr. Tucker’s waiting for you.”

Elyse nodded and quietly followed Gavin into the house.

Cody was sitting on the sofa, his fingers deftly working on replacing a broken violin string. The soft twang of the string echoed in the quiet room.

Gavin and Elyse took their seats, their eyes fixed on Cody’s meticulous movements.

Once the new string was in place, Cody looked up, his voice deep. “We’ll be moving on from Cambape in a few days.”

Elyse’s eyes widened in surprise. She turned to Gavin, brows raised, “Weren’t we supposed to stay for two weeks?”

“What difference does it make if we stay for two weeks or a few days?” Cody chuckled, his tone gentle but firm. “A few days won’t change anything. Elyse, don’t waste your time on people who don’t love you. You need to focus on loving yourself, understand?”

Cody’s words hung in the air, heavy with earnestness.

Elyse remained silent for a moment, absorbing the weight of his advice. Finally, she nodded, her voice steady. “I understand, Mr. Tucker.”

“Get some rest. You’ve had a long day.”

Cody’s voice was like a warm blanket of concern, wrapping around Elyse’s weary soul.

Even if she didn't have the tender embrace of her grandmother's love, she was enveloped by her mentor's unwavering care. Familial love wasn't a necessity, she realized; the bond between a mentor and their student could be equally profound, filling the empty spaces in her heart.

Chapter 682:

With this newfound understanding, Elyse felt a serene peace wash over her. But she couldn't leave Cambape just yet; Felicia still had to hear her play the violin.

The next day, an unexpected visitor disrupted the quiet.

Gavin eyed the man in front of him with palpable disdain, thoroughly disgusted by the lecherous grin on the visitor's face. "Mr. Ewing, how many times do I have to tell you?" Gavin hissed, his voice tinged with irritation, "My teacher isn't accepting any performances. He's focused on his student's competition, not your schemes."

Grayson Ewing, a director of a TV station, rubbed his hands together, a nervous habit, as he responded, "But this time's different! I really hope Mr. Tucker can be a guest at our TV station's charity event. His presence would definitely draw in more celebrities and support."

Gavin rolled his eyes in exasperation. "Really? Because I've heard that your TV station's charity events are nothing but money-making scams."

Grayson wiped the cold sweat from his brow, his smile faltering. "That's not true. The previous director was corrupt, yes, but he's been imprisoned. I'm the new director as of this year," he said, laughing awkwardly. "Our TV station's reputation was tarnished by the last director, and now, many people..."

Gavin rubbed his brow in frustration. "Even if you say so, how can I be sure you're sincere? Besides, Mr. Tucker doesn't accept commercial performances. Please, leave."

Grayson, narrowing his eyes thoughtfully, hesitated for a moment before speaking. "Actually, we were also hoping you might consider attending the charity event, Mr. Cramer."

Gavin's mouth twitched with irritation. After a long pause, he finally said, "So brazen."

Grayson grasped Gavin's arm desperately. "I know it may seem like I'm only interested in your fame, but I genuinely want to contribute to the charity. I really have no other options."

At that moment, Elyse, drawn by the commotion, approached and saw a portly man clinging to Gavin. Curious, she inquired, "Gavin, who's this?"

"Director of Cambape Television, Grayson Ewing," Gavin replied tersely. He then gently but firmly pried Grayson's fingers off his arm. "I can't assist. The previous director did so much damage that rebuilding trust will be impossible."

Grayson, his eyes brimming with frustration, made one last plea. "Mr. Cramer, don't be so quick to refuse. I can show you the welfare homes supported by our station. The children there are counting on us."

Gavin raised an eyebrow skeptically. "It all sounds like just showbiz. Anyone can put on an act."

Grayson's face fell, the desperation evident. Despite his unkempt appearance, his desire to help was genuine.

Elyse, noticing the distressed look on Grayson's face, asked curiously, "Who are you planning to invite to this charity event?"

