

Bound love 721

Chapter 721:

“After all the performances, the judges will randomly select participants to perform new pieces, testing their true abilities,” Edward revealed with a glint in his eye.

Elyse’s eyes narrowed in thought. “What will these randomly chosen contestants get in return?”

“Nothing,” Edward replied calmly. “They’re simply given another chance to prove their skills.”

“Then what’s the point?” Elyse pursed her lips, contemplating this twist. “I hope I don’t get chosen, since I wouldn’t get any extra points.”

Edward paused, his brow furrowing in contemplation. “Maybe it’s not just about the points,” he began, a spark of excitement in his eyes. “If you nail that extra round, it could significantly boost the judges’ impression of you. It’s your chance to shine, to make every judge remember you and acknowledge your strength.”

Elyse pondered his words with a thoughtful expression. “Well, I guess that makes sense,” she replied, a hint of optimism creeping into her voice. “Being chosen could actually be a great opportunity.”

Edward stroked his chin thoughtfully. He wasn’t entirely sure if this tidbit of intel was accurate; it was just a rumor he had picked up. But seeing the fierce determination in Elyse’s eyes, he hoped it would come to fruition.

If his information turned out to be false, he dreaded the thought of Elyse’s wrath descending upon him.

Since they still had some time to kill, Elyse decided to retire to the lounge.

Elyse was asleep in the lounge until a loud scream startled her awake, prompting her to go outside. When she stepped out, she saw Fiona holding a broken violin, her voice filled with rage. “Who the hell did this? Show yourself, you coward!”

Other participants were also drawn to the scene by the noise. Fiona’s eyes scanned the group until they landed on Elyse. She stormed towards her with a menacing gaze and barked, “You destroyed my violin, didn’t you?!”

Elyse shook her head and replied, “I swear, it wasn’t me. I haven’t even been in your lounge.”

“Who else could it be then? You hate me the most. Who but you would invade my space and break my violin?”

Fiona’s fury at Elyse burned hot. If not for Elyse, she wouldn’t have been separated from Jayden or cast aside by Cody. She firmly believed that her love and career had been wrecked by Elyse’s schemes!

Elyse sneered at Fiona’s accusations. “I’m not like you and I’m not a backstabber. You’re accusing me without proof. Can you stoop any lower?”

“How can you prove it wasn’t you?” Fiona shot back.

Elyse met Fiona’s glare firmly and retorted, “The one who accuses has to provide evidence.”

As their argument hit a deadlock, another contestant came out of a different lounge with a broken violin in hand. “Who the heck broke my violin? I’ll find them wherever they may be!” The contestant was livid.

Elyse raised an eyebrow and asked sarcastically, “Is my name on that one too?”

Fiona’s face turned pale, her mouth opening and closing without sound. In a short while, it was discovered that the violins of up to eight contestants had been damaged.

No one had expected that among the participants was someone malicious enough to sabotage others. A wave of anger spread through the crowd, with everyone determined to catch the culprit.

However, the immediate concern was to keep the competition on track. Therefore, contestants looked around, trying to borrow violins from acquaintances.

At that moment, a sobering thought hit Fiona. She had no backup violin. To compete, she would need to ask for help. Inevitably, her eyes landed on Elyse.

Chapter 722:

Elyse noticed Fiona's dilemma but remained silent. She wasn't going to help her. As far as she was concerned, Fiona owed her an apology first.

Fiona's eyes met Elyse's several times, her lips trembling, but she couldn't bring herself to ask.

Suddenly, a tall male contestant approached Elyse, asking to borrow her violin. Fiona's heart pounded as she listened to their conversation, desperately hoping Elyse would say no. But Fiona couldn't voice her hopes.

Elyse, unaware of Fiona's inner turmoil, couldn't refuse help when asked. It was simply in her nature to help others.

Fiona's body tensed as she watched Elyse hand her violin to the male contestant. Unable to hide her bitterness, she spat out, "How typical, sucking up to any man. How many men have you flirted with behind your husband's back?"

