

Bound love 1301

Chapter 1301:

Elyse's smile was small but chilling. "What do I want? I want to settle the score with you Owens." Her voice was smooth, her words dripping with venom. "You claim I'm just an outsider. Fine. Let's talk about how your grandfather was responsible for the death of my child."

Debora's eyes flickered with guilt. "What does that have to do with me? I didn't kill your child. Find the real culprit."

Elyse arched a brow in amused disbelief. "So, you're saying you have no problem with me taking revenge on your grandfather?"

Debora scoffed, rolling her eyes. "Go ahead. If you're brave enough, go and take your revenge on him. But guess what? He's dead. You'll never have the chance to make him pay."

Elyse's smile turned malicious as she crossed her arms, tilting her head slightly. "How could I possibly not have a chance?" she said, her voice soft yet laced with danger. "Because, you see, I'm the one who killed him."

Debora froze, her pulse racing as the weight of Elyse's words sank in. "No... that can't be true. He was killed by Jayden. Corrie told me so. She wouldn't lie to me!"

Elyse's lips curled into a wry smile. "Why wouldn't she lie to you? You really believe everything she says?" She stepped closer, her voice colder than ever, each word cutting deeper.

"If you don't believe me, let me paint a picture for you. Your grandpa, terrified yet defiant, begged me not to pull the trigger. But I didn't care. I shot him anyway."

Elyse's piercing gaze locked onto Debora's, her next words hanging in the air like a dark cloud. "Do you know what it feels like to kill your enemy with your own hands? It's like being reborn."

Debora shook her head violently, her voice trembling. "Impossible! He couldn't have been killed by you. Jayden must have forced you to say this!"

Her denial rang hollow, more for her own reassurance than anything else. Elyse—the quiet, delicate woman she once knew—couldn’t possibly have had the strength to take a life. This had to be some twisted game, a trick meant to rattle her.

Debora fixed Jayden with a scornful glare, disbelief etched across her face. “I can hardly believe you’d stoop so low as to let Elyse cover for your heinous crime. You truly are monstrous.”

Jayden’s face tightened, his annoyance clear. “Can you drop it already?”

“You’re a ruthless killer! I’ll make sure the media hears about this. There’s no escaping the consequences for Grandpa’s murder!” Debora’s conviction was unwavering. In her eyes, Jayden was the mastermind behind Enzo’s murder abroad, using Elyse as a naive shield, just as he often had.

“Planning to go public?” Elyse sneered, dismissing Debora with a cold glance. “Is that really your plan?”

Debora clenched her jaw. “What’s that supposed to mean? This is not your concern anymore. You’re no longer part of this family! If you meddle, I’ll expose your complicity in harboring a murderer by tomorrow. Think about your career; you won’t be playing the violin much longer, not on my watch.”

Elyse’s expression hardened, her eyes narrowing in a rare display of menace. Her presence tonight radiated something entirely different—something that made Debora uneasy.

Chapter 1302:

Jayden, meanwhile, remained silent, his anxious gaze fixed on Elyse rather than responding to Debora’s accusations. His behavior puzzled Debora. Why wasn’t he defending himself? Why was he so focused on Elyse?

Breaking the silence, Elyse pulled out her phone and made a quick call, her tone curt as she asked Pearce to come over immediately. Ending the call, she turned to Debora with a sinister smile, her demeanor unshaken by the chaos around her.

“Could you give us a moment? My cousin will be here shortly to clear things up,” Elyse said calmly.

Debora hesitated, confused by the mention of a cousin. She already suspected Elyse wasn’t the true culprit but wondered why this person’s arrival was necessary. Was Elyse worried that revealing the truth could jeopardize her career? The more Debora reflected, the more certain she became of her theory.

Ignoring Elyse, she turned to Jayden, her gaze cold and unyielding. “Stop pretending nothing happened. You’re coming with me now to face justice for your crimes.”

Jayden’s scornful expression didn’t waver. “You’re delusional. Leave now, and stop causing a scene.”

Debora’s anger boiled over. “How can you live with yourself after killing Grandpa, Jayden? You disgust me.”

Elyse observed the exchange with cold detachment, her voice laced with mocking undertones. “Quite curious, isn’t it? Enzo’s dead, and yet, out of the entire Owen clan, only you seem driven to seek justice. Where is everyone else?”

Stunned by the implication, Debora retorted sharply, “What are you implying?”