"We're reaching out to major elite families in Cambape and prominent social figures," Grayson explained with a heavy sigh. "The previous director's corruption scandal has left us in a tough spot. Despite our efforts, rebuilding trust has been an uphill battle."

He had been thrust into the role at a crucial time, left to clean up the mess left by his predecessor. Unlike most new directors, who start with a splash, Grayson's task was to salvage what was left.

He touched his rounded face, anxious about his future. If he couldn't turn things around, he feared he might become the shortest-serving director in Cambape Television's history.

Grayson, dejected, appealed once again, "Mr. Cramer, please, give me a chance. Trust me just once, and I promise I won't let you down."

Gavin remained indecisive, but Elyse, smiling, interjected, "Mr. Ewing, would you consider inviting me to the charity event?"

Chapter 683:

Grayson's confusion was evident. He didn't recognize Elyse; to him, she was just a well-dressed young woman. "You?" he asked, bewildered. "I don't think I know you. Who are you?"

Calmly, Elyse took out her phone, Googled her name, and showed him the information. Grayson stared at the screen, then looked up in surprise. "Champion of the Champions Cup? And the last disciple of Mr. Tucker? Are you really willing to attend the charity event?"

Elyse nodded, then said, "I'll agree to attend, but only if you can prove to me that your intentions are genuinely charitable. Otherwise, I won't participate."

Grayson's eyes brightened with hope. He quickly pulled out his phone and began showing her various documents and donation records. The evidence quickly dispelled Elyse's doubts.

With Elyse confirmed for the event, Grayson was visibly moved, his eyes welling with tears. "Even though Mr. Tucker can't make it, having his disciple attend means a lot to us."

"I have a small favor to ask. Can you help me out?" Elyse leaned in and whispered a request into Grayson's ear.

A flicker of confusion crossed his face, but he nodded earnestly. "I'll do my best to accommodate your request."

Once Grayson had left, Gavin asked her, “What made you decide to participate in the charity event?”

Elyse responded candidly, “He seemed genuinely distressed, and I felt compelled to help.”

Gavin smiled at her empathy. “Do you think he really lacks resources and connections? His initial target was Mr. Tucker.”

Elyse shrugged nonchalantly. “I understand what he’s thinking, but it’s fine. This opportunity will be good for me. It’s my last performance before the competition abroad.”

Gavin’s curiosity was evident. “What did you whisper to him then? What’s he going to help you with?”

Elyse flashed a knowing smile. “That’s a secret. You’ll just have to wait and see.”

Cody emerged from his room and sauntered toward Elyse and Gavin, who were deep in a hushed conversation. He interjected with a hint of amusement in his voice, “Instead of diligently practicing your instruments, what mischievous plot are you two concocting?”

Gavin responded quickly, “Elyse has kindly agreed to perform at Grayson Ewing’s charity event!”

Feeling Cody’s intense stare, Elyse dropped her gaze, her voice filled with regret. “Grayson was so disheartened, I couldn’t refuse. If anyone is to blame, let it be me.”

“Blame you?” Cody’s tone softened as he asked. “It’s great that you want to perform, but isn’t the event tomorrow? Have you picked out an evening gown yet?”

Elyse paused, then turned to Gavin, her voice uncertain, “I don’t have a gown for it.”

Gavin looked from Elyse to Cody, his expression resigned. "I'll go shopping with you after lunch."

Elyse let out a relieved laugh and bounced off to the yard to rehearse her performance.

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An hour later, Gavin drove Elyse to the mall. While browsing through the dresses, they encountered Thea, who was accompanied by an unfamiliar teenage boy.

Elyse caught Thea's eye, her mind racing back to Pearce's plea from last night. A wave of discomfort overwhelmed her, and she quickly looked away, feigning ignorance of Thea's presence. Elyse did not fully grasp the extent of Thea's resentment toward her.

Determined to avoid any conflict, Elyse hoped to keep away from Thea's provocations. However, Thea seemed intent on causing trouble.

