

Bound love 691

Chapter 691:

Elyse chuckled, her eyes gleaming with ridicule. “You can order the Bentley family’s security around? Who are you, the future hostess of the Bentley family or something?”

Thea bristled at Elyse’s taunt, her voice turning icy. “If you don’t leave, don’t blame me for being ruthless.”

With that, Thea turned on her heel to find security.

Elyse watched her retreat, finding Thea’s childish behavior amusing. But she had no interest in Forrest; she was here for Victoria.

Upon asking for directions from a passing servant, Elyse made her way to the second-floor lounge.

As she stood before the massive wooden door, she took a deep breath, bracing herself for whatever drama Victoria might unleash. Summoning her courage, Elyse raised her knuckle and rapped lightly on the door.

“Come in.”

In her mid-forties, Victoria looked both striking and intimidating. She wore a tight black dress that showed off her curves, demanding attention with her disdainful demeanor.

Her delicate face was framed by clear eyes, and her fiery red lipstick stood out. Seated in an armchair with her legs crossed, she radiated an undeniable charm.

When Victoria’s gaze landed on Elyse, her eyes seemed to frost over.

A chill ran down Elyse’s spine as she felt the intensity of Victoria’s gaze, intensified by her casual stirring of red wine in her glass.

After scrutinizing Elyse carefully, Victoria's voice carried a note of scorn as she said, "You do resemble that bitch."

Elyse shifted, her discomfort evident by the twitch of her nose. She was unsure how to respond to Victoria's remark.

Unbothered by Elyse's silence, Victoria took a sip of her wine and added, "You have more bravery than your father."

Elyse couldn't hold back her curiosity. "Do you still mind his rejection back then?"

Victoria looked down at her wine, her tone emotionless. "Without a doubt. He was the first man who rejected me. I, Victoria—beautiful, accomplished, and from a distinguished family—was considered less than your ordinary mother."

Her eyes locked with Elyse's as she smirked. "He had awful taste, don't you think? After he married your mother, he died unexpectedly."

Elyse quickly retorted, her voice shaking with anger. "They were murdered! If that hadn't happened, they would have been the happiest couple alive!"

Victoria's joyless laugh was as jarring as nails scraping on a chalkboard, "Only you would hold onto such a childish belief."

Elyse was silent for a moment before asking, "Why did you call me here?"

Victoria stood up smoothly from her armchair. She walked over to Elyse, her polished nails gently tracing Elyse's face. "I didn't expect you to come here alone. You've surprised me."

Elyse felt a shiver of fear as a sense of dread washed over her. Surely Victoria wouldn't throw a drink at her, right?

But as Elyse pondered this, she felt something hard press against her lower back.

Looking down, Elyse's eyes widened at the sight of a pistol in Victoria's hand, casually aimed at her stomach. Fear drained the color from Elyse's face, and her body tensed up.

Victoria pressed the gun harder into Elyse's stomach. "Your life will pay back what Rickey owes me. Your death might make me rethink the partnership your cousin wants so badly."

Chapter 692:

Fear was evident on Elyse's face, her voice quivered as she tried to stay calm. "Maybe we could talk this over," she suggested.

Victoria looked at Elyse with a cold, detached expression, "You are Rickey's daughter," she stated simply. "What's there to talk about?"

Taking a deep breath, Elyse asked gently, "Don't you wonder what he thinks of you?"

Victoria's grip on the gun tightened momentarily, pressing it more firmly against Elyse. Her voice had a hint of anger. "It's not wise to lie. Your dad has been dead for years. How could you possibly know what he thinks?"

Fearful that the gun might go off, Elyse controlled her fear and said, "I just know! If you want to hear, I can tell you, but first, you need to take the gun away and stop pointing it at me!"

Victoria hesitated for several seconds, then stepped back and said solemnly, "Enlighten me."

Elyse unclenched her fists. "He always felt guilty about you," she said. "He wished he could apologize to your face."