Elyse’s reply was candid, her tone unwavering. “Face it, everyone was likely relieved by Enzo’s death. If they truly sought justice, the media would have swarmed Jayden the moment he landed. But your family’s silence speaks volumes.”

Debora faltered, unable to respond. Elyse’s words struck a chord she couldn’t ignore. Her family’s lack of action, despite her protests, now seemed glaringly evident. This visit was something she undertook alone, choosing not to inform anyone of her intentions.

Moments later, Pearce drove up and made his way inside. Expecting to find Jayden causing trouble for Elyse, he instead encountered both Debora and a somber Elyse, the tension in the room palpable.

Perplexed by the tense atmosphere, Pearce asked, “What’s happened here?”

Elyse pointed toward Debora and quickly explained, “Could you handle her for me? She’s threatening to make Enzo’s murder public and could ruin everything for me.”

Caught off guard, Pearce paused for a moment before stepping protectively in front of Elyse. He had already been told about Elyse’s cold-blooded act of revenge for her lost child. Since then, he had been quietly investigating the Owen family, preparing to neutralize any potential retaliation from them.

With his usual steady demeanor, Pearce took out his cigarettes and casually asked, “Did your family send you, or are you acting on your own?”

Debora, unprepared for this confrontation with both Elyse and Pearce, had come to seek out Jayden, only to find herself tangled in a far more complicated situation. Even Debora, who often took time to piece things together, was starting to understand. Could Elyse be the true culprit behind Enzo’s murder, not Jayden?

Chapter 1303:

As the realization set in, Elyse spoke up, her voice cold. “Debora, are you still thinking of contacting the media?”

Feeling increasingly cornered by Elyse and Pearce’s intense scrutiny, Debora instinctively took a step back, her voice wavering with uncertainty. “What do you mean by that?”

Pearce’s response was blunt. “What we mean is, if you go ahead and disclose this, we’ll be forced to respond accordingly.”

Debora stared at Elyse, her voice laced with shock. “Are you seriously saying you didn’t deceive me? You actually murdered my grandpa?”

Elyse shook her head, her expression resolute. “Murder? He was responsible for the death of my child. In light of that, my actions were merely retribution.”

Debora’s tone sharpened, disbelief mixing with anger. “You took his life for that of an unborn child?”

Without warning, Elyse struck Debora across the face, her eyes blazing with fury. The slap landed hard, leaving Debora's cheek red and swollen, the imprint of Elyse's hand clearly visible.

Staggering back, Debora pressed her hand to her stinging cheek, her voice trembling with disbelief. "How could you hit me?"

Elyse, her hand still raised, shot back with intensity, "Shouldn't I? You think you're above reproach?" Her eyes narrowed into a menacing glare. "Say another word against my child, and it will be the last thing you do."

It had been a long time since Debora last saw Elyse, and she remembered her as soft and yielding. She hadn't realized the extent of Elyse's transformation—this new Elyse was unrecognizable, fiercer than she could have ever anticipated.

Jayden, who had been watching the confrontation silently, finally intervened. "Stop this, Debora. This matter is beyond you. Let your parents pursue justice for him. They probably don't even know you're here, right?"

Humiliation and anger flashed in Debora's eyes as she clenched her jaw, unwilling to show weakness.

Elyse interrupted with a sharp, probing look. "Jayden, are you trying to send her away because you think I'll harm her?"

Jayden was acutely aware of how volatile Elyse could become when it came to anything related to her child. Although she stood quietly now, he could sense her internal agony. He knew her deeply, especially her profound connection to her lost child, which had driven a deep wedge between them—a gap he had been tirelessly trying to bridge.

Before Jayden could respond, Debora interjected fiercely, "I don't need his protection. Now I understand you orchestrated my grandpa's death! You monster, I won't let this go."

As Debora turned to storm out, Driscoll and the household staff obstructed her exit.

“What is this? How dare you block my way? Don’t you recognize who I am?” Debora demanded, her voice sharp.

Jayden exhaled wearily. “They know exactly who you are. But they can’t let you leave if you intend to harm Elyse.”

Chapter 1304:

Debora looked at him in dismay. “So, it’s your orders they’re following? You’re the one keeping me here.” Her anger boiled over. “You’re siding with Elyse, even though Grandpa raised you! You’ve truly let me down.”

Elyse gave a light clap and a wry smile. “It’s rather moving. I had assumed no Owen held real affection for him. It seems I underestimated you. Unfortunately, he never saw you as his successor. Even in his dying moments, his thoughts were only of Jayden.”

Debora exploded in rage, shouting, “You’re crossing a line!”

