

Bound love 1421

Chapter 1421:

Jayden turned to Elyse with an exaggerated look of mock despair. “Oh no, what a pity. I’d really love to attend one of these events, but it seems I’m never in the right circle.”

Completely oblivious to the faint tension crackling between the two men, Elyse said earnestly, “I’ll ask Zayn if you can come along next time.”

“That’d be awesome,” Jayden replied, his smile tightening around the edges.

Elyse scratched her head, her brow furrowed in quiet confusion.

Something about Jayden didn’t seem quite right.

His mind appeared entirely preoccupied with his work, his thoughts consumed by financial matters. Could someone like that genuinely value the beauty of music?

A storm of questions churned in her thoughts, though she chose to keep them to herself.

Victor fixed his eyes on Jayden, speaking with deliberate seriousness. “Pearce and I had a conversation about you earlier. He’s concerned that you might end up making Elyse’s life unhappy. He’s been wrestling with whether he should encourage her to find someone better, someone who can truly bring her joy.”

“As Elyse’s cousin, Pearce has every right to be protective,” Jayden responded with icy composure, “but I don’t see how that has anything to do with you.”

Victor’s face grew more resolute. “I’m Pearce’s best friend. I care deeply about Elyse and want nothing but her happiness.”

He hesitated for a moment before continuing with a faint smile. “Elyse is truly remarkable. Don’t you think she might find even greater joy with someone else?”

Jayden's chest tightened as his heart skipped. He was sure he understood Victor's insinuation.

A sly grin spread across his lips. "Elyse's happiness lies with me and no one else."

Victor's mouth curved into a restrained smile. "Where does all that self-assurance come from? Honestly, Jayden, I believe Elyse would thrive with just about anyone other than you."

"That's your perspective," Jayden replied sharply.

"And that's yours," Victor shot back with equal force.

Elyse, standing awkwardly between them, had initially assumed their exchange was lighthearted teasing. But the rising tension between their words revealed something much deeper.

She stepped forward and pushed them apart, her glare stern as she faced each of them. "What's wrong with you two? Honestly? Do you think my happiness hinges entirely on being with a man? Can't I find joy in my own way?"

Victor stumbled over his words. "That's not at all what I meant. Of course, you can be happy on your own. I just meant having someone who loves you can make things even better."

"Those are two completely separate ideas," Elyse responded, her expression firm and displeased. "It's late. I'm ready to go home." She turned toward the car, but Victor quickly stopped her with a hurried, "Please, just consider what I've said, all right?"

"I will," Elyse answered, her tone steady. "I'll let you know what I decide."

Victor nodded in agreement, his eyes following her as she stepped into the vehicle.

Jayden had remained silent, his gaze locked on Victor with unyielding focus. He could feel Victor's underlying intentions toward Elyse. Victor finally shifted his attention back to Jayden, his expression calm, a faint smirk tugging at his lips. "Is there something you'd like to say?"

Chapter 1422:

“Not a thing,” Jayden replied with a flat tone.

“Don’t be so sensitive.” Victor chuckled lightly. “If there’s nothing, then maybe it’s time you left. Unless you’ve lost interest in driving Elyse home, I’d be happy to take over.”

Jayden let out a short laugh, his face unreadable. “No need for that. We live together, so your offer is unnecessary.”

Jayden slid into the car, his face clouded with a storm of emotions.

Elyse settled into her seat, immediately succumbing to drowsiness. Her eyes drifted closed, creating a stark contrast to Jayden’s turbulent mood.

The tension remained unbroken during their drive home. Jayden walked ahead in unusual silence, his steps quick and deliberate. It wasn’t until they were inside that Elyse realized something was wrong.

Driscoll observed the unfolding scene, a mug of hot chocolate in hand. Elyse trailed behind Jayden, her expression a mixture of confusion and concern.

“What’s wrong?” she pleaded, her voice soft but persistent. “Talk to me, Jayden. Please don’t shut me out.”

But Jayden remained obstinately silent, avoiding her gaze with practiced determination.

Driscoll found the moment peculiar.