Victoria scoffed. "That's it? You must be making that up."

Elyse paused, then suddenly dropped to her knees before Victoria.

A look of astonishment appeared in Victoria's eyes. "What are you doing?"

"There's something else my father once wanted to tell you," Elyse said softly, enduring Victoria's pressure. "'Victoria, it's my fault for not choosing you. You are like a rose in my heart—romantic, free-spirited, passionate, yet cheerful. You are so perfect. I'm just a piece of shit, never a good match for you.'"

At the mention of "rose," Victoria hesitated, for Rickey had always called her that. As she got lost in these memories, Elyse said the phrase "a piece of shit." Unable to help herself, a smile appeared on her face. Only one person had ever described himself so self-deprecatingly—Rickey.

Elyse noticed Victoria's smile and sighed in relief. Her life had just been saved!

Victoria snapped back to the present and looked at Elyse. "Young lady, did your dad leave any other messages for me?"

Elyse nodded, then bowed her head and said with heartfelt sincerity, "I didn't explain things to you properly before I left, and that was my mistake. It's been so long, and every night I've thought about when I should come and apologize."

She paused, giving a wry smile. "Ms. Bentley, my father regretted not giving you a proper explanation, leaving you to face criticism and ridicule. You asked why I was brave enough to come to this meeting. It was to honor my father's wish and apologize on his behalf."

After she spoke, Elyse nervously looked at Victoria. Was Victoria going to retaliate after her honest confession?

Victoria remained motionless for a while, then her eyes sparkled with curiosity. She asked, "Where is your father's grave?"

Elyse felt uncomfortable. "My parents haven't been buried yet."

The remains of Rickey and Jazmine were still at Jayden's place.

This thought made Elyse feel weary. She realized she should have taken care of her parents' final arrangements before the divorce.

Victoria responded with a slight smile. "Is that so? Then if I want to visit his grave, you'll have to show me the way, right?"

Elyse nodded, somewhat embarrassed. "Yes, that's what I meant."

Victoria then seemed to lose interest. She leaned back, placed the gun on the table, and poured herself a drink indifferently. "Leave. Stop bothering me."

Chapter 693:

Elyse realized Victoria was sparing her. Otherwise, given Victoria's fixation on Rickey, she might have threatened Elyse with the gun.

After expressing her gratitude, Elyse quickly got up and headed for the door.

As Elyse was opening the door, Victoria called out to her. Elyse turned around anxiously. Was Victoria having second thoughts?

Unaware of Elyse's anxiety, Victoria lifted her glass and complimented, "You play the violin beautifully, just like your father."

Elyse let out a relieved sigh and smiled. "Thank you for the kind words. I hope you have a pleasant night."

Victoria didn't respond and continued drinking.

Outside the room, Elyse leaned against the wall, lost in her thoughts. She had survived what felt like a trial with Victoria.

“Dad, you really caused a lot of trouble when you were young. I’ve had to work incredibly hard to make amends.” After collecting herself, Elyse prepared to leave.

Pearce was waiting outside the Bentleys’ residence. Only Elyse had been allowed inside.

Worried that Pearce had been waiting too long, Elyse lifted her skirt and quickened her pace.

But as she entered the hall, four security guards suddenly surrounded her.

Confused, Elyse noticed Thea emerging from behind the guards.

Thea stood confidently before the four guards, a smug smile on her face. “Elyse, you’ve made it quite difficult for me to track you down. You sneaked into the Bentleys’ place and stirred up trouble.”

Elyse was baffled. “Trouble? What are you talking about?”

Thea said, “If you weren’t causing trouble, then what were you doing there for the last half hour? I’ve been searching for you for a while and couldn’t find you.”

Elyse chuckled lightly. “I had my reasons for visiting the Bentleys. Now that I’ve accomplished what I needed, I’m leaving.”

Thea looked at her suspiciously. “And what exactly brought you here?” She guessed Elyse probably went there to meet Forrest. She must have been trying to curry favor with Forrest.

