

Bound love 1651

Chapter 1651:

Jayden stilled. “Why are you asking?”

“I’m curious what price tag comes with deploying fighter jets,” she responded pointedly.

A heavy silence fell between them. After a moment, Jayden took her hand in his, his touch reassuring. “Don’t worry, I’ll make back the money I spent in no time.”

Elyse’s lips twitched with barely contained emotion. “How much did you give? Just tell me!”

After a thoughtful pause, Jayden leaned in close, his breath warm against her ear as he whispered the amount.

Disbelief widened her eyes. The stunned silence stretched for a heartbeat before she grabbed his collar, her voice rising. “That much? Don’t you realize you got swindled?”

Seizing his chance, Jayden gently eased her back onto the bed, silencing her protests with a kiss that spoke volumes, savoring the warmth of her beneath him.

When she was breathless, he finally released her, his voice taking on a placating tone. “Don’t be angry. I’ll earn it back soon.”

“No wonder you stayed silent earlier!” She glared at him fiercely. “You were afraid I’d confront you about it, weren’t you?”

Jayden’s fingers found her lips, pinching them gently. “Alright, let’s not dwell on that anymore. Let’s focus on what we should be doing tonight instead.”

Surprise flickered across her features. “What are we doing tonight?”

Before she could process his meaning, her legs were gently eased apart, his hand exploring with practiced intimacy.

Heat rushed to her cheeks as she instinctively tried to close her legs, but he held firm. “Do you want to do it again?” she whispered, breathless.

“Of course, I do.” His voice dropped lower, heavy with desire. “Just enjoy my caress, sweetie.” His kiss silenced any response she might have had, deep and consuming.

When they finally parted, Elyse’s head spun pleasantly, whatever objection she’d planned lost in the fog of desire as her body responded to his touch.

With swift efficiency, he sat up and divested her of her pants. A shiver ran through her as cool air hit her newly exposed skin. She glanced down just in time to see him tossing aside her underwear.

A deep blush painted her cheeks crimson.

“Already blushing?” Jayden teased. “I haven’t even begun yet.”

“Can’t I be shy?” Elyse whispered, her cheeks painted with a delicate rose hue.

Jayden lowered himself, enveloping her in his warmth. “Of course you can. Your blush makes you irresistible,” he murmured against her skin. In one fluid motion, he lifted her hips and joined their bodies. A soft whimper escaped her lips, teetering between pleasure and discomfort, but he captured her sounds with a tender kiss.

Chapter 1652:

“Please, gentler,” she breathed, her voice trembling. “You’re being too intense.”

His eyes softened as he gazed at her. “I missed you desperately, sweetie. The thought of losing you...” His voice cracked with raw emotion. “Do you know what that did to me?”

The vulnerability in his words struck Elyse speechless.

She realized she'd never asked about his feelings during that harrowing moment when the fighter jet hung above them like death's shadow, ready to strike at any instant.

Since her recovery, he had maintained such a steady, unshakeable presence that she'd forgotten he too could be haunted by the fear of losing her.

A bittersweet ache filled her heart as she reached up, wrapping her arms around his neck. "I missed you too," she smiled, her eyes glistening. "That day on stage, all I wanted was to find you, to feel safe in your embrace. That's when I truly understood—you're my anchor in this world."

Jayden's expression melted into pure adoration. "And you're mine," he whispered, his voice thick with emotion.

Heat crept up her neck as she murmured, "Tonight's yours then, just... don't be too rough."

His touch turned feather-light as he promised, "I'll make this night unforgettable for you, my love."

Elyse woke to find Jayden's head heavy on her chest. She sucked in a breath and tried to shift him.

The movement only made him stir. Instead of loosening his grip, his arms tightened around her.

The pressure was suffocating, like a python tightening its hold. Grabbing a handful of his hair, she huffed, "No wonder you have nightmares—you were suffocating me all night."

Jayden snuggled in deeper, a contented sigh escaping him. "Mmm, you're way better than any pillow."

"You're comfy," she grumbled, her voice muffled against him. "But I'm two seconds away from losing consciousness."

Jayden lifted his head, grinning lazily as their eyes met. "Didn't I make you happy last night, though? You kept saying no, but every time I tried to pull away, you clung to me like I was your favorite blanket."

Elyse's face turned crimson as she covered her hand over his mouth. "I did not! Don't be ridiculous!"

Jayden's response was muffled under her palm as he mumbled something incoherent. Finally, he pulled back, sitting up with a wry smile. Her shyness never ceased to surprise him. They'd spent countless nights together, but she still blushed like a teenager caught in a high school crush.