Chapter 684:

Thea approached Elyse, her arms crossed, her tone laced with mockery. "Look at you, out of trouble in just a few hours thanks to your hero."

A playful smirk appeared on Elyse's face as she met Thea's eyes. "Feeling angry? Or are you just eager to drag me back to that dark basement?"

Thea scoffed. "Wrongdoers deserve punishment. Otherwise, they'll never recognize their mistakes."

"In that case, you should be in that place more than I should," Elyse retorted, her smile cold. "You can't keep bending the rules forever. Eventually, your luck will run out."

"You're just a smart mouth!" Thea hissed.

Elyse shrugged, her laughter tinged with mockery. "I'll take that as a compliment."

“Who’s she?” the young boy standing next to Thea asked, his eyes filled with curiosity as he looked at Elyse.

Thea hesitated, considering her words carefully. “She’s... the daughter of the man who left the Benson family years ago.”

Upon hearing of Elyse’s background, Forrest Bentley examined her more closely, his gaze thoughtful.

Feeling the intensity of his scrutiny, Elyse instinctively stepped back, putting some distance between them.

After a moment, Forrest ended his observation and offered his hand to Elyse. “It’s a pleasure to meet you,” he said, smiling. “I hope we can get along.”

Elyse hesitated just long enough to accept Forrest’s handshake, then briefly shook it. “I must be going,” she announced. “I have other commitments.” With that, she grabbed Gavin’s arm and quickly walked away.

Forrest watched Elyse as she departed. “Is she really Rickey’s daughter?” he inquired.

Thea nodded. “Yes. Are you interested in her?”

“A bit,” Forrest confessed.

Thea experienced a surge of jealousy. Forrest had only just met Elyse, yet he seemed already intrigued by her. Thea had been trying to get close to the Bentley family for over a year by courting Forrest.

“Elyse spells trouble,” Thea cautioned. “She’s returned to the Benson family only to claim the inheritance.”

Forrest responded with a dismissive shrug. “So what? Disputes over inheritance are typical. Even Pearce had to battle to secure his position as head of the family.”

With a sardonic smile and his eyes on Thea, he retorted, “You might want it, but you have no chance. After all, you’re not a Benson by blood, are you?”

Thea’s face paled. She had endured Forrest’s taunts for a year, and this was the best he could offer?

“Spare me that wounded look; you’re not pretty enough to carry it off.” Forrest dismissed her with a glance that lacked any hint of sympathy.

Chapter 685:

Having splurged on a grand new gown, Elyse poured her anticipation into meticulous preparations for the charity event the next day.

However, upon arriving at the opulent venue, she was confronted with Grayson’s elaborate setup—a dazzling array of media outlets and celebrities filled the space. Elyse made her way backstage, seeking the sanctuary of the dressing room, but unexpectedly ran into a familiar face.

“Richie! What are you doing here?” Elyse exclaimed, her voice filled with surprise as she quickly approached him, clutching her violin case tightly.

Richie, equally surprised to see Elyse, replied, “Are you performing at this charity event? It’s such a lucky coincidence—I am too!”

A wave of elation swept over Elyse as she declared, “Fantastic! It’s so reassuring to know I’m not the only one here supporting this great cause!”

Richie gave a light shake of his head. “I’m actually here on business. The TV station is paying me well to attend. What about you? How much are you being paid to perform?”

Elyse’s smile faltered, her expression shifting to uncertainty. “Grayson paid you? How much did he give you?”

Richie scratched his head, looking puzzled. “I’m not sure. My performance fees are quite high, and most people can’t afford them. You’d need to ask my agent for the exact amount.”

Elyse’s smile vanished, replaced by a cool indifference. She waved her hand dismissively. “I have nothing more to discuss with you.”

Richie blinked and then said, “Come on now. No one really believes that people who perform at such high-profile events are doing it purely for charity, do they?”

Elyse felt a sting from his words. Angrily, she punched Richie’s arm and said through gritted teeth, “I admit I’m inexperienced. This won’t happen again.”