Elyse smiled. “I don’t think I owe you an explanation for my visit here.”

“Arrest her! She’s definitely been up to no good.” Convinced of Elyse’s mischief, Thea promptly ordered the guards to escort Elyse out.

Elyse frowned and protested, “What are you doing? Let me go! I can walk on my own.”

Thea's tone was cold. "Elyse, just because you're back doesn't mean you can replace me. Don't even think about claiming what isn't yours. Your greed is repulsive."

Elyse thought Thea was being overly paranoid. When had she ever expressed a desire to take Thea's place?

Elyse struggled vigorously, but the guards held firm and she was trapped.

At that moment, everyone at the banquet turned their eyes toward Elyse, and they began whispering, wondering who she was.

Just when Elyse felt her reputation might be irreparably damaged, Forrest appeared. He was dressed in a black suit with a red earring stud, exuding a blend of nobility and menace, far from appearing youthful.

Forrest eyed the distressed Elyse and commanded sternly, "Release her. Elyse is here at the invitation of the Bentley family. Don't be disrespectful to her."

Chapter 694:

With an order from Forrest, Elyse was freed.

She moved her hands and arched an eyebrow at Thea, her eyes twinkling with pride.

Unbeknownst to Elyse, her look was like a provocation in Thea's eyes.

Thea was clenching her teeth, nearly grinding them to bits. She was baffled by Forrest's sudden warmth towards Elyse.

Trying to mask her irritation with a forced smile, Thea inquired curiously, "Elyse is Rickey's daughter. You've always despised their family. Why are you treating her kindly now?"

Elyse looked at Thea, taken aback by her boldness and forthrightness.

In front of everyone, Thea had exposed Elyse's identity. It seemed like she was challenging Forrest too, wasn't she?

Elyse quickly glanced at Forrest. As she expected, he looked dissatisfied.

Forrest's eyes grew colder as he looked at Thea. He responded indifferently, "This is my home. Here, my words are law. Are you questioning my authority?"

Thea was scared.

This was the first time Forrest had treated her so coldly, and it shook her sense of security. She desperately wanted an explanation from Forrest. But she knew better than to press him.

With her lip quivering, trying to hide her distress, Thea muttered, "Sorry, I spoke out of turn."

Forrest dismissed her and turned to Elyse, saying, "You can go now."

Elyse nodded, gracefully gathered her dress, and exited under the watchful eyes of everyone.

As Elyse departed, the atmosphere in the banquet hall lightened, returning to its previous harmony.

But Thea was restless. She hurried upstairs in her high heels to confront Forrest.

When Forrest saw Thea following him, his disdain grew. He attempted to walk away, but Thea caught up to him.

Panting, Thea demanded, "Why are you so kind to Elyse? You even let her walk free. Have you forgotten what her father did to your mother? Weren't you determined to make Rickey's descendants pay?"

Forrest listened to Thea's words and let out a chuckle. "You think you know me well. It seems you've studied my mind thoroughly to gain my approval."

Detecting an unusual tone in Forrest's voice, Thea said, "Aren't we friends? Why are you speaking to me like this? We don't have any issues, do we?"

Forrest scoffed at Thea's naivety. "Do you really not understand? How could I be friends with you? You are just like a pet to me. Having someone from the Benson family as my pet amuses me greatly."

Thea's face was drained of color. She shook her head in disbelief and said, "How can this be? Nothing has changed between us. Why this sudden shift? Did Elyse say something to you during that half-hour she was away that made you turn against me?"

Forrest looked at Thea with a mix of pity and dismissal.

He was well aware of Thea's background and motives when she first approached him, which made it easy for him to boss her around.

Now, he was tired of the charade.

Chapter 695:

Seeing the chill in Forrest's gaze, Thea understood she would lose Felicia's favor.

Forrest was finished keeping Thea around, not even as a subordinate to order about. To him, she had become completely dispensable.