A mischievous glint flickered in his eyes. Her bashfulness was undeniably charming, and teasing her had become one of his favorite pastimes.

Oblivious to his thoughts, Elyse grabbed her clothes and made a beeline for the bathroom, her steps brisk with embarrassment. Jayden trailed behind, grinning like a cat with a secret.

Chapter 1653:

She halted at the doorway, spinning on her heel, her face still flushed. "What are you doing?"

He swept her into his arms, grinning. "Just giving my love a hand with her bath."

Her legs kicked in protest. "I can handle it myself!"

He nudged the bathroom door shut with his elbow, eyes gleaming. "Too bad. I'm already committed."

Ignoring her half-hearted struggle, he carried her inside, laughter echoing as the morning took a decidedly intimate turn.

Later, dressed and ready, Elyse joined the group near the hotel entrance. Chloe drifted over, her voice teasing. "Okay, spill. Your skin's glowing like you just walked out of a spa. Don't tell me you went without me."

Elyse's blush deepened. Glancing at Jayden, who was engrossed in his phone, she muttered, "No spa treatments."

Chloe frowned. “Then did you switch up your skincare? I use the same stuff as you, and I’m not getting these results!”

She pulled a compact mirror from her pocket, scrutinizing her reflection as if it had betrayed her.

Elyse fumbled for an answer, but Jayden slid his phone into his pocket and wrapped an arm around her waist, his hand resting casually on her lower abdomen.

“It’s the glow of love,” he said with a smirk. “When are you going to get yourself a boyfriend, Chloe? If you do, I’ll sponsor a month-long trip overseas for you and your lucky guy. My gift to true love.”

Chloe bit back a retort, though her arsenal of comebacks was locked and loaded. Jayden’s generous offer made her pause.

Her expression shifted into a syrupy-sweet smile. “Absolutely! I’ll be on the lookout for love—you can bet on it!”

Jayden nodded, a playful glint in his eye. “If you can’t find anyone suitable, come see me. I know plenty of eligible bachelors.”

Chloe tilted her head, considering the offer. Jayden wasn’t just anybody—his circle of friends had to be successful. With him willing to play matchmaker, turning him down would be downright foolish.

“Actually, that sounds amazing!” she said, her grin widening. “I’ve been single forever, and dating has been a disaster. I’d really appreciate the help.”

Jayden nodded. “Good. I’ll start scouting once we’re back.”

“You’re the best boss ever!” Chloe beamed. “I’d follow you anywhere!”

Elyse, watching the exchange, rolled her eyes. Talk about a masterclass in flattery, she thought.

But she saw through Jayden’s offer immediately. It was a clever ploy to get Chloe an entire month of leave.

Chapter 1654:

A chill ran down Elyse's spine as a thought struck her—if Chloe was gone, she'd be home alone with Jayden and his boundless energy. And knowing him, that kind of “quality time” would be anything but restful.

At the airport, Chloe spotted Elyse and Jayden heading in the opposite direction after clearing security. Frowning, she hurried after them. “Hey, where are you going? My gate's this way!”

Elyse blinked in surprise. “We're headed to Manfek. Aren't you coming with us?”

Chloe's heart raced as she frantically checked her ticket. “Mine says I'm flying home!”

Elyse's gaze instinctively shifted to Jayden. He'd booked the tickets—he would know.

Jayden gave a casual shrug. “Must've been a mistake by my assistant.”

Elyse's eyes narrowed, sharp as a blade. “A mistake? Come on, Jayden. Maybe it's time you start telling the truth.”

Elyse squinted, unconvinced. “I don't think your assistant would make such a mistake. He's always meticulous and doesn't miss details.”

Chloe's brows furrowed as she glanced at Jayden.

He rubbed the bridge of his nose, then spoke firmly. “You're going to Manfek to get the violin repaired. So, I'll come along.” After a brief pause, his gaze shifted to Chloe, laced with disapproval. “Maybe it's best if you head home. There's no need to tag along.”

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Elyse complained, “Why didn't you tell us sooner?”

Jayden shrugged, glancing at Chloe, who looked too stunned to respond. “I assumed she’d figure it out.”

Chloe’s face burned with embarrassment. Her confidence faltered as she struggled to recover from the awkwardness.

She hadn’t realized until now—Jayden wanted to be alone with Elyse.

Looking back, it made sense. They’d barely left their room yesterday. When she went to fetch them for dinner, they’d been perfectly content, lost in their own little world.

It hit her then: she’d been interrupting their private moments the entire time.