Richie chuckled heartily, then asked, “Did your husband come to Cambape too? Didn’t he try to stop you when he saw how naive you are?”

Mention of Jayden caused a pang in Elyse’s heart. She avoided eye contact and stammered, “He-he doesn’t know I agreed to perform here.”

Richie’s eyes widened with understanding. “Ah, I see. If he knew, he definitely wouldn’t let you be so easily fooled. Your man’s got brains sharper than a ninja sword! I mean, did he learn all his tricks from a cunning fox or what?”

Elyse couldn’t help but laugh at his description. “Your characterization is amusing, but let’s keep it between us. Jayden wouldn’t appreciate hearing it.”

Richie laughed and said, “As long as you don’t tell, Jayden won’t find out. It’s between us.”

A hint of sadness flickered in Elyse’s eyes. She wondered if she would ever get the chance to see Jayden again.

After chatting for a while, they both headed to their lounges to prepare for their performances.

In the lounge, Elyse sat before the mirror, putting on her makeup. A staff member with a name tag entered and whispered something to her. After hearing the message, Elyse asked the staff member to leave.

Chapter 686:

Twenty minutes later, Elyse waited backstage, ready to perform. As the host introduced her, Elyse gracefully made her way to the center of the stage.

The members of the Benson family below displayed a range of emotions upon seeing Elyse.

Brian and Pearce looked pleased and eagerly anticipated her performance. Thea's expression was one of barely concealed hostility, her teeth clenched in frustration. How could Elyse steal the spotlight at such an event? Felicia's expression, meanwhile, was stormy, as if her anger could erupt at any moment.

On stage, Elyse's eyes swept over the audience and found the Benson family. Spotting Felicia, she felt a surge of satisfaction. This was her chance to play a piece for Felicia.

As the stage lights shifted, Elyse struck a poised pose. A soft spotlight illuminated her, making her shine and capturing the audience's full attention.

Elyse waited for the right moment and noticed Felicia, leaning on a cane, decisively leaving the audience. Thea followed closely behind.

Elyse felt a pang of disappointment. Did Felicia really not want to hear her violin performance that much?

Despite being disheartened, Elyse quickly composed herself to focus on the task at hand. She prepared to play "Träumerei," a piece strongly requested by Grayson. He believed it perfectly reflected the sentiments of the TV station. Although Elyse felt the piece was a bit too melancholic for a charity gala, she had promised to perform it.

Following that performance, Elyse transitioned to "Hungarian Dance," a lively and cheerful melody that instantly captivated the audience.

In the audience, Gavin watched Elyse's performance with a chuckle. "She sure knows how to show off her talent."

After Elyse played her final note on the violin, the audience erupted into a warm round of applause. However, despite the cheers, Elyse felt a twinge of disappointment gnawing at her. She bowed gracefully, masking her feelings behind a practiced smile, and made her way off the stage.

Grayson, grinning from ear to ear, approached her with enthusiastic claps. "As expected from Mr. Tucker's star disciple! Elyse, your performance was absolutely mesmerizing, even for me—and I don't even understand classical music!"

Elyse's gaze flitted over to Grayson, her thoughts returning to Richie's recent words. She returned his smile, though hers was tinged with something sharper. "Mr. Ewing, you're too kind. Don't forget to send over my performance fee, okay?"

Grayson's smile faltered, replaced by a pitiful expression. "Er, Elyse, our TV station has been struggling lately. The previous director left such a mess, and we're really tight on funds..."

He theatrically wiped his eyes with his chubby hand, but Elyse remained unmoved.

"If you don't pay me, it will be a great disrespect to my teacher," Elyse pointed out, her eyes flashing with determination. "I'd have no choice but to inform him."

Panic flashed across Grayson's face, and he quickly shifted his demeanor, rubbing his hands together nervously. "Please, don't be hasty. It wouldn't be good for our friendship. I'll make sure you get your payment soon."

