

Bound love 151

Chapter 151:

Elyse reacted with surprise. “So you’re saying you don’t have any feelings for her?”

Jayden replied, “Let me repeat myself. I wasn’t exactly nice to her either.”

Skeptical, Elyse challenged, “So why did you let her take my place at dinner? And you just sat there when she picked on me.”

Jayden, feeling stuck, responded, “Why didn’t you stand up for yourself?”

Taken aback, Elyse questioned, “What are you saying?”

With a composed demeanor, Jayden elucidated, “In public, I anticipate you carry yourself as a refined lady. However, at home, there’s no need to maintain that facade. If someone encroaches on your belongings or space, feel free to reclaim what is rightfully yours.”

“So you think it’s my fault for not standing my ground? You’re giving her a free pass to take my things. And if I reclaim them, you’re going to fault me for being narrow-minded, right?” Elyse inquired, seeking clarity.

Jayden scoffed, “Do you really see me as that kind of person?”

“Who can say,” Elyse replied, unsure. She felt unjustly treated and began to doubt the solidity of their relationship. In her heart, she knew their bond was delicate, likely to crumble under pressure. It wouldn’t take much for them to fall apart. Yet she kept these thoughts from Jayden, sensing a wall that had risen between them.

Right then, Driscoll and the staff approached, grinning widely and carrying bouquets. “Mrs. Owen, these flowers come courtesy of Mr. Owen. Aren’t they splendid?”

Elyse was moved, holding the vibrant pink roses close, tears welling in her eyes. Jayden felt a sting of disappointment. “What do you take me for? Didn’t I get you pink roses too?”

Tears streaking her face, Elyse’s voice quivered, “Did you really plan this surprise for me?”

“Who else?” Jayden replied, his gaze tender.

Observing Elyse’s emotional reaction, Driscoll pondered that Jayden might not have the softest voice, but he was changing, making an effort. With a camera in hand, Driscoll suggested, “Today is unforgettable. Why not capture it in a photo?”

The suggestion took Elyse by surprise, prompting her and Jayden to exchange glances. Seizing the moment, the servants nudged the pair closer. Side by side, they grappled with a mix of feelings.

Camera in hand, Driscoll took command. “Let’s see those smiles!”

Flushed with embarrassment, Elyse mustered a stiff smile.

“You look lovely when you smile,” he said. Glancing at the camera, Driscoll couldn’t help but chuckle at Jayden’s solemn face. “Come on, Mr. Owen, a smile please.”

Elyse peered at Jayden, who was usually quick to smile, but now his face was unreadable. In a whisper, she urged, “Smile.”

Jayden, not keen on losing his composure but equally not wanting to let them down, cleared his throat and offered a restrained smile. At the sight of Jayden’s grin, Driscoll snapped the photo without hesitation.

Holding a bouquet of pink roses, Elyse smiled with refined grace. Jayden, seated beside her, smiled sincerely, his joy evident. Driscoll looked over the photograph, immensely pleased, convinced the two were a match made in heaven.

Elyse was toying with flowers when Jayden gently reminded her, “Why don’t you give the flowers to the maid temporarily and come have lunch?”

With a slight nod, Elyse handed the blooms to the nearby maid and took a seat beside Jayden, wondering to herself if it was by design that their seats were so closely placed. While seated, Elyse’s gaze was drawn to the intricate patterns on the tableware, bringing a smile to her face.

Driscoll approached, giving Jayden the camera to show him the photo. He hinted with purpose, “Mrs. Elyse, you might not be aware, but Mr. Owen crafted those two figures himself.”

Elyse, caught by surprise, looked up. “Did Jayden make these?”

Jayden, caught off guard by Driscoll’s disclosure, coughed to cover his bashfulness and scolded, “Driscoll, you weren’t supposed to tell her that.”

With deference, Driscoll replied, “Mr. Owen, if you don’t share your efforts with her, she’ll remain oblivious. After all, it was you who toiled over it all afternoon.”

Touched by the gesture, Elyse asked, “You really designed them?”

Jayden, feeling such matters were beneath him but unable to deny his handiwork, struggled to maintain his composure. He confessed, “Yes, I mulled over it all afternoon but couldn’t find inspiration. In the end, I used your likeness.”

To ensure she understood, he explained further, “With your likeness, it’s unmistakably yours. I intended nothing more by it.”

Chapter 152:

Jayden did his best to hide his embarrassment, but Driscoll just sighed helplessly. Jayden was too proud sometimes. Elyse barely paid attention to Jayden’s words, her gaze drawn to a tiny figure on the tableware. Then, catching Jayden off guard, she kissed him on the cheek.