To Elyse, Debora’s outburst seemed merely a childish tantrum. “Is that so? It seems you’re unraveling already?” With a swift move, Elyse grasped Debora’s wrist, her expression cold.

“Feel free to expose my actions tomorrow, but are you truly empowered to speak for all the Owens?” Elyse’s voice was calm but firm.

Trapped by her own words, Debora retorted impulsively, “Absolutely! My family sent me here to confront you and your accomplice! You won’t get away with this!”

Pleased by the response, Elyse loosened her hold and said, “That’s enough. Release her.”

Debora hesitated, momentarily confused by Elyse’s sudden decision to let her go. Her instincts told her that something wasn’t quite right. Still, she felt uncomfortable staying in Jayden’s residence any longer. With lingering doubts, she quickly left.

Once Debora was gone, Pearce grinned, his tone light. “You heard her, Jayden. She claims to act on behalf of the Owen family. If they decide to take action against Elyse, I won’t remain on the sidelines.”

Jayden, still observing Elyse with an unreadable expression, nodded in agreement. “Understood. I’ll stay out of it.”

This response seemed to please Pearce.

Elyse, stifling a yawn, turned to Pearce. “Thanks for coming, Pearce. That’s all I needed you for. You can go now. I need some rest.”

Elyse gracefully made her way upstairs, retreating into the calm sanctuary of her room. Meanwhile, Jayden turned his attention away and addressed Pearce with a hint of intrigue.

“You’ve been delving into the secrets of the Owen family. What have you managed to unearth?”

Unsurprised by Jayden’s awareness of his clandestine efforts, Pearce answered with a measured calm, “More than enough. Should Debora stir the pot too vigorously, don’t hold it against me when I lay bare the skeletons of your family.”

With a nonchalant shrug and a knowing smile, Jayden responded, “Their misdeeds no longer bear my name. I’ve cut all ties with the Owens.”

The most profound lesson Jayden had gleaned from his kin was the mastery of cold detachment. Severing those familial bonds had been almost instinctual for him. No matter how many labeled him callous or thankless, he remained utterly unbothered. Detachment was, after all, the quintessential Owen family creed.

Earlier, when Debora had stormed in, not for a second did Jayden believe her tirade was fueled by a quest for justice for Enzo. There had to be a selfish motive lurking behind her fervor. Predictability was a hallmark of the Owen lineage—each member a cog in a cold, calculating machine, driven solely by personal gain.

Chapter 1305:

As Pearce made to leave, a thought seemed to arrest him mid-step. “Jayden, ever ponder this? Elyse had no need to fire that shot.”

Silence fell, heavy and thick, as Jayden struggled to swallow. His throat suddenly dry, the weight of the question hung in the air.

With a soft exhale, Pearce continued, "That day wasn't just about the two of you. The area was teeming with mercenaries. She could have easily resolved it herself or simply issued a command. And yet, she refrained. Ever wondered why?"

Jayden's silence stretched on before he finally asked, "Why?"

Pearce yawned, fatigue evident in his posture, and offered a parting thought. "Mull it over. I've got my own vendettas with the Owens to settle."

Rooted to the spot, Jayden remained motionless for an extended period. Driscoll, ever observant, drew near and gently suggested, "Sir, perhaps it's time to rest. Some riddles are best left unsolved."

Reflective, Jayden murmured, "I always believed I was Elyse's shield. Yet now, I suspect she may have been mine all along."

Puzzled by the remark, Driscoll inquired, "What do you mean?"

With a shake of his head and a reassuring pat on Driscoll's shoulder, Jayden made his way to his study.

That night, the study became Jayden's refuge as he eschewed sleep, while Elyse embraced her solitude and slept soundly, unburdened.

Come morning, Elyse greeted the day with zest, savoring her breakfast before stepping into Chloe's car.

As they settled in, Elyse noticed Chloe stifling a yawn and asked, "Is it really necessary to fetch me every day? Doesn't it wear you out?"

Chloe, brushing away a stray tear, replied with a weary smile, "It's simply part of my duties. I'm hardly weary from it."

Elyse listened attentively as Chloe outlined the day's itinerary.

Chloe began, "I've shared yesterday's video, and it's generating a buzz online. Curiosity about you is mounting. Today's talk show appearance is crucial to keep that interest alive."

Elyse nodded, acknowledging the information. "Understood."

"Remember, it's a live show," Chloe continued. "The host will field real-time questions from viewers, which you'll need to answer on the spot."