Thea was overwhelmed with panic and was at a loss for what to do next.

Forrest glanced at his watch and firmly said, "You should go too. Don't come here ever again. You're not part of my family, so keep your distance."

Thea's face went ghostly white.

Forrest walked away decisively, leaving Thea without any hope.

Returning home in despair, Thea found Felicia waiting in the living room.

Feeling adrift, Thea masked her disappointment with a strained smile and asked, "Grandma, why are you still awake?"

Felicia looked at her intently and replied, "I was waiting for you."

Thea's heart raced with foreboding. "Why were you waiting for me?"

Felicia inquired, "So, how are things going with Forrest Bentley?"

Thea ran her fingers through her hair and hesitated. "It's... fine, I suppose. I just got back from the Bentleys' banquet, and I'm absolutely drained. I don't want to attend another one."

"Don't be so headstrong," Felicia said calmly, leaning back against the sofa. "Pearce has a project and wants to partner with the Bentley family. Despite all these years, they still hold a grudge against us. I want to use this opportunity to mend fences."

After a brief pause, Felicia added, "Go talk to Forrest. Have him negotiate the cooperation with Victoria."

What Thea dreaded had come to pass. She had just been humiliated by Forrest and forced to keep her distance from the Bentley family. Now, Felicia wanted her to discuss cooperation with him.

Thea's mind swirled with conflicting emotions as she stood there, struggling to find the right words to respond to Felicia.

Not getting the answer she expected, Felicia frowned and asked, "What? Can't you do it?"

“It’s not that I can’t, but I...” Thea trailed off, searching for an excuse. She wanted to maintain her standing in the Benson family without upsetting Felicia.

Finally, sorrowfully, Thea said, “Grandma, it’s not that I don’t want to help facilitate the cooperation between the two families, but I simply can’t anymore.”

Felicia’s face grew stern as she asked sharply, “What happened? Tell me.”

“I was just thrown out by Forrest because... because...” Thea bit her lip, looking too embarrassed to continue.

Felicia prodded, “Just spit it out.”

Thea’s voice trembled with pain. “It’s Elyse’s fault. Elyse also showed up at the banquet today. She disappeared for half an hour. I have no idea what she did while she was there, but when Forrest came back, he kicked me out and said he wanted nothing more to do with me.”

Felicia was stunned. “Elyse did this?”

At this moment, tears cascaded down Thea’s cheeks.

Chapter 696:

Through her sobs, Thea lamented, “Grandma, I’ve been friends with Forrest for so many years. Because of Elyse, I’ve lost that friendship, and now there’s no hope for peace between the two families. I can’t do what you asked of me!”

Felicia, leaning heavily on her cane, rose slowly, made her way to Thea, and gently patted her head to soothe her. “Don’t cry, dear. I know you’ve been wronged. Rest assured, I will stand up for you.”

Thea continued to sob. “But what about Pearce’s project? I could have helped him, but now... I can’t do anything for him anymore.”

Felicia's eyes softened with understanding. She comforted her, "Sweetheart, Pearce may not realize your worth, but you still choose to assist him. He's lucky to have a cousin like you in his corner."

Thea's face showed even more grievance. "Everyone knows how much I care for him, but he doesn't. In his heart, there's only Elyse as his cousin!"

The mere mention of Elyse's name deepened the disdain in Felicia's eyes. "It's all Elyse's fault! Ever since she's returned, nothing has been right. I will make sure she pays for this! She thinks she can do whatever she wants with Pearce backing her up? Dream on!"

Wiping away her tears, Thea said pitifully, "Grandma, I'm exhausted. I want to rest in my room."

"Of course, go rest, dear." Felicia didn't stop her, urging Thea to go to her room.

Back in her room, Thea strolled into her bathroom, positioned herself before the mirror, and wiped away her makeup. A chuckle escaped her lips, unexpected but irrepressible.

"Well, Elyse, your presence isn't entirely in vain," she mused aloud. "You can be my scapegoat!"