“Oh my God!” The surrounding servants gasped in excitement. It was the first time the couple had shown affection publicly, dispelling rumors of their strife and proving their deep love. Driscoll was also taken aback for a few moments before he turned to Jayden, noticing how Jayden nervously rubbed his thumb and forefinger together. Driscoll laughed and commented, “Looks like you two are quite the happy couple.”

Feeling both embarrassed and shy, Elyse looked down, wondering why she had acted so impulsively. Curious about Jayden’s reaction, she stole a glance at him but felt a twinge of disappointment at his impassive face. He seemed indifferent.

“Guys, enough of that,” he said abruptly, placing a glass of juice in front of Elyse. “Let’s eat.”

Elyse nodded and started to enjoy her meal. After lunch, they settled in the living room to watch TV. Suddenly, Jayden asked, “Do you have to participate in the second round of the selection process on Monday?”

Elyse nodded. “Yes, why do you ask?”

Jayden grabbed a grape, peeled it, and popped it into her mouth before replying, “I’ll be there on Monday.”

Surprised, she asked, “You want to come watch? Can your family members come along?”

“The second round is different from the initial one. To ensure fairness, the organizers permit participants’ family members to attend. The results will be fair.”

“Well, you can join,” Elyse murmured, barely hiding her excitement.

Jayden nodded and ate another grape. Behind them, Driscoll watched. A maid standing next to him smiled and said, “It looks like things are getting better between them. You must be pleased.”

Driscoll nodded, his voice filled with relief. “When they get along, it means a baby might arrive sooner.”

Just as Elyse was enjoying the moment, her phone rang. It was Mabel calling. As soon as the call connected, Mabel's sobs filled the air. "Get to the hospital fast! Theo is out to kill me. If you don't come and save me, I'm done for."

Elyse felt her mood plummet as she asked, "Why haven't you come home yet after all this time?"

"Are you going to save me or not? I'm your sister! Theo's after me; he wants my heart."

Elyse scoffed, "But you're quite fond of him, aren't you?"

"Elyse, if I die, I'm taking you with me. I'll drag you to hell!" Before Mabel could finish her threat, the call ended abruptly. Just before it did, Elyse could hear footsteps in the background. Had Mabel really offended Theo?

Biting her lip, Elyse hesitated, then turned to Jayden. "It sounds like Mabel isn't lying. Should I go?"

Jayden obviously didn't think she should. Even though they were married, Theo continued to haunt them, disrupting their lives. Frustrated, Jayden dropped the remote control and said icily, "It's your call. If you're worried about Mabel, then go see her." Seeing the hesitation on her face, he quickly added, "If you're worried, I can come with you." This reassured Elyse.

When they reached the hospital, they headed to the VIP ward Mabel had mentioned. The floor seemed unusually quiet with no nurses in sight at the station. Suddenly, Mabel's desperate cries pierced the silence. "Let me go! I won't bother Theo anymore. Just let me go!" Her voice echoed loudly through the corridor. This explained the absence of the nurses.

As they approached, they found Mabel on the floor, her face a mess of tears and mucus. She tried to grab Theo's pants but was pushed away by his bodyguards. Theo seemed to relax when he saw Elyse, though Jayden was right behind her.

"There you are," he said in a soft tone.

Mabel suddenly turned around, spotting Elyse. She scrambled to her feet and tried to reach her, but the bodyguards held her back. “Help! Theo wants me dead and to take my heart. I don’t want to die!”

Chapter 153:

Elyse noticed a marked change in Mabel’s demeanor. It seemed she’d truly learned a lesson from Theo’s actions. Coldly staring at Theo, Elyse questioned, “Mr. Ward, why are you tormenting my sister like this? She’s done nothing to you. Why bully her?”

Draped in a hospital gown, Theo still maintained an air of handsomeness and grace. “She volunteered,” he stated. “Claimed she’d do anything to be with me.”

Elyse’s dissatisfaction was palpable. “So you plan to kill her and take her heart?”

Theo dismissed her accusation with a wave of his hand. “You’ve got it all wrong again. She’s the one who professed her affection for me. I merely sought proof of her feelings. She insisted her heart held all the answers and that I occupied it alone.”

With an innocent façade, Theo nudged Mabel’s back. “And what did you tell me?”

Mabel, flanked by bodyguards, trembled with fear, her resolve crumbling beneath her. Tears streamed down her face as she remained silent.

“Speak up,” Theo demanded impatiently.

Reluctantly, Mabel confessed, “I said you could have someone open my heart. If you saw it, you’d understand my love for you.”

Mabel felt deeply wronged. She never anticipated Theo would take her statement so literally. Unaware of Theo’s sinister intentions, she had intended her words as a gesture of devotion. If she’d known the consequences, she would have chosen her words more carefully. As Theo proceeded with plans for the heart removal surgery that afternoon, Mabel was left dumbfounded.