Her palms grew clammy as embarrassment set in. “Actually,” she said awkwardly, “I’m not really up for going to Manfek. I’ll just head back to the lounge and catch my flight home. You two enjoy yourselves!”

Before they could respond, she grabbed her luggage and hurried off, her retreat almost frantic.

Elyse watched her disappear, then sighed. “Looks like you scared her off.”

Jayden shrugged. “It’s fine. I did it on purpose.”

If he didn’t rattle Chloe a little, he wouldn’t get to have Elyse entirely to himself.

Their flight to Manfek departed earlier than the one heading home. By the time they landed, the evening sky had dimmed.

At the hotel, Elyse sank onto the sofa, exhaustion evident in the slump of her shoulders. Jayden rubbed his hands together with a playful grin. “Tired? Want me to carry you to the bath?”

Chapter 1655:

Elyse's face flushed crimson as memories of their earlier moments resurfaced. She wrinkled her nose, visibly flustered. "No, thanks. I can handle myself."

Jayden's grin turned teasing. "You sure? You might miss a spot without me."

Before she could respond, his hands slid gently to her waist, the contact sending a blush spreading all the way to the tips of her ears.

Elyse's cheeks bloomed a delicate rose. "You've been... horny since last night," she murmured, a playful accusation lacing her words. "And now you want more?"

"I'm a grown man," Jayden replied, a confident smirk curling his lips. "It's only natural to feel this way."

Even as he spoke, her underwear had already been discarded, lying forgotten on the floor.

Elyse gasped softly, her voice barely audible. "But... what about me? I don't know if I can do this."

He raised an eyebrow, mischief glinting in his eyes. "How can you know if you can't handle it if you haven't even tried? And besides..."

He leaned in, his body pressing gently against hers. His breath warmed her ear as he whispered, "Two fingers, and you're already like this. Didn't you say you couldn't handle it?"

His touch sent a shiver down her spine, drawing a weak whimper from her lips. "I... don't know," she admitted, her thoughts scattering. "My legs are so tired from all that walking today. Could we maybe... not tonight? I really need to rest."

Jayden nipped playfully at her ear, his voice a low rumble. "Even with those tired legs, your body is telling a different story. I have a duty to fulfill those needs first. Then, and only then, can we worry about your poor, weary legs."

Elyse recognized the determination in his gaze, the firmness in his tone—her excuses had reached their limit. He wasn't letting her off that easily.

In one swift motion, her clothes were gone, leaving her perched delicately in his lap.

His proximity, the heat radiating from him, sent a dizzying wave through her, her senses overwhelmed.

Finally, her resistance crumbled. "Please," she whimpered, her voice thick with longing and surrender as she leaned into him. "Just... just enter me. I can't... I can't take it anymore."

Jayden brushed a stray strand of hair from her face, his touch feather-light. "Where is it," he whispered, his eyes locking onto hers, "that you can't take it anymore? Tell me."

Elyse bit her lip, her blush deepening. "My... my..." she stammered, the words catching in her throat. "My... you know."

Jayden's gaze softened. "What's the problem, sweetheart?" he murmured, his fingers tracing a delicate line along her skin. "Everything looks perfectly fine... and very aroused." His touch was gentle, a feather-light caress.

Elyse's cheeks burned a vibrant crimson as she whispered, her voice barely audible. "I... I need you inside me," she breathed, a hint of desperation in her tone. "I feel so... empty."

Chapter 1656:

A soft chuckle rumbled in his chest. He positioned himself at her entrance, his eyes locking with hers. Then, with a slow, deliberate thrust, he entered her. Her head fell back, a soft moan escaping her lips.

Jayden held her close, his arms wrapping around her trembling form. "There, there," he murmured soothingly. "I'll be gentle this time, I promise."

Elyse snorted, a playful glint in her eyes despite the lingering flush on her cheeks. "You always promise that," she teased, laughter lacing her words. "And you always end up being... well, not so gentle. I don't believe you for a second."

"When have I ever lied?" Jayden teased, a smirk playing on his lips. "You're the insatiable one. Gentle just doesn't do it for you, does it? You need it rough and fast."

“Not true,” Elyse murmured, though her blush betrayed her. “You just like being tough.”

Seeing her playful defiance, Jayden softened. He cupped her face, kissed her gently, and asked, “Okay, maybe I do. But... do you like it?”

Elyse, flustered, nodded. “I suppose so.”

Jayden’s smile turned mischievous. “Then I’ll make sure you’re thoroughly... loved.”

Elyse surfaced slowly, the afternoon sun caressing her skin with its warm glow.