Elyse's face turned cold as she locked eyes with Fiona, her gaze cutting. "Your mind is so corrupt, seeing dirt everywhere. If you have time to insult me, why not focus on finding a violin to borrow?" She paused for a moment before continuing, her voice dripping with contempt, "Or do you plan to forfeit again?"

Fiona's hands balled into fists, her jaw clenched in barely restrained fury as if she longed to lash out at Elyse.

Elyse ignored Fiona and headed backstage to watch the performances of the other contestants. Seeing Elyse's refusal to help, Fiona vowed to get even and set off to find another violin from someone else.

As the round drew to a close, the judges surprised the audience with a twist. Instead of a random extra performance, they revealed the rankings based on their performances.

Elyse made it to the top five, and so did Edward, who ranked higher than her. As the results were announced, Elyse turned to Edward with a smirk and said, "Well, well, Edward, showing off has its perks. Look how high you are."

Edward winked at her playfully and replied, "I'll keep my ranking, but yours isn't set in stone."

Hearing this, Elyse scoffed, "I don't need any guarantees from you. I can hold my own." With that, she turned her attention back to the judges as they continued announcing the ranks.

As the end approached, Elyse finally heard Fiona's name. Her eyes widened in shock at Fiona's disappointing rank. Fiona was very close to the bottom. Subconsciously, Elyse's gaze swept across the crowd, looking for Fiona.

Fiona sensed Elyse's gaze and met it with a bold stare. She found Elyse's stare quite annoying. She had played an unfamiliar violin during the competition, which naturally led to a mistake. She was convinced her skills were perfect and attributed any errors solely to the violin.

Unaware of Fiona's thoughts, Elyse checked if Fiona was upset. Seeing she wasn't, she looked away. Since Fiona was no longer her violin practice partner, she felt no need to comfort her. Now, her priority was to keep her ranking secure. The scores in the top ten were tightly packed. Without careful attention, she knew she might fall behind her rivals.

Elyse shifted her focus away from Fiona. Sitting at the top of the leaderboard, she felt the quiet pressure of the competition energizing her.

After the event, Elyse bid Edward farewell and climbed into Gavin's vehicle. She recounted the day's events to Gavin while in the lounge. Gavin dropped Elyse at the lounge and then made his way to the auditorium, taking a seat. Absorbing Elyse's story, he slightly furrowed his brow and inquired, "Did you find out who was responsible?"

Elyse shook her head. "I'm not sure. There are no cameras in the lounge corridor. Also, the contestants affected by the violin sabotage are all lower-ranked. The staff is still looking into it."

After a pause, Gavin said, "Don't let this bother you. Just keep performing as you do, and you'll surely secure a spot in the top three."

Chapter 723:

Elyse expressed her astonishment, "Gavin, your faith in me is really strong. I can hardly imagine making it to the top three."

Gavin laughed softly. "Believing in it can sometimes make it a reality."

"How could it be that simple? You don't understand the intensity of the competition among the top ten," Elyse replied, her lips tightening, feeling tense.

Suddenly, Elyse noticed they were not on the way back to the hotel. She questioned, "Gavin, where are we headed? Shouldn't we be going back to the hotel?"

Gavin clarified, "I'm taking you to a banquet. Our teacher can't make it because he's tied up with old friends, so he asked us to attend on his behalf."

Elyse looked down at her attire. "Is it okay to go to the banquet in this competition dress?"

"Why not? We'll head out after the meal, and no one will need to speak with us," Gavin responded.

"Oh, so we're just going to eat!" Elyse exclaimed with enthusiasm. "I'll make sure to eat plenty before we return to the hotel!"

Upon arriving at the banquet hall, Elyse, clad in a green dress, gracefully entered arm-in-arm with Gavin. They were unfamiliar with the banquet's host and intended to leave shortly. Elyse wondered if she might encounter anyone she knew there.

Seeing an acquaintance, Gavin released Elyse's arm and mentioned, "I'm going to chat with a friend for a bit. Enjoy the food and stay here until I return."

"Understood. Go and catch up. I'll start with dinner," Elyse said confidently and made her way toward the buffet.