He recalled times when their relationship had been rocky, but never had he seen Elyse pursue Jayden with such humble determination. Something had shifted between them.

Elyse’s patience began to wear thin. Her questions grew more insistent, her frustration mounting with each unanswered query.

In a decisive moment, she grabbed Jayden by the collar and pulled him into her room, her grip leaving no room for argument.

Jayden offered little resistance, allowing himself to be guided by her forceful momentum.

Inside the room, Elyse thrust him onto the sofa. “Explain yourself,” she demanded, her irritation bubbling to the surface. “What’s bothering you? Did I do something wrong? If you’re upset, just tell me. How am I supposed to understand if you won’t speak?”

Jayden turned away, his voice laden with hurt. “I’m not important to you. You don’t care about my feelings.”

“That’s nonsense,” Elyse retorted. “When have I ever made you feel unimportant? When have I not cared about you?”

His response came sharp and pointed. “If I meant something to you, why are you so close to another man?”

Elyse folded her arms, exhaling sharply. “Oh, for heaven’s sake. Victor is just an acquaintance of my cousin.”

Jayden scoffed, “A friend of your cousin? That man’s got eyes like a hawk circling its prey. He’s clearly angling for something more.”

Elyse blinked, confused. “Something more? What on earth are you implying?”

Jayden leaned forward, his resentment flaring. “Don’t play innocent. He outright challenged me in front of you, suggesting you find someone else. If that’s not a bold-faced provocation, I don’t know what is.”

“You’re reading too much into it,” Elyse countered. “He’s just sharing advice.”

Chapter 1423:

Jayden's jaw tightened. Her obliviousness to Victor's ulterior motives grated on him.

To Jayden, Victor's so-called advice was the sugar coating on a poisonous pill, and Elyse seemed all too willing to swallow it whole.

Jayden realized he needed to do something.

His silence only stoked Elyse's annoyance. She threw up her hands. "Fine! You want to sulk? Be my guest. Go back to your room. I'm done with this conversation. I need sleep."

But Jayden, feeling her dismissal like salt on an open wound, dropped onto her bed with an air of defiance.

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm sleeping here tonight."

Elyse's eyes widened. "Are you out of your mind? Who said you could stay here?"

Without missing a beat, Jayden sauntered toward the bathroom. "Grab me some pajamas from my room," he ordered.

Elyse crossed her arms, glaring daggers. "Dream on."

Jayden smirked, unbothered. "Fine. I'll sleep naked."

Elyse's jaw tightened. "You wouldn't dare."

Jayden's laugh was low and confident. Of course, he would dare. They'd shared far more intimate moments, and her fiery temper only amused him.

Fearing he'd make good on his threat, Elyse stomped off to fetch his pajamas, muttering curses under her breath.

As the water ran in the shower, Elyse found her thoughts drifting to Victor's suggestions.

Was there truth in his words? Would some space between her and Jayden really bring clarity?

When Jayden emerged, toweling his damp hair, he found Elyse lost in thought. “Your turn,” he said, his voice softer now.

Elyse, her drowsiness setting in, nodded and headed to the bathroom. When she returned, Jayden was on the bed, his gaze steady and unreadable.

“What now?” she asked, her guard rising.

Jayden patted the spot beside him. “Stop acting like I’m a villain. Come to bed.”

Elyse grabbed her phone, contemplating retreating to his room instead. Better to avoid whatever game he was playing.

But Jayden saw through her in an instant. Before she could escape, he tugged her back, tossing her onto the bed like a fisherman reeling in his catch.

Hovering over her, his voice was low, almost teasing. “No more running. We’ve both showered, and it’s time we sorted things out once and for all.”

Elyse threw her hands up in exasperation. “Sort things out? We just need to have a good conversation. We don’t have to do it in bed.”

Jayden leaned closer, his frustration bubbling just beneath the surface. “Don’t play dumb, Elyse. You know what I mean. I’m trying to reconnect with you. We haven’t done that in a long time.”

Elyse took a step back, her voice firm. “I’m not your wife, Jayden.”