Turning to Elyse, Mabel's tears flowed uncontrollably. "Elyse, please help me. I don't want to die."

Elyse couldn't help but feel a mix of frustration and pity towards her sister's naivety. She turned to face Jayden, who lazily raised his eyes, leaving her even more baffled by his nonchalant expression.

Taking a deep breath, Elyse addressed Theo, "Mr. Ward, my sister has been indulged since childhood. She speaks nonsense without considering the consequences, so please overlook her words." Then, with sternness in her tone, Elyse commanded, "Mabel, apologize to Mr. Ward immediately."

Shaking with fear, Mabel struggled to form a coherent sentence amidst her sobs, offering apologies after several failed attempts.

Theo had invested considerable effort to bring Elyse here; he wasn't about to release Mabel without a fight. Expressionless, he inquired, "Which part of her words were nonsensical?"

Her declaration of love for me, or something else? You need to clarify." Elyse clenched her jaw, stating firmly, "Her comment about having her heart dissected as proof of love was a jest."

Theo sneered, "If that's false, then why did she visit me today? Was it to poison the food or steal my secrets?"

Stunned, Elyse retorted, "Impossible! Mabel is incapable of such acts." Mabel lacked the cunning to steal secrets; she'd easily divulge her family's information with minimal coaxing.

Leaning back, Theo countered, "You may not believe it, but I do. In my weakened state, she could easily harm me." Glancing at Theo's formidable bodyguards, Elyse noted their strength and size. Theo was far from vulnerable.

Growing exasperated, Elyse snapped, "Find a legitimate reason to detain her. Stop manufacturing trouble. Release my sister immediately!"

Theo smirked. “Why should I heed you? Until my investigation concludes, Mabel stays. Otherwise, you’ll be arranging her funeral.”

Hearing the word “funeral,” Mabel’s distress escalated, pleading with Elyse for salvation. Frustrated, Elyse barked, “Enough with the tears!”

Startled, Mabel fell silent, fearing Elyse would abandon her. Elyse’s voice turned icy as she confronted Theo. “Mr. Ward, when will you release her?”

Theo feigned contemplation. “I’ll consider it. Once the investigation concludes, she’ll be free.”

Shaking her head, Elyse insisted, “No, you need to set a deadline and promise not to harm her.”

“What do I gain from making promises to you?” Theo countered.

Intervening, Jayden spoke up. “Mr. Ward, aren’t you concerned about tarnishing the Ward family’s reputation by mistreating a young girl?”

Theo’s gaze hardened as he sneered at Jayden. “What have I to fear? No matter how tarnished my reputation, it remains untouchable. But you, you’re a joke.”

Elyse couldn’t stand Theo’s disparagement of Jayden. “Why persist in villainy?” A glint of hostility flashed in Theo’s eyes. “Escort them out. I no longer wish to see them.”

Chapter 155:

The name Cody Tucker caused quite a stir in the crowd. Cody was none other than a virtuoso violinist. At just 30, he’d completed a world tour with his violin concertos, earning the title of one of the best musicians in the world. He’d been living a low-key life for years, seldom seen except at essential national events where his performance was needed. So when Cody unexpectedly showed up, it was quite a shock to everyone.

Elyse couldn’t contain her excitement as she asked cheerfully, “Are you sure? Is that really Cody Tucker?”

The male orchestra member pointed at his eyes and said, “I may need glasses, but I’m not blind. I’ve seen him clear as day. Yes, it’s Cody Tucker.”

The backstage was buzzing with excitement. It would be a great honor if Cody were to comment on their performances.

“Vicky, come on. You’ll get Cody Tucker’s compliments. You’re the most outstanding violinist here and definitely the future concertmaster,” someone encouraged Vicky.

Upon hearing the familiar name, Elyse subconsciously looked over and locked eyes with Vicky. Meeting Elyse’s gaze, Vicky said defiantly, “Of course, I’ll get his compliments because I’m the best.”

Elyse felt the pressure. Her gut told her this second round of selections was going to be different. With Cody’s appearance, the backstage was abuzz with discussion. Everyone was on edge, wanting to deliver a flawless performance. Elyse glanced at Rebekah.

Rebekah, known for stirring up trouble and negatively impacting her competitors’ mentality, was now preparing for her performance with unusual focus.

Elyse was the first to perform and chose to play “The Four Seasons.” She finished the piece flawlessly, skillfully conveying the emotions within the music. When she finished, she saw approval in the instructor’s eyes. With a sigh of relief, she stole a glance at Cody. He remained expressionless, giving no hint of his thoughts.