Holding a plate, she carefully picked her food, and when she noticed that only one piece of chocolate cake remained, she made a beeline for it. As she reached for the cake, another slim hand appeared beside hers. Their hands brushed against each other, causing both to retract in surprise.

Elyse gasped, turning to see a young girl with her hair styled in a bun. The girl was dressed in a vibrant pink dress, her makeup matching, exuding energy and charm.

Embarrassed and slightly upset, the girl turned to someone near her and complained, "Look, she's going to take the last piece of chocolate cake. I might miss out!"

Elyse followed the girl's gaze and noticed a tall man in a black suit approaching them, his approach relaxed. This man carried an aura of authority, yet his casual manner suggested he was approachable. Feeling the weight of his piercing look, Elyse stiffened slightly and whispered his name. "Jayden."

Jayden glanced between Elyse and the girl, his voice playful and indulgent as he asked, "Do you really want that piece of chocolate cake so much? Aarya, are you just a little glutton?"

At his words, Aarya Hudson's face lit up, and she affectionately took hold of Jayden's arm, exclaiming joyfully, "You don't understand. Chocolate cake is the best thing ever to me!"

"Darling, I want to have some of this chocolate cake. Can you assist me?" Aarya exclaimed with delight, clutching Jayden's arm.

“Alright,” Jayden replied. He then dropped his amused look and stared at Elyse with a stern expression. Clearing his throat, he asked politely but distantly, “Pardon me, my girlfriend desires this piece of chocolate cake. Would you mind giving it to her?”

Jayden’s girlfriend wanted to have the cake? When did he get himself a girlfriend?

Elyse was too stunned to respond. For a moment, all she could do was purse her lips and silently ponder the situation.

Misinterpreting Elyse’s blank look, Aarya assumed that she was refusing. Pouting, Aarya clasped her hands together and pleaded, “Please, I really crave this chocolate cake. I know you aimed for it first, but could you let me have it?”

They knew she had aimed for the cake first, yet they still wanted it from her! A flicker of sorrow crossed Elyse’s eyes.

Chapter 724:

Before she could respond, Jayden interjected, “How about you name a price for this piece?”

Elyse’s mind was in disarray, unable to grasp Jayden’s intention.

Jayden lifted his wrist, showed his watch, calmly removed it, and handed it to Elyse. He looked at her intently and said, “Here you go. Now, give us the cake.”

Aarya, unable to sit still, quickly took the watch and put it back on Jayden’s wrist. While doing so, she protested, “No, this watch is worth millions. You can’t just give it away for a piece of cake. I won’t allow it!”

Checking his watch once more, Jayden said to Aarya with a sly grin, “You’re simply my girlfriend. Why concern yourself with my spending?”

Aarya, enamored with Jayden's handsome face, huffed and said smugly, "Of course, a good woman like me is rare. Other women are just after your money."

Jayden draped his arm over Aarya's shoulder, leaned close, and murmured in her ear, "So, should I cherish someone as wonderful as you?"

"Of course!" Aarya's cheeks reddened. She nestled into Jayden's arms, overflowing with joy.

At that moment, the chocolate cake was forgotten. To Aarya, nothing was more delightful than Jayden's embrace, not even chocolate cake.

Watching Jayden and the other woman's blissful moment in silence, Elyse felt as if a knife had pierced her heart. Seeing the man she loved with another was unbearable.

"It's fine. Just enjoy the cake. I don't want it anymore," she muttered. With that, Elyse turned and walked away without a backward glance.

The moment she turned around, her tears began to flow uncontrollably. Her heart was breaking. She had no idea how she had managed to hold back her emotions and not lose her composure before Jayden.

Elyse didn't want to confront Jayden and demand why he moved on so quickly. But her rational side reminded her she couldn't question him in the first place. They were divorced and no longer a couple. It was normal for Jayden to have a new partner post-divorce.

Thinking of this, Elyse clenched her fists as she did her best to hold back her emotions and tears. It was Jayden's prerogative to be with someone else, and she had no right whatsoever to judge his choices.

"Gavin."