“But you’re still with me now,” he countered, his tone softening despite his exasperation. “Isn’t it natural to want to be close to the person you care about?”

Something about his earlier encounter with Victor had left Jayden unsettled. He didn’t fully understand it himself, but the encounter stirred emotions he couldn’t put into words.

Chapter 1424:

He forcefully spread her legs, his tone harsh. “Open up a bit. If you dare close them, I’ll spank you.”

Elyse’s face flushed with a mix of embarrassment and anger as she instinctively tried to pull away, her movements hurried and tense. But before she could, Jayden’s hand landed lightly—a playful yet firm gesture that left her startled. A sharp sting lingered on her skin, and a wave of humiliation rose within her, her eyes brimming with unshed tears.

“You jerk!” she exclaimed, her voice filled with exasperation.

Jayden’s heart remained unyielding, cold, and unresponsive to the sight of her tears. He stated firmly, “I warned you not to close your legs. If you choose to ignore me, you can’t hold me responsible for spanking you.”

Elyse, filled with anger, attempted to close her legs once more. Jayden sneered, prying them apart again, delivering several firm slaps until her skin turned red, marked with clear palm prints.

Overwhelmed and unable to hold back any longer, Elyse broke down, her sobs spilling out in a torrent of distress.

Jayden’s voice cut through the air, sharp and impatient. “Why are you crying? If you don’t stop, I’ll do it again,” he warned, his tone leaving little room for sympathy.

Elyse, determined to stand her ground, cried even louder.

In response, Jayden’s hand landed again, delivering a series of measured spanks on her tender skin.

Both sides of her butt burned with pain, and she finally stopped resisting, biting her lip in humiliation, refusing to look at Jayden. Seeing Elyse close her eyes, tears slipping—

Tears slipped silently down her cheeks, and Jayden’s tone shifted, losing its earlier edge. “Did I hurt you? Do you feel wronged?”

Elyse chose not to respond and remained silent.

Undeterred, Jayden thrust his fingers inside her, causing Elyse to gasp and open her eyes wide.

Despite the years they had spent together, this was the first time Elyse found herself with such an unguarded, unfiltered view of Jayden's actions.

In her shock, the weight of her sadness momentarily lifted, and she blurted out, "What are you doing? Stop it!"

Jayden lifted an eyebrow, a smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth. "It's been a while since we've been intimate. If I don't lend a hand now, can you handle it later?"

Elyse's emotions churned, a mix of shame and frustration boiling over. "Quit your antics!" she snapped, her voice thick with anger. "If you want to have sex with me, just get it done quickly!"

Jayden shook his head, a hint of seriousness in his voice. "It doesn't work like that," he said, his tone steady. "We are bonding. If I don't take your well-being into account and rush things, you won't be happy."

With that, he focused on her passageway, realizing she was too tense. Unable to move forward without easing her, Jayden knew he had to tread carefully.

Elyse's focus was entirely on her sensations, her eyes fixed on Jayden's every move. Her body, betraying her will, began to respond against her intentions. A reluctant sound of pleasure escaped her lips.

Jayden could feel the shift in her energy, her tension giving way to something else. He leaned in, his voice low and teasing. "How long do you plan to do it with me later?"

Chapter 1425:

Elyse shook her head, her impatience clear. "Just get it over with."

Jayden's expression softened, but his tone remained firm. "That's not how it works," he replied, shaking his head. "I can't rush it. The more time we take, the better it'll be."

Elyse bit her bottom lip, her body trembling as a wave of emotions washed over her. Just as Jayden finished speaking, she reached the peak, a silent shudder coursing through her, caught between hesitation and release.

Jayden wrapped his arms around her gently, holding her close as he savored the moment. He took in the warmth of her body, appreciating the delicate beauty of her in his embrace.

He murmured, his voice soft with suggestion, "Aren't you off tomorrow? If you are, we could have more time to ourselves tonight."

Elyse, still dazed, took a moment to collect herself from the lingering afterglow. "I don't have a choice in this, do I?" she said, her voice tinged with frustration. "Stop acting like you're asking for my opinion. If you're going to fuck me, just do it."