Elyse felt a pang of disappointment that her idol hadn’t praised her. Nonetheless, she quietly exited the stage, waiting for the others to perform.

“Your wife’s getting better and better,” Richie remarked to Jayden, tapping his fingers along with the rhythm.

Jayden replied proudly, “She’s my wife. Of course, she’s exceptional.”

Richie hadn’t expected such a public display of affection. “Have you two made up then?” he asked with a cheeky grin.

Jayden rolled his eyes at Richie. “Was there ever any doubt?”

“How cocky of him,” Richie thought, deciding not to engage further with such a self-assured individual. He figured only Elyse could put up with his arrogance.

Disappointed, Elyse returned backstage. One of the orchestra members tried to console her, “Don’t be so hard on yourself. You played beautifully and didn’t make a single mistake. You’ll definitely make it through to the next round.”

Elyse thanked her, but she couldn’t shake off the disappointment of not receiving praise from Cody. Stepping aside, she searched for Jayden in the audience.

“Why the long face? You played perfectly,” Richie asked in confusion, sitting next to Jayden.

Elyse sighed, “Mr. Cody Tucker didn’t seem pleased with my performance.”

Richie was surprised, “How do you know?”

“I saw him frown while I was on stage. I must’ve made a mistake; that’s why he’s unhappy.”

“Why did you come to the selection process?” asked Elyse.

“My friend and I came to watch your performance. Cody Tucker’s scowl, although it might not be for lack of effort on your part. Perhaps it’s a habit of his,” Richie explained.

Jayden glanced at Richie, “How do you know about his habits?”

A mysterious smile spread across Richie’s face, “Take a guess.”

Jayden and Elyse exchanged a glance, then deliberately looked away, ignoring Richie. Unfazed, Richie returned his attention to the ongoing selections.

Two hours later, all the performances were done, and the instructors began tallying the scores. Only the top-ranked performers would proceed to the next round. Everyone was on edge, waiting anxiously.

“There are two players tied for first place, Vicky Aston and Elyse Lloyd. I know Vicky; she’s always been the role model in our orchestra. But who is Elyse?”

“The top five contestants get to compete for the position of concertmaster. But this time we have six candidates. The competition is going to be fierce.”

“There’s a dark horse in the running this year. Could Elyse end up becoming the concertmaster?”

Still basking in the joy of tying for first place, Elyse inadvertently locked eyes with Vicky, whose expression was a mixture of hatred and disgust. After a moment of surprise, Elyse smiled brightly and stared back at her.

Vicky sneered and mouthed something to her. Though Elyse couldn’t read lips, she knew exactly what Vicky had said this time. Vicky had said, “You don’t deserve to tie for first place with me.”

Chapter 156:

Elyse retorted just as Vicky had, “You really don’t deserve it.” Vicky’s eyes flashed with resentment as she glared at Elyse.

At that moment, the head of the orchestra walked over to them along with Cody and the teacher. He gestured for the top five contestants to step forward. “Go and prepare. Mr. Tucker here will be joining the panel of judges. I hope each of you can showcase your strengths and earn recognition through your performance.”

There was a collective cry when he finished speaking.

“Oh my God, Cody Tucker is judging the performances! If I had known that, I would have worked harder. What a shame, I ranked sixth. I’m just a point away from being the fifth.”

“Gosh, I really envy them. They get to receive Mr. Tucker’s guidance and insights. I don’t think I’ll ever get that kind of opportunity with my ranking.”

“Come on, don’t be so glum. I didn’t get chosen either.”

Contrary to the lively atmosphere among the crowd, the six contestants in question were silent and tense. They were eyeing each other carefully. From that point onward, they were no longer good buddies from the same team but enemies competing for a title.

It was understandable as the results of the competition would dictate the trajectory of their career and therefore their future. Everyone began to disperse, and Elyse returned to the lounge. She was just about to walk through the doorway when she heard the sound of someone crying.

She poked her head in and found Rebekah sobbing in one corner. The woman was crouched on the floor with her arms crossed over her knees and her back to Elyse.

Elyse briefly recalled that while Rebekah had not been eliminated, she had narrowly passed for the second round. In fact, she ranked last among the five. Elyse wanted to just leave and forget what she saw, but Rebekah seemed to have sensed her presence.

She whirled around and met Elyse’s eyes. Embarrassed, Elyse froze in place, unsure whether to leave or stay.

“Are you here to laugh at me?” Rebekah snapped angrily.

Elyse had to roll her eyes, “Please, you’re being paranoid. I am not like you. I don’t enjoy rubbing salt in one’s injury.”

Since she had been discovered, what was the point of fleeing? She might as well just take her things before leaving. So Elyse walked up to her locker, took a piece of string, and turned to leave.