Hearing Elyse's voice, Gavin, who had been chatting with a friend, turned around and was taken aback. Alarmed, he asked, "What's wrong? Why on earth are you crying?"

Ignoring his friend, Gavin quickly led Elyse to a corner. Wiping her tears away, Gavin asked, "What happened? Talk to me so that I can help you."

Elyse shook her head, refusing to tell Gavin about her encounter with Jayden and his new girlfriend. When she chose to divorce, she should have been prepared for this, right?

She had been delusional to assume that Jayden would reconsider and return to her after understanding everything. But then, Jayden wasn't the type to self-reflect. In his world, she was meant to be his and only his. In short, she was his possession. How could he allow his possession to have its own thoughts and desires?

With tears streaming down her face, Elyse shook her head slightly and said, "I don't want to stay here anymore. Can I leave now?"

Seeing Elyse in this state, Gavin knew she shouldn't stay any longer. He quickly took out his phone, saying, "I'll call Irving to pick you up."

Chapter 725:

"No, I can go back alone," Elyse firmly declined.

Elyse lifted the hem of her skirt and swiftly turned to leave, moving so quickly that even Gavin struggled to keep up. Just as she reached the exit of the banquet hall, a figure suddenly blocked her path. She looked up in surprise to see Edward grinning mischievously at her.

Instinctively, she raised her hand to cover her tear-streaked face, the humiliation of being caught crying by someone she had recently met washing over her.

Edward, with his hands casually in his pockets, leaned in and remarked with a mocking interest, "You were so happy an hour ago. Why are you now crying?"

Elyse took a step back, still shielding her face, feeling an inexplicable sense of guilt. "What does it have to do with you?" she snapped.

Edward's expression turned serious as he replied, "Of course it matters. If you don't tell me, I'd miss out on the fun."

Seeing Edward's serious expression, Elyse's resolve to keep her secret only hardened. She took a deep breath, forcing back her tears, and said casually, "It's nothing, really. I just cried a bit for no reason. I'm totally fine."

Edward tilted his head, disbelief etched in his eyes. "Really, I'm okay. The exhibition match ended, and I got too excited. Tears of joy. Not a big deal," Elyse insisted, raising her voice. She gave a firm nod, almost convincing herself.

Edward, not wanting to push her further, nodded in feigned acceptance. "Since you're fine, why not accompany me back to the banquet?" he suggested.

Panic flashed across Elyse's face. "Accompany you to the banquet? Can't you see I'm about to leave? I won't go."

With a sneer, Edward stepped forward, spun Elyse around, and hooked his arm around her neck, forcefully leading her back to the banquet hall. Having been seized so suddenly, Elyse could feel the pressure in her neck, making it hard for her to breathe. Preoccupied with escaping Edward's grasp, Elyse had no time to feel sad.

She frowned, clearly uncomfortable, and said, "You're hurting me. Let go of me."

Edward loosened his grip slightly but still held her tightly, wary that she might bolt. Lowering his head, he saw her unhappy expression and scoffed. "Do you know how many women would love to be hugged by these biceps? And you're the only one who can't appreciate them."

Elyse widened her eyes in shock and disbelief. Was he seriously this narcissistic?

"You don't actually think you're the most handsome man in the world, do you?"

With a confident smile, Edward brushed his hair back. "It's no question that I am the most handsome man in the world."

Seeing his self-assured demeanor, Elyse fell silent, cursing her luck for encountering him. Suddenly, Edward led her to the restroom.

Under her puzzled gaze, he pulled out a compact from his pocket and said gently, "Sweetheart, your makeup isn't waterproof. Touch up inside. I'll wait for you. We don't want other people to see you like this."

Elyse glared at Edward with resentment. "Why not let me go back to the hotel? I can remove my makeup there."

Edward wagged his finger, his voice laced with condescension. "Since you ran into me, it's your karma. You have to stay with me until I decide to leave."

Just as Elyse was about to unleash a torrent of curses, Edward shoved the compact into her hand and pushed her toward the bathroom. He closed the door behind her, crouching by the seam, and kindly reminded her, "After you touch up, we'll go eat. You can have whatever you want, on me."