A trace of apprehension flickered across Elyse's face. "Live? That means I need to be especially sharp, doesn't it?"

Chloe chuckled reassuringly. "Precisely. But I have no doubts about your performance. There's absolutely nothing to worry about."

Elyse's unease was palpable. "It's my first live broadcast. I must admit, it's quite daunting."

Chloe offered a comforting smile. "Don't let the nerves get to you. I've coordinated with the production team. They've agreed to sidestep any delicate topics, and even the audience questions will be pre-screened to ensure you're not put in a tight spot."

Reassured, Elyse relaxed and nodded her understanding. They arrived at their destination early. Elyse began her preparations immediately, even though the live segment wasn't scheduled until the afternoon.

Chapter 1306:

The intricate preparations required for even a brief live segment were more involved than Elyse had anticipated. As she sat in the lounge, poring over the day's schedule, her attention was suddenly caught by a woman acting oddly nearby.

Elyse's brow furrowed in confusion as she queried, "Excuse me, who are you? Do you work here?"

Without turning, the woman answered smoothly, “I’m a temp, just here to clean.” Her tone was too calm, almost rehearsed, sparking a flicker of suspicion in Elyse.

Elyse pressed on, her voice laced with skepticism. “Are you sure you’re just cleaning?”

“A temp? Does the station usually employ temporary staff?”

The woman, maintaining her composure, simply replied, “I’m just a cleaner, not like the full-time staff here.” She quickly grabbed a trash bag and made a swift exit from the lounge.

Elyse watched the woman’s retreating figure, a sense of déjà vu washing over her. There was something unmistakably familiar about her, as if their paths had crossed in another life. Even her voice seemed to echo a distant memory.

Yet, try as she might, Elyse could not place where she might have encountered her before.

As the curtain rose, Elyse took her cues from the staff and gracefully made her way to the recording studio. The interview began on a high note, with Elyse captivating the audience with whimsical tales from her adventures in international competitions.

Yet, as the audience Q&A unfolded, the atmosphere shifted dramatically.

A woman, dressed in a cleaning uniform, suddenly collapsed in front of Elyse.

A look of stark terror swept over Elyse’s face as she stared in utter disbelief at the scene before her. The room fell silent for a moment, just long enough for the woman to gather her breath and wail.

“Elyse, I implore you, set me free!”

The live audience sat frozen, while viewers at home watched in confusion and disbelief.

Swiftly regaining his composure, the host intervened, his voice stern. “This is not part of our show. Verify this immediately.”

At his command, two assistants rushed to the woman's side, attempting to escort her offstage.

However, the woman anticipated their approach, clutching desperately at Elyse's feet and pleading, "Elyse, have mercy! Release me from this torment. You're crushing my spirit. Can't you spare just a fragment of your compassion?"

The studio descended into chaos, sparking a wave of fervent discussion among the online audience.

Chloe, who had been backstage, noticed the commotion but arrived just moments too late to catch the critical exchange.

"Identify yourself. What ties do you have to Elyse?" the host demanded.

Elyse faced the distraught woman, her eyes wide with confusion. "I don't know you. I've never caused you harm. Why are you targeting me with these accusations?"

Chapter 1307:

The cleaning lady, tears staining her cheeks, retorted, "You claim ignorance? Elyse, does your heart not weigh heavy with guilt when you deny knowing me?"

Recognition slowly dawned on Elyse as she finally placed the face. "Thea Benson?" she exclaimed, her voice trembling.

Thea's response was cold and venomous. "You still remember me, huh? Are you satisfied now, seeing how low I've fallen?"

Elyse's confusion deepened as she scrutinized Thea, who looked nothing like the privileged Benson heiress she once knew.

Taking advantage of Elyse's distracted state, Thea continued her plaintive pleas. "Elyse, for the love of all that is good, speak to Grandma. End this agony. You're destroying me!"

Elyse's expression twisted in bewildered innocence. "I swear, I've never wronged you. There must be some mistake."

Thea's voice rose to a feverish pitch. "How dare you stand there and deny your deeds? Have the memories of your actions truly faded? What could I possibly have done to deserve such cold-heartedness from you?"

Chloe's voice pierced the escalating chaos, sharp and commanding. "Security, get her out now! Is this how we let someone tarnish my artist's reputation? Are we just going to stand here like statues?"

Her words jolted the crew into immediate action. Feeling the imminent threat, Thea shielded her face and screamed.

"Don't hurt me! I'm innocent!"