Satisfied with his response, Elyse nodded and then turned toward the lounge.

Chapter 687:

As she approached, she noticed Richie's agent pacing anxiously in front of the door, worry written all over his face.

“What’s wrong?” Elyse called out, her curiosity piqued. “Is Richie being difficult again?”

The agent rushed over to her, anxiety etched across his features. “The singer set to duet with Richie missed her flight! She won’t land for another hour, and their performance is in ten minutes! What are we going to do?”

“What were they supposed to perform?”

“They were supposed to sing together—a duet!”

Elyse tapped her chin thoughtfully. “But isn’t Richie tone-deaf? How was he supposed to pull that off?”

The agent declared with unwavering confidence, “The pay is generous enough. Even if Richie is tone-deaf, he can still stand on stage and muddle through one song.”

Elyse was stunned into silence, unsure how to respond.

Perhaps because his agent had been gone a while, Richie emerged from the lounge, his expression puzzled. “Is the other singer here yet? I’m about to go on stage.”

The agent shook his head, looking apologetic. “It seems you’ll have to perform alone.”

Richie’s eyes widened in disbelief. “How can that be? I can’t sing! Do you want me to lose all my fans?”

The agent’s face twisted with frustration. If he had known the other performer would fail to show up, he never would have booked this gig for Richie.

After giving it some thought, Elyse suggested, “How about I go onstage with you?”

Richie eyed Elyse with skepticism. “You can sing?”

“No,” Elyse admitted with a chuckle, “but I can play the violin to help you find the rhythm. Usually, people struggle with singing because they lack a sense of melody and don’t know how to stay on beat. They sing too freely and go off-key.”

Richie looked between Elyse and his agent, his uncertainty evident. “Well... It’s worth a shot!”

Together, the two headed into the lounge to start practicing.

Time was of the essence, and they managed only a few hurried rehearsals before the staff ushered them to the backstage area.

Standing backstage, Richie took a deep breath, his nerves clearly frazzled. “God! I’m never singing again after this. Music is definitely not my forte.”

Elyse gently placed a hand on his shoulder, her voice soothing. “Don’t worry. I’ll guide you through it.”

Richie took a deep breath, his heart pounding as he stepped onto the stage with Elyse.

The moment Richie appeared onstage, the auditorium erupted in deafening screams from his adoring fans. Elyse couldn’t hide her amazement, her eyes twinkling with admiration at the power Richie commanded. His fame was undeniable, and the frenzy of the audience only confirmed it.

Filled with inspiration, she positioned her violin under her chin and started to play.

The opening notes of “Can’t Stop the Feeling” filled the air, and although Richie lacked in his vocal abilities, he had a natural talent for hyping up the crowd. Richie stole a quick glance at Elyse, who met his gaze with a warm, encouraging smile.

Emboldened, he began to sing. As the performance progressed, he discovered that by mirroring Elyse’s rhythm and melody, he stayed perfectly in tune. A surge of excitement coursed through him, and in a spontaneous burst of enthusiasm, he leaped off the stage, diving into the sea of fans to interact with them up close.

Chapter 688:

Elyse's heart leaped to her throat at Richie's unexpected move, but she maintained her composure and continued playing the violin, her fingers dancing over the strings with practiced ease.

Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Richie stopping in front of Claire, who was sitting in the front row, and ceremoniously placed his cap on her head.

Claire reacted dramatically. She collapsed into her friend's arms, overcome with excitement, her face a mix of disbelief and adoration.

Elyse's eyebrows shot up in surprise. Was Richie Claire's idol?

Richie bounded back onto the stage, his exhilaration contagious as he circled around Elyse while singing, his energy pulling her in.

Unable to resist, Elyse began to dance, her movements synchronized with the beat and Richie's infectious enthusiasm.

As Elyse twirled, her eyes caught Claire's gaze, now filled with a mixture of envy and resentment.