Chapter 726:

Elyse couldn't stand Edward's unpredictable personality and shouted through the door, "Are you crazy? The food at the banquet is free."

Standing in front of the mirror, Elyse took in her reflection and realized just how terrible she looked. She meticulously began fixing her makeup, losing track of time in the process. Just as she was putting the final touches on, a girl's voice broke the silence from outside the door.

"What are you doing loitering by the women's restroom? Are you some kind of pervert?"

The voice sounded oddly familiar to Elyse. She hurriedly finished touching up her makeup and opened the door, ready with an explanation. "Sorry, he's with me. He's just waiting."

But as the words left her lips, Elyse froze. Standing in front of her was Aarya, Jayden's girlfriend. Aarya's eyes lit up in recognition, her tone bright with surprise. "Oh, it's you! Thanks again for letting me have the last piece of chocolate cake. It made my day!"

Elyse forced a smile, unsure of how to respond. Meanwhile, Edward glanced at Aarya, a flicker of disdain crossing his face, though he kept his expression neutral. He turned to Elyse and said, "You're done? Let's go."

Elyse composed herself, gave Edward a nod, and followed him. As they reentered the lavish banquet hall, Edward leaned closer and asked, "Do you know that girl?"

Elyse paused, considering her words. "Just a passing acquaintance. She wanted my last piece of chocolate cake, and I let her have it. That's all."

Edward exhaled a sigh of relief and whispered in her ear, "The girl's family is not to be trifled with. Avoid her in the future."

Puzzled, Elyse asked, "Do you know her?"

"Not personally," Edward replied, his tone serious. "But her family is infamous, and she has quite a notorious reputation."

Elyse nodded thoughtfully, a chill running down her spine. She turned and saw Jayden seated on a nearby sofa, his gaze dark and unyielding. Startled by his intense stare, Elyse shivered involuntarily.

Unaware of Elyse's discomfort, Edward pointed to the spread of gourmet food ahead. "There's so much good food here. You'd be crazy not to enjoy it."

Before she could respond, Edward pulled her closer to the buffet. As she glanced back, the crowd in the banquet hall soon obstructed Jayden's view. Feeling a wave of relief, Elyse sighed. Being out of Jayden's sight was a small mercy. At least she wouldn't have to endure the sight of Jayden and his girlfriend together. Out of sight, out of mind. The memory of Jayden and Aarya's closeness earlier made her heart ache, and she subconsciously clutched her chest.

Edward, sensing her distress, suddenly turned back and asked, “Did you cry earlier because you didn’t get the chocolate cake?”

Still immersed in her thoughts, Elyse’s mind struggled to keep up. “What?” she asked, confusion evident in her voice.

Edward’s brow furrowed in disapproval. “If you wanted to eat it, why did you give it away? Don’t give away the things you love so easily. You deserve to have chocolate cake too.”

Elyse was taken aback, as if struck by lightning. In that moment, a profound realization hit her, and much of her frustration seemed to melt away. Edward continued, his tone tinged with sarcasm, “You cried over a piece of chocolate cake. How pathetic. But since I’m a good friend, I’ll make sure you get another one.”

Elyse felt a surge of warmth from his unexpected gesture. Despite Edward’s occasional unreliability, his words had a way of offering comfort. But what did he just say? Get her another one? Elyse thought, trying to process his offer. “Get me one?” she asked, bewildered, as she hurried to catch up with him. “How?”

“Don’t worry about it. Just eat,” Edward replied with a mischievous grin.

Chapter 727:

Elyse’s nerves tightened. Edward’s demeanor was like a caged animal, ready to lash out if provoked. Yet, with no chocolate cake in sight at the moment, he seemed relatively calm, and Elyse could momentarily relax.

They strolled through the banquet, selecting their favorite dishes. Elyse, who had been ravenous before, momentarily forgot her hunger, her spirits lifted by the earlier chaos. With food finally in her stomach, she now wanted to indulge fully.