Suddenly, her eyes rolled back, and she slumped to the floor, unconscious. A production assistant rushed to scoop Thea up and carried her away.

Trembling with fury, Chloe was incensed. This debacle had unfolded live, and the crew's delayed reaction was utterly unacceptable.

Chloe stormed off the stage, signaling frantically to the staff. Reacting without hesitation, the director cut to a commercial break, desperately trying to salvage the situation.

Chloe, livid, confronted the bewildered staff with intensity. "Who was that woman? How did she get past security? Why wasn't she stopped sooner?"

Her anger mounted as she continued, "This is live! Do you realize the uproar this incident has caused online? Your negligence has dragged my artist through the mud!"

The staff exchanged uneasy looks, silence hanging heavily in the room. The chief director remained silent. Suddenly, a production assistant burst into the room.

"She was faking it! We were about to call an ambulance when she just ran off!"

Elyse let out a weary sigh. "We need to keep the show moving, don't we?"

Chloe faced her, solemn and concerned. “An incident just occurred on live TV. It’s your call if you want to stop.” The air was thick with tension. Halting the show could spell disaster.

Elyse shook her head, recalling advice she had once received: an artist must show resilience, no matter the challenge.

Chapter 1308:

Having made her decision, she resolved to push forward. “I’ll keep filming,” Elyse announced firmly. “Let’s move forward with the rest of the show.”

Chloe paused, uncertainty flickering in her eyes. But as she met Elyse’s steady gaze, she quashed her doubts and turned to address the host.

“As for the incident that just unfolded, please avoid discussing it with the viewers.”

The show continued filming smoothly, but the online backlash against Elyse was gaining momentum. Harsh comments and accusations flooded in, but since the host had chosen not to address the incident on air, Elyse remained blissfully unaware—for now.

Once the live broadcast wrapped, the director hurried over, his expression apologetic.

“Miss Lloyd, I’m terribly sorry about the incident earlier. We’ve just looked into it. That woman wasn’t part of the crew. She was a temp brought in for cleaning. She slipped into the studio while the staff were preoccupied with the filming.”

Elyse offered a gracious smile. “I see. No harm done. If you really want to apologize, how about inviting me back for another episode?”

The director blinked in surprise, caught off guard by her leniency. Beside her, Chloe raised a brow, clearly surprised.

The contract strictly outlined protocols for such incidents. Shouldn't they be demanding accountability? After exchanging a few more pleasantries with the director, Elyse left for her next engagement.

Once inside the car, Chloe turned to her. "We could demand compensation for this and have the show issue a public statement clearing your name."

Elyse reclined in her seat, closing her eyes. "There's no need for that," she said, her tone calm. "I'd rather use this to build a good rapport with the director than force an apology. It's more valuable in the long run."

Chloe frowned.

"Jayden would step in for you. You don't need to go out of your way to manage things like this."

Elyse shook her head. "It's different, Chloe. I need to earn my own connections. I can't rely on him for everything."

Chloe paused for a moment before asking, "Do you not want him to help you?"

Elyse chuckled. "Like I said, I can't rely on him for everything. If I did, wouldn't that make me just a freeloader?"

Chloe nodded reluctantly. "Fair enough. But what about that woman? She clearly wanted to damage your reputation. We can't just let it slide."

Elyse sighed, her voice turning thoughtful. "Honestly, I don't know yet. I barely know her. I met her a couple of times months ago, but after I went abroad, I never heard from her again."

Chloe's brow furrowed. "So her claim that you ruined her is baseless?"

"Completely," Elyse replied. "We're not close, so why would I bother hurting her?"

Chloe pursed her lips, determination hardening her features. "I'll handle it. Your career is just taking off. We can't let people like her drag you down."

Chapter 1309:

Elyse gave her a grateful look. “Thank you, Chloe. I trust you’ll sort it out.”

By the time they arrived at the next filming location, Chloe was already on her phone, making calls and pulling strings to address the growing online storm. Elyse, meanwhile, focused on preparing for her shoot.

But before Chloe could fully manage the situation, Pearce had already seen the posts online and the comments that came with them.

When he reviewed the live broadcast recordings, Pearce noticed that the contentious segment had been edited out. Only a few scattered clips remained online, hinting at the incident.

Frowning, he picked up his phone and dialed Elyse.

Elyse, busy with work, didn’t answer. It wasn’t until evening, after several attempts, that they finally connected.

Elyse was out to dinner with Chloe when her phone buzzed again.

Answering it, she sounded puzzled. “What’s up, Pearce? Don’t tell me you miss me again.”