She could hardly wait to see how Felicia would dole out punishment to Elyse.

The following morning found Elyse in the yard, struggling to keep her eyes open as Gavin meticulously arranged sheet music, gearing up for their practice session.

Cody, phone in hand, sauntered over, "I've got our flight tickets. We're heading out in two days."

A grin played on Cody's lips as he looked at Elyse. "Taking you there early so you can acclimate, make sure you're all set for the environment."

Elyse blinked in surprise, processing his words before nodding. “Alright, I get it, Mr. Tucker.”

Noticing Elyse’s distraction, Gavin raised an eyebrow. “Got everything squared away? Ready to go abroad without any loose ends?”

Elyse snapped back to reality, smiling. “Everything is basically done. I have no regrets.”

“That’s good to hear.” Gavin nodded approvingly.

They didn’t fly directly abroad because Elyse had some personal matters to attend to. Though they were unaware of her reasons, they didn’t mind accompanying her.

One morning, after practicing the violin, Elyse sat in a chair, daydreaming and gazing at the sky when the doorbell rang.

With Gavin and Cody out shopping, Elyse was alone at home.

She walked to the door and asked, “Who is it?”

Thea’s cold voice responded, “It’s me, Thea Benson. I need to talk to you.”

Why would Thea suddenly appear unannounced?

Elyse was puzzled but opened the door anyway.

Chapter 697:

She frowned at Thea’s smug smile and asked, “What do you want?”

“Grandma asked me to bring you back. Are you coming with me?” Thea asked in a sarcastic tone, raising an eyebrow.

Doubt lingered in Elyse's mind. She wondered why Felicia would want to see her. Had Pearce convinced Felicia to listen to her play the violin?

"Fine, I'll go with you," Elyse agreed, believing her sole connection to Felicia was her desire to play the violin for her before leaving.

Thea's smile broadened. "Good. Follow me."

Elyse got into the car and accompanied Thea back to the Benson Estate.

The moment she stepped into the living room, she sensed an unusual atmosphere. She quietly observed her surroundings before sitting down to wait for Felicia.

A few minutes later, Felicia, leaning on a cane, approached Elyse. Her gaze fell on the violin case in Elyse's hand, and her expression darkened.

Sitting across from Elyse, Felicia asked, her voice stern, "What were you doing at the Bentleys' banquet yesterday?"

Elyse glanced at Thea, who stood nearby, and replied calmly, "I was invited to their banquet."

Thea immediately interjected, "Impossible. You didn't have an invitation. Everyone knows they dislike your dad. How could they send you one?"

Elyse countered, "Is an invitation necessary to attend their banquet?"

Thea sneered, "It shows how little you know. Who hosts a banquet without sending invitations? You really are a bumpkin. I bet you just snuck in."

Elyse shrugged nonchalantly. "I'm the exception."

Felicia's voice turned icy. "How could you have special privileges? What were you really doing there?"

Elyse sensed something was amiss.

“Didn’t you call me here to listen to my violin performance?”

Felicia snorted. “Listen to you play? That’s laughable. Why would I want to hear that?”

Stunned, Elyse asked, “Then why did you call me here?”

Thea, raising her chin, said with a smug expression, “Why? You don’t realize you offended someone at the Bentley family? Because of you, I was permanently cut off from them. If you hadn’t done what you did, this would’ve never happened.”

Elyse retorted, “Isn’t it typical for you to be cut off? You’re just Forrest’s sycophant. He discarded you, and now you’re pinning the blame on me?”

Thea didn’t expect Elyse to be so blunt.

Thea’s eyes flashed with venom. “Forrest and I are friends, not whatever you’re insinuating. You’ve not only ruined my relationship with him but also slandered me. Elyse, how could you be so cruel?”

In a sudden moment of clarity, Elyse understood Thea’s ploy. Thea had been cast aside by the Bentley family and now needed a scapegoat to deflect Felicia’s wrath.