Elyse and Edward enjoyed a surprisingly pleasant rapport, their conversation about music creating an unusual yet harmonious connection. That was, until Edward’s gaze fell upon the last piece of cheese shrimp. With swift, decisive movements, Edward snatched it before Arya could reach it, placing it triumphantly on his plate.

Aarya, seeing her favorite dish taken, pouted with displeasure. “Sir, don’t you know it’s first come, first served?”

Edward raised an eyebrow, his tone teasing. “No, I only know that the one who grabs it first claims it. It should be obvious.”

Aarya’s anger was palpable, her fury directed squarely at Edward’s dismissive attitude. Elyse, observing the unfolding drama, stood in stunned silence. Her mind raced as she recalled Edward’s earlier warning about Aarya’s powerful and infamous family.

Wasn’t he the one who advised her to keep her distance? So why was he now so eager to provoke Aarya? Did he not fear the potential consequences of challenging her?

Feeling a pang of sympathy for Edward, Elyse stepped forward, ready to intervene and defuse the escalating tension. Just then, Jayden made his way over.

“What happened?” Jayden asked gently. “Why are you upset again?”

Aarya’s lower lip trembled as she pointed accusingly at the cheese shrimp on Edward’s plate. “I had it first, but he took it,” she complained, clearly aggrieved.

Edward’s irritation was evident. Knowing that Jayden was Elyse’s ex-husband, he couldn’t hide his displeasure at seeing Jayden come to Aarya’s defense. With a defiant lift of his eyebrow, Edward declared, “I got it first. It’s mine.”

Jayden frowned slightly, his gaze fixed on Edward as he fell into thought.

Aarya didn’t particularly care for the cheese shrimp; given her family’s wealth, she had tasted far finer delicacies. However, Edward’s attitude irked her. She felt compelled to claim the shrimp as her own.

Gritting her teeth, she declared, “Give it to me, or you’ll regret it.”

Jayden restrained the incensed Aarya, shaking his head at her to signal that he would handle the situation.

Seeing Jayden's gesture, Aarya's expression softened slightly. She stepped aside, waiting for Jayden to retrieve the cheese shrimp for her.

Jayden advanced, positioning himself in front of Edward and pulled out his phone. "Name your price. How much for the cheese shrimp you're holding?"

Edward, taken aback by Jayden's straightforward approach, responded incredulously, "Are you serious? You want to buy this shrimp right out of my hand?"

Jayden nodded firmly. "Exactly. Name your price."

Standing beside them, Elyse couldn't contain her frustration any longer. She frowned and said disapprovingly, "Have you lost your mind? You tried to trade a watch for a piece of cake, and now you want to buy the shrimp at any price? Jayden, what are you trying to achieve?"

Jayden looked at Elyse. After a brief pause, he replied, "Not much. I'm just using money to make my girlfriend happy."

Elyse felt a sharp pang in her heart. Her breathing quickened, and she forced out her words. "If you want to use money to make your girlfriend happy, do it elsewhere. Why flaunt your wealth at someone else's banquet?"

Chapter 728:

Growing a bit impatient, Jayden retorted, "Can't I use my money to make my girlfriend happy? Just tell me, how much?"

Elyse sneered. "Earlier, she took my favorite chocolate cake, and now my friend is enjoying her favorite cheese shrimp. What's wrong with that?"

After saying this, Elyse crossed her arms, standing resolute and defiant.

Aarya, irritated by the accusation, responded loudly, “What do you mean I took your cake? You gave it to me freely. Could I have possibly taken it against your will?”

Edward chuckled, catching Elyse’s stern gaze. He picked up the shrimp, a mischievous grin spreading across his face. He held the shrimp out to Aarya and asked provocatively, “You want this, right?”

Aarya raised her head arrogantly. “If you admit you were wrong, I’ll forgive you this time.”

Edward raised an eyebrow. Right in front of Aarya, he ate the shrimp, savoring it like a fine delicacy and making satisfied noises occasionally.

Aarya froze for a few seconds, then erupted in anger. “That was my shrimp. How dare you eat it!”