“So, you got a higher score than me, so what?” Rebekah screeched behind her. “I will definitely win next time. Don’t think you can act all arrogant to me.”

Annoyed, Elyse looked back and frowned at Rebekah, “Can you stop making up stories already? I didn’t do anything to you. Quit slandering me.”

Rebekah gnashed her teeth together in frustration. She had never seen Elyse as someone powerful, but everyone around her seemed to regard the latter highly. Rebekah just wanted to know why they all thought Elyse was better than her.

Rebekah continued to rant, “You only got lucky this time. Once the selection for the concertmaster commences, everyone will finally see you for the fraud that you are.”

Elyse just shrugged, completely unfazed. “In that case, I’ll hold on to my luck until I get on that stage. Be sure to watch me shine from backstage, okay?”

They never got along in the first place, so Elyse felt no compulsion to comfort or encourage Rebekah. She continued to the door, ignoring the still-seething Rebekah.

Elyse left the venue and met up with Jayden. When she didn’t see Richie, she asked, “Where is Richie? Has he left?”

“He said he was going to look for a friend,” Jayden answered as he handed her back her phone. “Theo sent you a message, by the way. He’s inviting you to dinner at his house tonight.”

“I’m not interested,” Elyse said without missing a beat. “He’s probably up to something again. I don’t want to share a meal with him, especially not at his turf.”

“Well, he seems to be threatening you,” Jayden pointed out. “Apparently, if you don’t go, your parents will come and pressure you.”

Elyse frowned at him. “Are you saying you want me to go?”

“Of course not. But can you really turn a blind eye on Mabel?”

Elyse grew quiet. There was no family affection between her and Mabel, but she was still her sister. In any case, she was not so heartless that she would just give up on Mabel.

“I’m afraid of Theo,” she finally said, voicing out her nagging concern.

Jayden smiled warmly at her. “Don’t worry, I’ll protect you every step of the way. You are my wife, after all.”

Meanwhile, Richie was killing time inside the orchestra leader’s office by playing mobile games on his phone. He looked up when Cody entered. “Well, how did Elyse do? Is she as good as I said?”

Cody crossed the room and sat on the opposite sofa, looking totally worn out. “They look so alike,” he said, pinching the bridge of his nose. “It makes me wonder if that person left a daughter behind before she parted from this world.”

Richie was baffled by the other man’s response, but he knew well enough not to pry. Instead, he changed the subject and asked, “Didn’t you always say you want an apprentice? I think Elyse would be the perfect choice. Just look for the right opportunity to offer her your mentorship.”

That made Cody look up. “Do you have feelings for her? Why are you advocating for her so passionately?”

Richie sighed. “Listen, I’m just trying to find an apprentice to take care of you after you retire. You’re getting old, but you have no one else in your life. An apprentice would look after you, at least.”

Cody clicked his tongue. “You cunning little rascal.”

Chapter 157:

Elyse kept her appointment with Theo, but she wasn't alone. Jayden's men accompanied and protected her throughout the journey, and she carried a specially made alarm device from Jayden. If she pressed a button, Jayden's men would immediately intervene.

Arriving on time, Elyse rang the doorbell. Theo opened the door, dressed in a housecoat that made him seem more approachable than usual. He noticed the violin case in her hand and raised an eyebrow, asking, "Just finished your practice?"

Elyse nodded and asked, "What do you need from me at your place?"

"Come in," Theo said, leaning against the door frame lazily.

With a sigh, Elyse walked in reluctantly and bent down to change her shoes. Theo's gaze drifted to her waist, noticing for the first time how slender and well-proportioned she was. He wondered why he hadn't noticed it before.

"Doesn't Jayden mind you coming here?" Theo asked, half-jokingly.

After slipping into slippers, Elyse gave him a cold glance and said, "You know he would mind, yet you insisted I come alone. Did you do that deliberately? Just drop the act."

Her response caught Theo off guard. Elyse had always been gentle and accommodating, never openly defying him. Now she seemed quite cranky. It was then that he realized she was no longer the person she used to be. Her character and temper had shifted, influenced by Jayden. Theo thought ruefully that Jayden had changed her.

Yet it had only been three months since her marriage to Jayden. Had she really forgotten their three years together in such a short time? Theo struggled to come to terms with this change.

"You've developed a sharp temper, Elyse. You should work on that," Theo remarked with a hint of malice.

Elyse snorted and retorted, "Why should I listen to you? What right do you have to demand that I change?"

Taken aback by her defiance—she had once been so compliant—Theo felt a surge of displeasure. Meanwhile, Elyse, feeling irked, sat down on the sofa and declared, “I’m hungry. Let’s eat.”