Pearce’s voice carried a hint of irritation. “Can’t I call you for no reason?”

Elyse rolled her eyes, keeping her tone light. “I’m really busy. If you’ve got something to say, spit it out. If not, let me go so I can rest early.”

“You’re going to drive me insane,” Pearce muttered. Then, cutting to the chase, he said, “I saw the posts about Thea online. Ignore her. She’s already been abandoned by the Benson family.”

Elyse, mid-bite of her dinner, froze. “Abandoned? When did that happen?”

Pearce, sitting in his office and absentmindedly twirling a pen, replied, “It was around the time you went abroad for the competition. Thea’s father wasn’t content with being a minor player in the Benson family. He conspired with rivals to frame my dad. But I caught wind of it and stopped it.”

Elyse’s brows furrowed. “And then?”

Pearce chuckled darkly.

“Then I gave Grandma the evidence. She was so furious she called the police and had Thea’s dad arrested.”

Elyse leaned back in her chair, processing the revelation. “I see. So, Thea had a breakdown and started resenting me because of that?”

Pearce laughed heartily. “Not quite. Thea didn’t stop there. She wasn’t just angry at Grandma; she contacted those same rivals, plotting to harm her. If it weren’t for a servant’s timely intervention, Grandma could’ve been killed.”

Elyse nearly choked on her drink. “Thea tried to harm Grandma? What on earth was she thinking? Wasn’t Grandma good to her?”

Pearce shrugged, though his disdain was palpable. “Who knows? But let’s not forget this—Thea and her father were never true Bensons. Her dad was adopted by Grandma after your dad ran away from home. She took him in as a replacement, but it’s clear he and his family never truly belonged.”

Elyse’s mind raced as she connected the dots. “So, Thea made all these mistakes herself. But why is she accusing me of ruining her?”

Chapter 1310:

Pearce leaned back in his chair, his tone casual. “That’s probably because not long after you left for abroad, Grandma called a family meeting and made her will.” He twirled his pen between his fingers, pausing before adding, “She left the bulk of her assets to you. Thea only got a few properties and some cash—no shares in the company at all.”

Elyse blinked in disbelief. “Wait, what? How did I not know about this?”

Pearce smirked. “Well, you weren’t there, were you?”

Setting the pen down, he explained, “Right after Grandma finalized the will, Thea’s dad started scheming with the competition, trying to undermine my dad. Looking back, it’s pretty clear she blames you for everything wrong in her life.”

Elyse rolled her eyes. “I figured she’d be satisfied with the money and houses. I didn’t think she’d come gunning for me.”

Pearce chuckled, shaking his head. “That’s why I suggested a little clause to Grandma. The money and properties are hers—but only when she turns forty.”

Elyse raised an eyebrow. “Forty? Why wait that long?”

He leaned forward, lowering his voice as if revealing a secret. “Because she’s been hanging around with some shady guy—a con artist. If she got everything now, he’d drain her dry in no time.”

Elyse smirked.

“Wow, that’s oddly thoughtful of you, making sure she hits middle age with a safety net.” Pearce groaned, rubbing his temple.

“Thoughtful? I’m still the one footing her bills. Her monthly allowance comes straight out of my paycheck.”

Elyse couldn’t help laughing at his frustration. They chatted for a while longer before Elyse finally ended the call with a soft chuckle.

Chloe, seated across the table, looked up curiously. “What did your cousin say this time?”

Elyse set her phone down and resumed eating. “We were talking about Thea. I think I finally get why she holds such a grudge against me.”

Chloe nodded, her expression thoughtful. “If it starts messing with your peace of mind, I won’t sit back and do nothing.”

After dinner, Elyse returned home and noticed Jayden pacing the hallway, his phone pressed to his ear. His voice was low and clipped, a clear sign something serious was unfolding.

She leaned toward Driscoll, who was tidying up nearby, and asked quietly, “What’s going on?”

Driscoll glanced at Jayden, then back at Elyse, his brows furrowed. “Not entirely sure, but I think it’s about his family. Their staff called me earlier this afternoon.”

Elyse nodded slowly, her lips pressed into a thin line. She made her way to the living room and sank into the couch, her eyes lingering on Jayden as she waited for him to finish his conversation.

An hour dragged by before Jayden finally ended the call and came into the living room. He dropped onto the sofa beside her, lying back with a heavy sigh.

The sudden weight on her leg made her glance down. Jayden’s face was turned toward her, his eyes shadowed with exhaustion.