Elyse turned to Felicia, her feelings a tumultuous mix of confusion and frustration.

Chapter 698:

Felicia was her grandmother by blood, but their relationship was far from close. Moreover, Felicia despised her.

Elyse had once hoped to build a connection with Felicia, but seeing the look of disgust on her grandmother’s face, she realized there was no point in trying.

After staring at Felicia for a moment, Elyse asked with a touch of unnoticeable anticipation, “Do you really believe Thea? Do you think I ruined her connections with the Bentley family, and not that she’s lying?”

Thea’s lips curled into a slight smile as she looked at Elyse, her eyes brimming with mockery.

Having been with Felicia since childhood, it was no wonder Felicia never doubted Thea’s words.

Inwardly, Thea cursed Elyse for not knowing her place.

Felicia’s attitude towards Elyse had always been consistent. Elyse, the biological daughter of Felicia’s most despised son, was scorned by association.

Felicia’s authoritative voice rang out as she questioned, “Why should I believe you over Thea? I raised Thea myself. I know what kind of person she is.”

Elyse had anticipated this response and remained unfazed. Instead, she calmly asked, “So why did you call me here?”

Felicia’s stern reply was immediate. “You really have no manners. Since the first day you met me, your casual attitude has been very annoying.”

She then turned to a maid and ordered, “Lock her in the guest room. Starting today, I will teach her some manners.”

Thea’s delight was barely contained.

Felicia had countless ways to deal with people, and locking Elyse in the Benson house was a clear indication that she intended to grind Elyse down slowly.

Thea raised her eyebrows triumphantly at Elyse and mouthed silently, “You’re finished. Your good days are over.”

Elyse's face darkened as she realized Felicia's intent to confine and punish her gradually. Her grandmother's methods were no joke.

However, Elyse had no intention of staying in this place.

Without hesitation, she declared, "I won't stay here. This isn't my home. I want to leave."

Thea continued to provoke her. "Nice try, but didn't you come back for inheritance and shares? You don't have to pretend."

Elyse shot back, "It's you who wants the shares and resources, not me. I never said I wanted anything from the Benson family. I came back only to see Grandma."

Thea laughed scornfully. "Who would believe that? You better do as you're told and not try to anger Grandma. You've already done something wrong, and she's giving you a chance by teaching you manners. You'd better appreciate it."

Elyse frowned and addressed Felicia, "I know you don't like me, but I never planned to take anything from this family. I came back just to visit you. When the time comes, I will leave."

Felicia completely ignored Elyse's words. Pointing at the violin in Elyse's hand, she coldly commanded, "Take her violin away. I don't want to see such things again. It displeases my eyes."

The maid nodded briskly and approached Elyse, reaching out to seize the violin case.

Elyse clutched it tightly and, with anger lacing her voice, exclaimed, "I've told you, I don't consider this place my home. What more do you want from me?"

Chapter 699:

Seeing that one maid couldn't manage it alone, Felicia signaled for another to assist.

Elyse struggled valiantly against the two maids, but they eventually overpowered her.

One maid held the violin case while the other restrained Elyse.

“You people are ridiculous,” Elyse fumed. “I’ve made it clear I don’t consider you family, and yet you treat me like this. I have nothing more to say to you.”

These words were directed at Felicia, but she didn’t seem to care.

In Felicia’s eyes, with the Benson family’s immense wealth, just 1% of Benson Group’s shares would ensure a lifetime of comfort. How could anyone not want that?

To her, Elyse was lying.

Felicia had seen all sorts of people in her lifetime. She was confident she would be able to unmask Elyse’s true intentions.

Felicia remained calm and ordered, “Take her away. Starting tomorrow, I will personally teach her.”

Elyse was infuriated. How could there be such a stubborn old lady who refused to listen?

She had repeatedly said she had no interest in the Benson family, but Felicia, with her unwavering confidence, insisted otherwise.

Locked in a room by the maids, Elyse paced around in frustration.