Reading her intentions, Theo commented, “You plan to leave right after the meal, don’t you?”

Elyse shook her head, giving Theo a contrived smile, and replied, “No, I take this meeting seriously. The meal isn’t ready yet,” Theo said, glancing toward the busy chef in the kitchen.

Elyse didn’t lie. She was indeed hungry. She surveyed the room and noticed some berries on a plate. Pointing at them, she looked questioningly at Theo. He gestured for her to help herself. After expressing her gratitude, Elyse started eating the berries.

Mid-bite, Theo posed his question, “When did you fall in love with me?”

Choking on the fruit, Elyse coughed violently. After catching her breath, she looked at him with disbelief. “Is that really why you asked me to come here?”

Theo nodded affirmatively and continued, “If you truly loved me, how could you so quickly develop feelings for someone else? You never really loved me, did you?”

Elyse rolled her eyes and countered, “Theo Ward, consider how I treated you in the past. I gave you love, care, and never disappointed you, right?”

Theo reflected carefully. During their time together, he couldn’t recall any significant problems. “You should know whether I loved you or not,” he said.

Elyse, frustrated, responded, “Don’t ask such foolish questions again. You’ve never loved me. While you were with me, you were always looking after Kaelyn. Why didn’t you just date her?”

Theo frowned and explained, “I’ve told you many times I was kind to Kaelyn out of gratitude, not love.”

“Gratitude? You’re willing to do anything for her,” Elyse retorted, clearly not convinced by his explanation. Previously, this topic had often led to arguments between them. Unable to tolerate it further, Theo exclaimed, “Remember when we were camping on a hill and encountered a mudslide? Kaelyn carried me all the way down the hill,” he added, feeling helpless. “Kaelyn saved my life. I can’t just abandon her.”

Upon hearing this, Elyse’s face took on a peculiar expression. Shaking with emotion, she yelled, “It was me who carried you down that damned hill!”

Chapter 158:

It had been an evening steeped in discomfort. Elyse couldn’t stomach another moment and excused herself from the dinner table after barely touching her food. Before walking away, she dropped a reminder to Theo, “Don’t forget to release Mabel.” She couldn’t be sure if her words had registered with him, but she didn’t linger to find out.

Elyse made a swift exit, finding solace in the quiet of Jayden’s waiting car. Jayden glanced at the clock. “Only forty-seven minutes. I take it dinner wasn’t to your liking?”

“I barely touched my food,” Elyse admitted, wanting to forget the evening’s unpleasantness. She closed her eyes, drained.

Respecting her need for silence, Jayden refrained from disturbing her and simply instructed the driver to take them home. Upon their return, they found Tess lounging on the sofa, sipping tea with an air of tranquility. Jayden and Tess had never seen eye to eye, their relationship marred by mutual disdain. Her presence in his home was a rare occurrence.

Jayden’s voice cut through the tension, sharp and direct. “Why are you here?”

Tess, composed despite the tension, set down her teacup and replied, “I’m here for a reason, naturally. Your brother has just graduated from college. I intend to offer him a position in the company so he can gain experience before taking the reins.”

Jayden scoffed. “And what does that have to do with me?”

Tess scrutinized Jayden for a moment before responding, her tone unwavering. “Despite your disability, your mind is sharp. You must support your brother. In time, he will appreciate your guidance when he assumes control of the company.”

Jayden’s patience waning, he cut the conversation short. “Escort her out,” he instructed Driscoll, his tone clipped, signaling his disinterest in further dialogue with his mother.

Tess, incensed by Jayden’s dismissiveness, said firmly, “Consider yourself informed. Tomorrow, Bryce will arrive. You will mentor him for his future role in the company.” With simmering anger, she added, “We cannot afford to lose control of the Owen Group to your Uncle Seth’s or your Aunt Jessie’s families. Otherwise, we’ll be at their mercy forever. Do you understand that, Jayden?”

With a tired sigh, Jayden rubbed his temples and silently excused himself, leaving Driscoll to handle Tess’s departure. Tess wasted no time lingering, having said her piece. With a disdainful snort aimed at Elyse, she grabbed her new handbag and stormed out of the house.

Elyse glanced at Jayden with concern, wanting to offer comfort, but sensing his desire for silence, she held her peace. However, he asked Driscoll to serve dinner. They ate in silence.

After dinner, Jayden retreated to his study while Elyse returned to the bedroom. She had barely settled when her phone rang, displaying Glenda’s name. Resigned, she answered, only to be met with Glenda’s accusatory tone. “Why hasn’t your sister returned home yet? Did you not talk to Theo? Do you even care about saving her?”