Jayden burst into laughter, then tenderly held Elyse's face, planting a firm kiss on her lips.

Elyse stepped back, irritation flashing across her face as she wiped her cheek. "I told you to hurry up! And keep those kisses to yourself—I don't need a shower in your spit!"

Jayden laughed, grabbing her face once more and showering her with kisses until her cheeks glistened with moisture.

"You did that on purpose!" Elyse accused.

With a sly wink, Jayden took advantage of her momentary distraction and boldly made his move, thrusting into her.

Elyse inhaled sharply, her back arching in reflex. It took her a moment to regather herself. Overwhelmed, she protested, "You promised you'd go easy on me! This feels anything but gentle."

"Looks like my fingers fell short of the mark," Jayden murmured, his lips curling into a smug grin. "Perhaps I should up the ante next time."

Elyse clenched her teeth, holding back her frustration. That was far from what she meant, but arguing with him was like talking to a brick wall—he'd only twist her words.

His actions were louder than any declaration, clearly showing that Elyse was destined to weather the storms of his temper.

After what felt like an eternity of relentless pursuit, Elyse was left utterly drained, too exhausted to even twitch.

Jayden, visibly satisfied, tucked her in and lay down beside her, a self-satisfied air about him.

Elyse cracked open an eyelid, her voice weary. "I'm wiped out. Satisfied?"

"I am," Jayden replied softly. "But not for the reasons you might think."

"Why then?" Elyse murmured, confusion knitting her brows.

Gently squeezing her cheek, Jayden smiled. "Because I've been close to you."

Elyse tilted her head, puzzled.

Seeing her confusion, Jayden continued, "Sometimes, I think we're both still trying to figure out what love really means."

Chapter 1426:

"So, how can two people, so clueless about love, stick together?" Elyse wondered aloud.

Jayden paused, a thoughtful look crossing his face. "Maybe that's the very puzzle we're meant to solve."

Elyse paused, then softly agreed, "You're right. We don't understand love. That's what makes everything so complex between us."

Yawning, her eyes fluttered shut. "I can't talk anymore. I need to sleep."

"Sleep then," Jayden whispered, pulling her close. "I'll join you."

"It's a good thing I'm off work tomorrow," Elyse mumbled sleepily. "Otherwise, there's no way I'd make it out of bed."

Jayden silently contemplated how easy he could make her life; she wouldn't need to work if he had his way. But he kept his thoughts to himself, knowing well that sharing them would only ignite another fiery debate.

The next day, they were still tangled up in bed at noon when a sharp knock rattled the door, abruptly pulling a grumpy Jayden from his sleep.

He cracked the door open, his eyes half-closed, still clinging to sleep. "Driscoll," he grumbled, "this better be important, or you know what'll happen."

Driscoll winced. "Shaun's here. And he's brought his parents."

Jayden blinked, rubbing his eyes, thinking he'd misheard. "Come again?"

Driscoll exhaled heavily. "Shaun's dropped by for a visit, and his parents tagged along. You should probably come down."

Jayden scowled, weighing this new annoyance. "Fine. Tell them to wait."

Driscoll nodded and wiped a bead of sweat from his forehead as he turned to leave.

He'd really hoped to avoid disturbing Jayden and Elyse, who hadn't emerged all morning, a sure sign of the previous night's fervor. He had his fingers crossed for these two, hopeful they'd resolve their differences and remarry soon.

And then this disruption. Their serene morning was now pierced by this unwanted intrusion.

Back in the room, Jayden started to get dressed, his movements stirring Elyse, who opened her eyes slowly. “What time is it?”

Jayden, slipping into his shirt, paused to pinch her cheek playfully. “It’s noon. Want to catch some more sleep?”

Elyse blinked. “No wonder I feel like I could eat a horse. I’m going to grab something to eat.”

Jayden gently pressed her back onto the pillows. “Stay here. I’ll ask Driscoll to bring up something. You can snooze a bit more after eating.”

“I guess I didn’t go easy on you last night.”

Elyse rolled her eyes, well aware of that fact.