She thought about her flight the next day, then finally stood still, took out her phone, and contacted Pearce, asking him to find a way to get her back home.

When Felicia declared that Elyse would be confined for a day, she meant every word of it.

By evening, Elyse hadn't had a bite to eat or a sip to drink. Resting on the bed, she kept swallowing to try and quench her thirst.

Just as she was about to fall asleep, the door suddenly opened, jolting her awake. She noticed Pearce's look of distress.

Pearce explained, "Thea is really a troublemaker. I was away in another city for a meeting. I rushed back as soon as I received your call, without even finishing my business there."

Elyse was visibly drained and said, "Pearce, please get me out of here. I'm starving and thirsty."

A shadow of concern crossed Pearce's face. "Did they really not give you anything to eat or drink?"

Elyse simply nodded, then slowly got up and started putting on her shoes.

Although furious, Pearce saw her composed manner and asked, bewildered, "Aren't you upset?"

Elyse answered coolly, "I was upset before, but isn't this treatment typical for me? Grandma has never been fond of me, right?"

Pearce was taken aback by her blunt admission and felt awkward mentioning it himself.

Pearce said, "Let's leave. I'll get you out of here and find you something to eat."

As Elyse finished tying her shoes, she mentioned, "Grandma took my violin. Can you retrieve it for me?"

"Sure, just wait here," Pearce replied before he went off to get the violin.

Elyse waited patiently in the small garden before the building.

Around thirty minutes later, Pearce hurried back with the violin case in hand, announcing, "Here it is."

Chapter 700:

Elyse opened the case to check the violin was safe and then suggested, "Pearce, could you take me to Grandma's window?"

Confused, Pearce asked, "What do you plan to do at her window?"

Pulling out her violin, Elyse played a few notes and smiled. "I want her to listen to me play."

Pearce grimaced, advising, "Perhaps that's not a good idea. She despises the violin. Playing it outside her window will only anger her."

Elyse nodded and said, "You might be right, but I still need to play for her."

Pearce was puzzled and inquired, "Why are you so intent on playing for her?"

Elyse said, "Do you really believe she hates the violin?"

Pearce remained uncertain. "Isn't that the truth?"

Elyse tilted her head, her smile bright. "I don't think so, but I'm not interested in finding out the real reason. I just want to fulfill his wish."

Seeing the resolve in Elyse's eyes, Pearce inquired, "'Fulfill his wish'? Who asked you to do this?"

Elyse placed a finger to her lips in a shushing motion, then explained, "Pearce, just take me there. Once I've done this, I can head off to the competition abroad without any lingering regrets."

Unable to deny Elyse, Pearce grinned affectionately. “You little mischief-maker. Fine, I’ll support you in defying Grandma just this once.”

Elyse chuckled and followed Pearce to another part of the garden.

She gazed up at the closed second-floor window and whispered confidently, “She’ll hear it.”

The night was starlit, and a chilly breeze set the perfect scene for a farewell.

Elyse moved forward a few steps, positioned herself under the window, and readied her violin. Moments later, the air was filled with the sweet sounds of her playing.

The piece was *”Melancholy Serenade.”*

The tune carried a deceptive liveliness, as though it were laughing, but a closer listen revealed a profound sadness beneath.

No joy was untouched by sorrow.

Pearce watched and listened, his arms crossed. After a while, he glanced up at the second-floor window, half-expecting Felicia to appear, drawn by the music.

Elyse played with intense focus.

She aimed to connect deeply with the music and grasp Rickey’s sentiments.

This was Rickey’s desire—to play this piece for Felicia.

Why *”Melancholy Serenade?”* There were surely better choices to reflect Rickey’s feelings.

If it had been up to Elyse, to choose a piece for a sorrowful mother, she would have picked something more direct to express love and emotion.

The emotions conveyed by *”Melancholy Serenade”* seemed too indirect. Didn’t Rickey worry that his mother might not grasp its depth?