Elyse defended herself, “I did talk to Theo. He promised to release her. If she’s not home, it means he broke his word. Why are you blaming me? Why don’t you go talk to him yourself?”

Glenda’s curses cut through the air, her frustration palpable. “Mind your tone! I’m your mother. Call Theo and find out when he’ll release Mabel.”

Elyse’s patience dwindled. “No, I won’t. You call him.”

Glenda erupted in anger. “You don’t care about Mabel, do you? You’re her older sister.”

Elyse reached her limit. “I do care, but she’s the one causing trouble. I warned her to stay away from him, but she didn’t listen and went to him anyway.”

Unable to argue with that, Glenda softened her tone. “I should have known better. I’m just worried about her.”

Elyse knew how much Glenda loved Mabel. Over the years, Mabel had received the affection Elyse had yearned for since childhood. In a moment of vulnerability, Elyse asked, “If I made the same mistake, would you ask Mabel to help me?”

Glenda’s frown deepened. “You would never do such a thing. Don’t be ridiculous. Ask Theo tomorrow when he’ll release your sister.” With that, Glenda ended the call, leaving Elyse feeling the icy chill of loneliness.

She longed for the love her mother showered on Mabel, wishing she could live a carefree life like her sister. Despite years of trying, Elyse felt invisible to her parents, her efforts constantly overlooked.

Clutching the phone, Elyse sighed heavily before dialing Theo’s number. Repeated attempts to reach him went unanswered, leaving Elyse to assume he was preoccupied. Thus, she decided to call him later.

Meanwhile, Theo sat in his study, staring at his phone. He knew why Elyse was calling, but he couldn’t bring himself to answer. The courage to face Elyse had deserted him.

Chapter 159:

Theo was relaxing in the study, leaning back in the plush chair with his eyes shut. Kaelyn, carrying her purse and wearing high heels, pushed the door open. “Theo, I was really surprised to get your message,” Kaelyn said with a gentle smile. “Now that I’m here, what do you want to do?”

She reached out to touch his face, but Theo abruptly opened his eyes and tilted his head away, avoiding her hand. Kaelyn gave an awkward smile, pulling her hand back. “What’s the matter, Theo? You seem upset.”

Theo gazed at her face for a moment before speaking. “Kaelyn, after that mudslide, how did you manage to save me?”

“Why bring that up?” Kaelyn looked stunned but kept her smile. “You know it was traumatic for me. I’d rather not think about it.”

Theo’s voice was cold. “So you’re not going to tell me? What about all the comforting words you gave me back then? Do you still remember them?”

Kaelyn fought down the panic rising in her chest and replied, “Of course, I do.”

Theo stared at her for a long moment before bursting into laughter. “Kaelyn, you’ve been lying to me for two years. Are you going to keep lying now? Do you think I’m that gullible?”

Kaelyn shot back, “I haven’t lied to you. You’re the only one for me.”

Theo snapped, his anger flaring. “The one who actually rescued me back then was Elyse, not you. You claimed her deed as your own. I’ve always seen you as my savior, caring for you so deeply that I even walked away from my own wedding.”

Kaelyn’s fists tightened, her nails digging into her palms. Had Theo discovered the truth? Was it Elyse who told him?

Gritting her teeth, she remembered the details of that day. When Elyse carried him down the hill, they were the only two around. Since Elyse and Theo were both unconscious, Kaelyn had taken the opportunity to whisk Theo away. He was soon at the hospital, and his fever had subsided. As for Elyse, she was found and taken to the hospital the next day.

Had she foreseen the turn of events, she might have taken Elyse’s life. Now that the truth was out, she was determined to stand her ground. Perhaps in time, Theo would see her side.

Tears brimming in her eyes, Kaelyn felt herself crumbling. “Theo, you don’t really think I saved you, do you?”

Theo looked at her, his gaze growing icy. “That night, when you were there for me, you whispered something. I’ll believe it’s you if you repeat those words.”

Kaelyn fought for composure. “That day was traumatic for me. I can’t bear to remember it.”

Theo’s laugh was sharp and scornful. “Elyse spoke those words. How foolish of me to assume you were my savior just because you were there when I woke up.”

Kaelyn wanted to explain, but Theo turned away, no longer willing to hear her out. “Kaelyn, don’t come near me again. I warn you,” he said, his expression dark and unwelcoming.

Kaelyn’s words faltered. She realized he had sided with Elyse. Her smile faded as she fixed her gaze on Theo and challenged, “Do you ever regret abandoning the wedding for me?”

The mention of the wedding struck a nerve. “How dare you bring that up,” Theo clenched his jaw tightly. If Kaelyn hadn’t lied, he would have never treated Elyse so coldly.