As he reluctantly continued dressing, she asked, “Do we have company?”

Jayden nodded. “Shaun and his parents.”

Elyse sat up again, puzzled. “Why are they here?”

“I’m not sure,” Jayden confessed. “That’s what I’m about to find out.”

After a moment, Elyse questioned, “Shouldn’t I come down too?”

Jayden frowned and gently pushed her back down. “Don’t worry about it,” he said dismissively. “They’re hardly guests. No need for you to get up.”

Chapter 1427:

Elyse curled her lips into a tight smile. “Fine. If you insist I shouldn’t go downstairs, then I won’t.”

Jayden replied, "They're not worth your time, not important at all." After his words, Jayden affectionately ruffled Elyse's hair before exiting the bedroom.

He walked into the living room and spotted Shaun lounging on the sofa, calmly sipping his coffee. Shaun's parents sat opposite, their faces etched with worry.

Jayden approached with a nonchalant air and asked, "So, you just showed up? Need something?"

With a look of concern, Hanley replied, "He's adamant about leaving the hospital. Claims someone's troubling him there and he's pushing for a discharge."

"That sounds like a family issue. Why bring it to me?" Jayden countered, his tone laced with surprise.

Hanley, uneasy, explained, "He's refusing to go back to Liverton or agree to any plans we make. He's only asking for you and Elyse." Jayden, momentarily thrown off, pointed to his own face and challenged Shaun, "Did you wake up confused this morning, thinking Elyse and I are your folks?"

Shaun stroked his chin, musing, "The moment I laid eyes on you both, something felt familiar."

Jayden snapped back, "Losing your memory doesn't mean you should lose all sense of reality. We've had our separate lives, and a pretty solid grudge to boot."

Curious, Shaun pressed further. "What grudge? Do tell."

Jayden paused, then sighed. "It's water under the bridge now, but that bridge was burned long ago."

Shaun, still confused, asked, "How is it too late? Wasn't our issue just business?"

Choosing to drop the subject, Jayden turned to Hanley and Velma. "What exactly are you asking of me, Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy?"

Hanley responded earnestly, "We're at our wits' end. He won't even acknowledge us as his parents. We're hoping you could look after him."

Jayden fell silent, his frustration palpable, before bluntly stating, “I don’t run a shelter here.”

Hanley was quick to add, “We’re willing to make it worth your while. Let’s hash it out in your study.”

As Jayden hesitated, Velma dabbed at her eyes and choked out, “Look, I know you’re not short on partners, and we might not be your top pick. But Shaun is our boy. He doesn’t recognize us anymore, so we’re just rolling with his punches.”

Turning to Shaun, who appeared indifferent to her tears, she pleaded, “Mr. Owen, could you consider helping us out, just this time? We’re ready to show you how serious we are.”

Rubbing his temples, Jayden muttered, “Crying won’t help anyone, you know.”

Velma, her voice heavy with sorrow, shared, “My son is so unlucky. After that car crash, he doesn’t remember a thing or recognize any of us.”

Unaffected by Velma’s distress, Shaun quipped, “Ease up on the tears; you’re not exactly a picture when you cry. Jayden might not play ball if you keep at it.”

Velma, catching the hint, quickly wiped away her tears.

Jayden looked over at Shaun, bemused by his carefree demeanor, and gestured towards his office. “Mr. Hanley Kennedy, let’s step into my study, please.”

Hanley, spotting a chance to bridge gaps, promptly followed Jayden.

Chapter 1428:

Velma remained behind, her tears falling silently now.

Shaun, clearly annoyed by the sobbing, shot Velma a look of disdain and dismissively turned his back on her.

At that moment, Driscoll walked to the elevator with a maid who pushed a cart loaded with food.

Realizing Elyse was still around, Shaun sprang up, eager to find her. Elyse was lounging against her headboard. After Driscoll set the food on the bedside table, he and the maid exited.

Just as Elyse was about to dig in, Shaun barged into her room.

Startled, Elyse blurted out, “Why are you barging into my room?”

Shaun, misunderstanding her condition, said, “I was wondering why you hadn’t come out to greet me. Looks like you’re not well.”