Elyse’s mouth twitched. Although she found Edward’s behavior inappropriate, she felt compelled to defend him since he had done it to stand up for her and intentionally provoke Aarya.

Elyse positioned herself in front of Edward. “Why fight over a shrimp? Your boyfriend is so wealthy. Why don’t you just ask him to buy you another? Isn’t it ridiculous to argue with us over a shrimp?”

Aarya, furious, shouted, “Is this about money? You deliberately took what I wanted most. No one, especially not you two, can take what I want.”

Elyse was taken aback, unsure if it was her imagination, but it seemed that Aarya’s last words were pointedly directed at her.

Edward continued to taunt, “Yes, yes, everything is yours. You throw money around like it’s nothing. You’re the best, aren’t you?”

Now completely infuriated, Aarya glared at them, her eyes blazing with fury.

Elyse turned to Jayden. “What are you waiting for? Why don’t you take your girlfriend outside for some shrimp?”

Jayden’s expression turned icy. He gave Elyse a piercing look before he began leading Aarya away.

Aarya, not ready to let go, protested, “Why are you pulling me away? I must find my dad. I’m not going to let those two get away with this.”

As Jayden walked away with Aarya, Elyse was left feeling hollow inside. She lowered her gaze, which was filled with sadness.

Edward, pretending not to notice her distress, nudged Elyse with his elbow. “I can tell by the way Aarya was looking at us that she holds a grudge. What if she tries to come after us later?”

Elyse turned her head and countered, “If you’re so worried about Aarya, why provoke her? You didn’t seem to hold back at all.”

Edward flashed a grin. “I don’t like her. If I feel like provoking her, I will. I’m handsome enough. Do I really need to care about what a woman thinks?”

Elyse sighed. “Sorry, this was mainly my fault. If I see Aarya again, I’ll explain everything to her.”

Edward lightly tapped Elyse’s forehead, irritation creeping into his voice. “Who told you to speak for me? I’m not intimidated by Aarya.”

Looking slightly confused, Elyse asked, “Didn’t you mention Aarya’s family is powerful?”

With pride gleaming in his eyes, Edward stood tall and said, “Mine isn’t weak either.”

Chapter 729:

Elyse tilted her head and asked, “Do you want a drink? Perhaps we should get some refreshments?”

Hearing this, Edward faced her, his intense gaze meeting hers. “Not only do you doubt me, but you probably find me annoying too, right?”

Elyse laughed awkwardly and replied, “I never said that.”

Edward scoffed and pulled her along as they walked. “The Hudson family isn’t a big deal. Next time, I’ll deal with all of them at once,” he said with disdain.

Elyse couldn’t help but chuckle, her spirits lifting.

As Elyse and Edward sat down to take a break, Jayden appeared again, standing firmly in front of Elyse.

Elyse’s smile faded instantly as she coldly asked, “What do you want? Shouldn’t you be with your girlfriend?”

Jayden met Elyse’s eyes with an inscrutable look and said coolly, “It’s not smart to provoke Aarya.”

Elyse’s anger flared instantly. What did he mean by her provoking Aarya? Was he really that protective of his new girlfriend?

She quickly stood up and said sharply, “Why can’t you just tell her to leave us alone?”

Jayden narrowed his eyes at her outburst. “I’m trying to have a civil conversation here, Elyse. What’s with the attitude? Is it a must for you to go around picking fights randomly?”

Elyse let out a bitter laugh and retorted, “Your concern is unwelcome! You should take care of your own girlfriend first!”

Jayden looked at Elyse's angry face and realized she seemed jealous. He approached her carefully, holding back his emotions, and asked, "Elyse, are you upset?"

Elyse reacted impulsively, pushing Jayden back a step. Her icy glare held him as she hissed, "You have a girlfriend. Stay away from me, unless you want your fiery little darling to come after me!"

Edward, who had been watching with amusement, noticed Aarya approaching with a stormy expression. He cleared his throat and whispered, "Aarya's here! You two should stop flirting."

Elyse widened her eyes and fumed, "When have I ever flirted with him?"