Kaelyn defended herself. “It was indeed Elyse who carried you down the hill, but I helped too. I was the one who rushed you to the hospital when you had that high fever.”

“Enough! I don’t want to hear any more of your excuses,” Theo shouted, slamming his hand on the table. “You’re the reason I can’t marry the woman I love. You should be grateful I haven’t hurt you.”

Kaelyn, her voice breaking with sobs, pleaded, “But I truly love you. I love you more than Elyse ever could. Why won’t you believe me?”

Theo burst out laughing, his voice tinged with anger. “Your love? You treated me well, yet you betrayed me with other men. I’ll never trust you again.”

“No, please, don’t push me away. My love for you is real,” Kaelyn tried to approach him, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“Fuck off!” In a fit of rage, Theo threw the pen holder from the desk. A pen struck Kaelyn on the forehead, and blood trickled down her face.

Chapter 160:

Kaelyn raised her hand, touching the wound, and then looked at her fingers, finding warm red blood on them. She gazed up at Theo, hoping he would feel sorry and guilty. However, she had misjudged. His eyes were filled only with hatred. Trying to force a smile, Kaelyn said weakly, “I didn’t intend to deceive you. Back then, I truly regretted hurting your feelings and lied about this matter to bring us closer.” Tears welled up as she added, “I was just too desperate for your love. I couldn’t stand to lose it.”

“If you don’t leave, I’ll have someone escort you out,” Theo said with an unquestionably stern tone.

Realizing her pleas wouldn’t change his mind, Kaelyn wiped her tears and exited the study. Before closing the door, she cast a pitiful glance back at Theo, but as soon as the door latched shut, her expression contorted, revealing a glint of malice in her eyes. Touching her wound, she sneered, “Elyse Lloyd, I thought you’d remain naive forever. Yet you’ve grown sharp since marrying.” She regretted not taking Elyse’s life that day. Now that Theo was privy to the truth, she believed it was just a matter of time before he would seek to reconcile with Elyse, rendering all of her efforts futile. She could not come to terms with this. She also couldn’t bear the thought of seeing Elyse’s joyful expression. She turned and made her way to the basement.

Mabel was being held in the basement by Theo with two bodyguards stationed at the door. Approaching them, Kaelyn said, “Theo sent me to speak with Mabel.” The two bodyguards exchanged glances then opened the basement door. Kaelyn walked in with confidence.

Mabel was unharmed, merely under house arrest by Theo. She had settled down and realized the vast differences between her and Theo. She understood that Theo would never treat her kindly. She regretted ever falling for such a cold-hearted man.

Hearing footsteps, she stood up eagerly, looking towards the door with hope that Theo might release her. But seeing Kaelyn instead, Mabel rolled her eyes in disappointment, sank back onto the sofa, and ignored her.

Kaelyn, undisturbed by Mabel's disdain and rudeness, simply asked, "You don't seem pleased to see me, do you?"

"Why would I be pleased to see you? You couldn't even win a man over. Do you really think your presence affects my mood?" Mabel was known for wielding her influence to intimidate others. Despite being aware of Kaelyn's fame in the entertainment industry, Mabel had only heard about her, and since they were not acquainted, she chose to disregard Kaelyn.

Kaelyn didn't care about Mabel's rude attitude. She smiled and said, "Actually, you were close to being released today, but Elyse didn't comply with Theo's demands. If she had, I could have freed you by now."

Mabel's expression changed as she inquired, "What did Elyse fail to do?"

"She was supposed to stay with Theo for three hours, but she left after just a short while. She didn't take his request seriously, nor did she intend to rescue you. It's unfortunate to have such an uncaring sister," Kaelyn replied, deliberately drawing out her words and grinning maliciously at Mabel.

"What did she say?" Mabel asked, growing angry.

"She doesn't even consider you her sister. She doesn't care about rescuing you. In fact, she'd prefer if Theo ended you so she could simply tell your parents to collect your body," Kaelyn replied, enjoying the effect her words had on Mabel.

Mabel was silent, her eyes burning with animosity.

Kaelyn had previously looked into the relationship between Elyse and Mabel, noting their discord. She understood that a few choice words could easily stoke Mabel's jealousy and narrow-mindedness, leading her to harbor animosity towards Elyse.

Observing Mabel's furious expression, Kaelyn was satisfied that she had effectively driven a wedge between the sisters. "If only Theo were as gullible as Mabel," she thought to herself.

Having achieved her objective, Kaelyn felt no need to stay in the basement. She said, “Theo is quite irritable right now. I’m not sure when you’ll be released, but good luck.”

With that, Kaelyn left, swaying her hips confidently.

Back in the living room, Elyse felt a sudden chill. She touched her nose and murmured with a hint of suspicion, “Is someone talking about me?”