Embarrassed yet too shy to confess she was merely recovering from a night of passion with Jayden, Elyse rubbed her nose and decided to play along with Shaun’s assumption.

With a sigh of resignation, she asked, “So, when will you leave my room?”

Shaun exhaled deeply, his voice soft. “Don’t give me the cold shoulder. It’s been ages since we’ve caught up. I’m not keen on rushing out.”

Elyse, a bit startled by his tone, replied, “You okay? You’re kind of giving me the creeps.”

Shaun waved off her concern. “It’s just that my mom’s meltdown in the living room was too much. Had to escape the waterworks.”

Elyse, finding herself at a loss, simply stared back at him, bewildered. After a thoughtful pause, Shaun shifted topics. “There’s something important we need to talk about.”

Eager to change the subject, Elyse sipped her soup and asked nonchalantly, “What’s on your mind?”

Shaun, his gaze distant, shared, “I can’t pin down the exact day, but recently, during an evening stroll in the hospital garden, I spotted a woman. Something about her silhouette struck a chord.”

Elyse sipped her soup, the spoon gently clinking against the bowl. She leaned forward, a curious tilt to her head. “So, you saw a silhouette that seemed familiar, and then what happened?”

“It felt too familiar, almost hauntingly so. My heart raced, and everything around me just faded. It was as if I was losing myself to the memory.” Shaun clutched his chest, his frown deepening as he recalled the uneasy heartbeats of that moment.

There was a heavy pause, laden with tension, before he continued. “My eyes were locked on her back, and then this sharp, bitter pain pierced my heart, filled with sorrow.”

“What did you do next?” Elyse’s voice was soft, almost a whisper.

Shaun touched his throat, a gesture of uncertainty. “I wanted to shout to her, but my words were stuck. Instead, my legs decided for me, racing towards her.”

His eyes clouded with confusion. “I just blurted out a name, and when she heard, she sprinted away and disappeared into the crowd.”

Elyse looked up, her expression clouded with confusion. “What name did you say?”

Shaun’s fists tightened reflexively, his heart racing. He answered with a slight tremor, “Tracy. I said Tracy.”

Chapter 1429:

Elyse’s fork dropped with a soft clink, and she fixed him with a look of sheer astonishment.

Saying that name made Shaun’s head spin, a peculiar sense of déjà vu washing over him.

It was eerily familiar. The mere thought of Tracy sent sharp pains through his skull, as if to ward off the memory.

Noticing Shaun’s evident agony, Elyse leaned forward, her voice laced with worry. “Are you alright? Do you need a doctor?”

Shaun waved off her concern with a weary shake of his head. “Just a severe headache. It’ll pass.”

Elyse sat back, her meal forgotten. She watched him struggle, half-expecting him to collapse.

As his breathing steadied, Shaun broke the silence with a troubled look. “What ties do I have with Tracy? Why does her name twist my stomach into knots?”

Elyse hesitated, her lips parting slightly as if to speak, but then closing again. “I’m not sure it’s my place to say.”

Silence hung between them for a moment before Shaun ventured, “Tracy’s my girlfriend, isn’t she? Did I fail her somehow?”

Elyse shifted uncomfortably, avoiding his probing gaze.

Reading her silence, Shaun’s voice grew soft but certain. “I see. Tracy is my girlfriend.”

After a thoughtful pause, Elyse gently suggested, “Have you ever thought that maybe forgetting could be a blessing? If the past is tangled and unresolved, perhaps it’s fate’s way of giving you a fresh start.”

Shaun firmly disagreed, shaking his head. “Forgetting doesn’t erase the truth. The sting I feel at the mention of Tracy proves she matters. I need to remember, not erase her from my memory.”

“Even if it brings back bad memories?” Elyse’s voice was barely a whisper.

Shaun looked down, his voice thick with resolve. “Painful memories might reveal mistakes I’ve made. I need to face them, not run away. That’s the only way to right my wrongs, isn’t it?”

Elyse was speechless. She had never envisioned a scenario where Tracy and Shaun would end up in such a dire situation.