Elyse's smile suddenly faded as she pondered whether Claire might be targeting her because of her friendship with Richie. As the final note of the song lingered in the air, Richie felt relief wash over him.

Once Richie and Elyse were off the stage, Richie let out a long sigh. "I won't do another commercial performance again. My heart was racing the entire time."

Elyse, busy packing her violin, flashed a reassuring smile. "I think you did great. You went off-key a few times, but you recovered quickly."

Richie looked up, a bit embarrassed. “You really shouldn’t say anything. It doesn’t make me feel better.”

Elyse shrugged, closing her violin case. “Well, it’s over now. I should get going.”

Richie nodded, his expression thoughtful. “Are you heading back to Watscar? Please give my regards to your husband. I’d love to catch up with both of you over a meal. Since commercial performances are off the table, I need to dive into my acting career.”

Elyse managed a faint smile. “Running low on roles?”

Richie nodded, stroking his chin. “I’m in search of good ones.”

“I’ll see what I can help with in the future,” Elyse said with a chuckle before heading out.

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Elyse wove through the crowd until she found Gavin. With a hint of curiosity in her voice, she asked, “How did I do on stage?”

Gavin flashed a thumbs up. “You’re looking more and more like a professional violinist. I’m really proud of you.”

Elyse’s smile widened. “Great! Let’s head back. I need to report my performance to Mr. Tucker.”

Gavin held up his phone. “Don’t worry about that. I recorded the whole thing. I’ll show him when we get back.”

Once home, Cody asked a few questions before settling in to watch the performance videos.

As Elyse performed solo, Cody's expression remained impassive. However, his brow furrowed when he saw her performance alongside Richie. After the video ended, Cody remarked, "It seems like accompanying him on the piano is a waste of your talents."

Elyse was amused. She was about to defend Richie when Pearce walked in.

He glanced at Elyse and said, "I need to speak with you privately about something."

Elyse was puzzled. "Is it something urgent?"

Pearce nodded gravely. "It concerns your father."

Chapter 689:

Cody's interest was piqued. "Is it related to Rickey? What's going on?"

Pearce hesitated, his expression troubled. "Victoria Bentley saw your performance today."

"Victoria Bentley?" Cody's surprise was evident. "Are you sure it was her?"

Elyse looked puzzled. "Who is she?"

Pearce nodded, turning to Elyse with an awkward look. "She was the blind date Grandma arranged for your father. She saw you in the audience and immediately approached me and my dad, inviting you to a banquet hosted by her family."

Elyse blinked. "And if I don't go, what can she do?"

Pearce's unease grew. "Actually, I'm working on a project that requires the Bentley family's resources. The Bentleys have been refusing to cooperate with us since Uncle Rickey refused Victoria. She said if you attend, she would seriously consider partnering with us."

Elyse's eyes widened in realization. "So my attendance could influence the project?"

Pearce nodded, looking helpless. "If you prefer not to go, that's fine. Victoria seems to have her own agenda. She's still holding a grudge that your dad didn't choose her and instead ended up with your mom."

Elyse sighed, contemplating her options. "I'll go. When is it?"

"Today," Pearce said with a rueful smile.

Elyse was taken aback. "Today? That's quite a coincidence."

Pearce sighed, looking resigned. "Yes, Victoria planned to host a banquet at home right after the charity event. She didn't expect to see you."

Elyse felt a mix of emotions. Was Victoria really planning something against her?

"I want to go," Elyse said after a moment of internal struggle. "Pearce, can you help me arrange it? I'm not sure I can handle this on my own."

Cody's face grew stern. "Are you sure about this? Victoria is quite unpleasant and has a sharp tongue. I've met her before."

Elyse was surprised by Cody's strong aversion to Victoria. She offered him a reassuring smile. "Mr. Tucker, I understand your concerns, but this is something I need to do as my father's daughter."

Reflecting on her father's notebook, Elyse added softly, "As his daughter, I should face those old acquaintances of his that he couldn't face on his behalf. It's something I need to do for him."