Edward scoffed, lowering his voice, "You've been doing it all along."

Aarya quickly approached, her gaze hostile toward Elyse. Stopping in front of the trio, she turned to Jayden and asked, "What are you doing here with them?" She then glanced at Elyse and questioned further, "Or are you still interested in her?"

Jayden placed a gentle hand on Aarya's shoulder, gently patting her as he said, "You're overthinking it. I just wanted to clear up a misunderstanding."

Aarya forced a smile, but her face was filled with disbelief. "Really? Have you sorted it out? If so, we should leave. To my place?"

Elyse's body tensed as she subconsciously glanced at Jayden. How close had they become that they were already living together?

Jayden looked at Aarya with tenderness and replied, "If that's what you want, I'll go with you."

"Of course, darling. You know I'd love for you to stay with me," Aarya said, linking arms with Jayden and glancing triumphantly at Elyse. With a wink, she led Jayden away with a smug smile.

Elyse stood still, her fists clenched as she fought back the sadness threatening to overwhelm her.

Edward, unable to watch any longer, spoke gruffly, "Don't torture yourself. They're gone. Staring won't bring him back."

"I know. But then, it's not like I care," Elyse retorted, her eyes stubbornly downcast.

Chapter 730:

Rolling his eyes, Edward scoffed, "You don't care? You cared enough to watch him leave with someone else. You need to stop deceiving yourself. He's already with another woman. You have to move on, Elyse."

For a moment, Elyse simply pursed her lips and said nothing.

Edward's concern deepened. "You're not still hung up on him, are you? Why would you want to waste your tears on a jerk? Since he has gone after another woman, you should also find someone else!"

Edward, puffing out his chest, proclaimed, "I'm prepared to make a sacrifice for my best friend. Come share my bed!"

Whenever Edward said such things, Elyse wanted to punch him. Controlling her frustration, she replied, "Stop joking. Go sleep alone."

"Come and share my bed. We'll drive your ex-husband wild," Edward provocatively suggested, noticing Elyse regain her energy.

As he spoke, he extended his hands and moved closer.

Elyse reacted with a scream of horror and punched Edward squarely in the chest.

"You punched my chest muscles. They must be bruised!" Edward exclaimed, clutching his chest and wincing in pain.

Then, he began to unbutton his shirt. "Let me show you. If they're bruised, you'll have to stay," he insisted.

"Go to hell, you bastard!" Elyse shouted, unable to tolerate his behavior. She kicked him, turned, and stormed out.

Jayden and Aarya left the banquet hall and settled into the car, riding in silence. Traffic halted as they approached an intersection, leaving them at a standstill.

Feeling claustrophobic in the confined space, Jayden loosened his tie and retrieved a cigarette from the compartment.

"I remember my dad saying you didn't smoke. Why are you smoking now?" Aarya asked with a faint smile.

Jayden exhaled a cloud of smoke, his face expressionless. "You don't like it?" he asked. "Sorry, I won't smoke anymore." With that, he stubbed out the cigarette.

"I didn't mean to stop you," Aarya explained, gently taking his hand. "If you want to smoke, it's okay with me."

"I don't want to do anything that upsets you," Jayden said softly, patting her hand.

Aarya felt reassured and touched by his consideration. Seeing him go out of his way to show affection felt good.

However, the thought of the woman from the banquet sparked an unexplained anger within her.

She clung to Jayden's arm, her red-nailed fingers brushing against his chest.

"Do you know the woman from the banquet?" she asked softly, leaning in.

"Who?" Jayden responded absentmindedly, looking out the window.

“The one who argued with me. Do you know her?” Aarya probed, still smiling.

“Yes. Why, are you jealous?” Jayden admitted straightforwardly.

Surprised by his openness, Aarya asked, “Who is she to you?”

“No matter who she is, you’re my girlfriend now. You’re the most important,” Jayden reassured her, taking her hand in his.

Aarya’s smile widened, and she hugged him tighter.

But as a Hudson woman, doubt was part of her nature. She couldn’t shake off the nagging suspicions about the sincerity of Jayden’s affection.