Shaun persisted, “If I ask you about Tracy, you’re not going to spill anything, right?”

Elyse shook her head. “No, I won’t.”

“And the woman I saw at the hospital that day,” Shaun asked. “Was it Tracy?”

Elyse hesitated, knowing deep down that Tracy wasn’t really gone. She finally answered, “I don’t know. You should talk to Jayden about that.”

Just then, Jayden appeared at the bedroom door, his face clouded with irritation.

He eyed Shaun, who wore a look of innocence, and snapped with a wry smile, “What audacity brings you into my bedroom?”

Shaun retorted, “Ease up. I’m here to talk to Elyse about something important.”

Jayden stormed over, seized Shaun by the collar, and dragged him toward the door, his teeth clenched. “This is neither the time nor the place. Get out of here!”

“Don’t get so worked up,” Shaun protested, trying to calm him. “Just hear me out. I can explain.”

Jayden was having none of it. After ejecting Shaun from the room, he slammed the door shut.

Chapter 1430:

He hurried back to Elyse, his tone laced with concern. “Did he trouble you in any way?”

Elyse shook her head. “No, but he did share something disturbing.”

“What’s that?” Jayden probed.

With a hesitant pause, Elyse replied, “He saw a woman’s silhouette at the hospital. He thinks it might have been Tracy.”

Jayden's eyebrows shot up, prompting her to continue.

Elyse's expression was fraught with concern. "Tracy showing up at the hospital... She wasn't there out of concern for Shaun, was she? If she was indeed there, and not for Shaun, then she must have come for..." She trailed off, leaving the name unsaid, yet Jayden caught on immediately.

"You think Tracy went to the hospital aiming for Dolores?" he concluded bluntly.

Elyse bit her lip and nodded.

Jayden fell silent for a moment before speaking again. "It's plausible. Her appearance likely spells out her intentions. She's targeting those who've wronged her. I can't see any other reason why she wouldn't approach you directly."

"No way, impossible!" Elyse shot back, her voice thick with disbelief. "Tracy would never do something like that. She has a kind soul." The tension in her voice hung heavily in the air, a clear sign of her struggle to come to terms with the accusation. Jayden, sensing her turmoil, decided it was best not to push her further.

He gently placed his hands on her shoulders, his tone laden with regret. "I wish it weren't true, Elyse. But all the evidence points to Tracy. She's our main suspect now."

Tears welled up in Elyse's eyes as she looked up at him, her voice wavering. "But you know Tracy, you know her heart. She couldn't possibly be involved in something so heinous."

In response to her distress, Jayden softened his approach. "Perhaps she had to go to the hospital. Maybe she was just sick," he offered, hoping to ease her mind.

Grasping at this new thread of hope, Elyse brightened a bit. "Yes, that has to be it! She must be unwell. Tracy is gentle, a truly good soul."

Jayden rubbed her back in a soothing motion. "You're right. Let's not dwell on it anymore, okay? Try to eat something. You've barely touched your food."

Elyse let out a heavy sigh. "I'm just not in the mood."

“No dice. If you don’t eat, I’m not playing nice.” His tone was half-teasing, but his hand moving under her skirt was not.

Elyse gasped, a mix of surprise and irritation. “What are you doing? Stop that!”

“Eat up and be good, or you’ll regret it,” Jayden replied, his voice calm but firm.

Elyse shot him a glare, then reluctantly picked up her fork.

Seeing her start to eat, Jayden allowed himself a moment of relief. The Tracy situation was a gnarled mess, but he couldn’t let it spoil Elyse’s meal.

“I’m going to have a word with Shaun,” Jayden announced, rising from his seat.

Elyse nodded and continued to eat in silence.

Jayden stepped out to find Shaun lingering by the door, his posture one of deep contemplation. Annoyed by his presence, Jayden delivered a sharp kick to his rear.

“Ouch!” Shaun yelped, tumbling to the floor.

Jayden’s expression twisted with distaste at Shaun’s clumsy reaction. As Shaun rubbed his sore backside and stood, he complained, “What was that for?”