Cody's resolve remained firm. "Really, you don't have to do that for him."

Elyse touched her nose, her voice tinged with guilt. "But I'm his daughter, and I'm more than willing."

Cody looked deeply into Elyse's eyes before finally letting out a weary sigh, his expression softening. "Rickey is so lucky to have had a daughter like you." Sadly, Rickey wasn't there to watch Elyse grow up.

Before Cody could change his mind, Elyse set off with Pearce to the dressing room to get ready.

When Elyse arrived at the banquet venue, the first person she ran into was Thea.

Thea looked at Elyse in disgust, as though the latter was a dead bug stuck to the sole of her shoe. "Why are you here? This is the Bentley family's banquet. Do you even have an invitation?"

Chapter 690:

Elyse, unfazed, replied curiously, "I should be the one asking you that. Aren't the Bentley and Benson families supposed to be enemies? How'd you get an invitation?"

Thea jutted her chin out proudly. "Why would I need an invitation? I'm Forrest's friend. If I want to attend a Bentley family event, I can just walk in."

"Then you must be quite close with the Bentley family, huh?" Elyse said with a smirk.

Not wanting to waste her breath on Thea, Elyse turned around and went to look for Victoria.

However, the relentless Thea blocked her path, her face contorted with anger. "I answered your question, so you should answer mine! Tell me. How did you get in?"

"I was invited out of the blue," Elyse answered frankly. "But it was so sudden that I didn't have the time to dress up properly."

Besides, Elyse knew Victoria's invitation wasn't for casual chitchat. Dressing lavishly to an event like this would be pointless, especially since the chances of her being

drenched in red wine by the end of the night were high—after all, Victoria and Rickey hadn't exactly ended on good terms.

Thinking of this, Elyse looked down at her dress. To avoid any untoward accidents, she had specifically chosen a burgundy dress. That way, even if somebody ended up splashing her with red wine, any stains wouldn't be apparent.

Smiling, she couldn't help but swell with pride at her cleverness.

Thea continued to badger her with questions, but Elyse, lost in her own thoughts, didn't respond.

Pissed off at being ignored like this, Thea came to a conclusion. "You snuck in, didn't you?" she snapped, lips curled into an ugly sneer. "What're you scheming this time? Confess now!"

Elyse glanced at Thea indifferently. Judging by how riled up Thea was now, it was clear that her fury stemmed from some kind of deep-seated fear—perhaps she was terrified that Elyse might steal Forrest's attention away from her.

Smirking, Elyse reveled in the opportunity to taunt Thea. "I'm planning to do something naughty with Forrest," she teased, her voice dripping with feigned innocence. "What? Think you can stop me?"

Thea's face contorted in anger, her teeth clenched tightly.

The Bentley family, a formidable clan in Cambape, had long been at odds with the Bensons, and she had worked her ass off to carve out a place for herself in the Benson family.

Usually, the big clans would at least be civil with each other, even if their interests didn't align.

But over twenty years ago, Rickey's scandalous elopement had ignited a fierce feud between the two families. Despite the passage of time, the Bentleys had never forgiven the Bensons, and reconciliation seemed impossible.

So, when Thea successfully forged a friendship with Forrest, the Bensons dared to hope for a resolution.

Thea herself carried the weight of these hopes, enduring Forrest's cruel treatment because she firmly believed she could mend the rift between their families.

The last thing she needed was Elyse meddling in her delicate plans.

Panic flared in Thea's eyes as she urgently demanded, "What the fuck do you plan to do to Forrest? He's still a minor! You'd better not try anything!"

Elyse, her curiosity piqued, asked with a playful smirk, "What? Are you planning to do something to him? You said so yourself he's underage, but you're not exactly a spring chicken. Are you planning to rob the cradle?"

Thea rolled her eyes, exasperation evident on her face. "Stop being so ridiculous! I simply refuse to let you cause any trouble here. Leave now, or I'll call security!"