She reached for her phone, glancing at the time before it slipped back onto the nightstand. A soft sigh escaped her lips as she stretched, her arms reaching languidly above her head.

Her movement stirred Jayden, who instinctively reached for her, pulling her close. “Awake already?” he murmured, his voice still thick with sleep.

“Not really,” Elyse mumbled, a soft rumble in her stomach betraying her words. “But I’m famished.”

Last night’s memories flickered through her mind. Jayden had been relentless, keeping her thoroughly entertained for hours. Even a trip to the bathroom hadn’t deterred him; he’d followed her in for a second act. By the time sleep claimed her, she was utterly spent, sinking into oblivion the moment her head touched the pillow.

Jayden sat up, a playful smile gracing his lips. “Well, then,” he said, his eyes twinkling. “Let’s go conquer that hunger.”

Elyse lifted her leg. “My legs are jelly, thanks to you,” she grumbled playfully. “Don’t even think about touching me for days. I need rest!”

Jayden, surprisingly compliant, helped her out of bed, a mischievous glint in his eyes as he began to dress her.

His apparent meekness only irritated her further. She playfully tugged at his ear. “Don’t give me that innocent act,” she said, a smirk playing on her lips. “You’re anything but.”

“Just a dutiful boyfriend, attending to his lovely girl’s needs,” he retorted, grinning.

“Smooth talker,” Elyse muttered, wishing she had the strength to kick him, but her legs still felt like noodles.

Jayden, wisely deciding not to push it any further, quickly finished getting dressed and jumped out of bed. “I’ll grab room service. What are you in the mood for?”

“Honestly, I’m so hungry I could eat a horse,” Elyse said, half-laughing.

“Alright, coming right up.”

Chapter 1657:

He placed the order, and the food arrived faster than they expected.

After devouring everything, they drove over to Anthony’s shop.

The shop was empty when they pulled up.

Elyse called out Anthony’s name a few times, but the silence swallowed her words. Confused, she pulled out her phone to give him a call.

Just then, a woman stepped out from the back room.

She wore a simple dress, her hair pulled into a neat ponytail. There was a quiet confidence in the way she carried herself.

Her eyes shifted from Elyse to Jayden, a smile tugging at her lips. “I heard someone calling for Anthony. Is that you?”

Elyse nodded, slightly lost for words. “Yes, we’re his friends. And you?”

The woman’s face brightened with recognition. “He went out to pick up some inventory. He should be back any minute. I’m his girlfriend, Cathy.”

Elyse gasped, her hand flying to her mouth. “Oh my gosh! You’re her, Cathy!”

“Yep, that’s me!” Cathy replied, her voice a mix of surprise and delight. “Do you know me?”

Elyse turned to Jayden, practically hopping on her toes with excitement.

“Remember when we left? Anthony was totally smitten with a nurse, and we were all betting on whether he’d ever work up the nerve to ask her out!”

Jayden’s face lit up with recognition, his grin widening. He glanced at Cathy. “Looks like he did.”

Cathy’s eyes twinkled as she winked. “Let’s just say I put him through a lot, but he passed with flying colors, so I figured we should give it a shot.”

Elyse clasped her hands together, her face soft with happiness. “I’m so happy Anthony’s found his happiness.”

Cathy laughed, the sound light and teasing. “Yeah, he’s a lucky guy.”

They’d barely been chatting for a moment when Anthony walked back in, his arms weighed down with two heavy boxes.

He froze when he spotted Elyse and Jayden. The boxes hit the floor with a heavy thud as he surged forward, wrapping them both in a crushing bear hug.

“Oh my God, you’re okay! Thank God!” His voice cracked as he held them so tightly they could barely catch their breath.

Cathy stepped in, tugging at his arm with a laugh. “Easy! You’re gonna squeeze the life out of them!”

Reluctantly, he let go, his eyes rimmed with red. Swiping at them with the back of his hand, he spoke thickly. “It’s just... really good to see you both safe. I couldn’t eat or sleep these past few days.”

Cathy raised a hand, nodding. “I can back that up. He’s been glued to the news, refreshing updates every five seconds.”

Elyse blinked rapidly, her voice wavering. “Anthony, you’re going to make me cry.”

“My heart was in my throat the entire time, watching you all risk your lives in such dangerous conditions. The thought of losing any of you was unbearable,” Anthony’s voice cracked as emotion overwhelmed him. His hands trembled as he covered his face to hide his tears. Moved by his raw display of emotion, Cathy drew him into her embrace, her touch gentle as she whispered, “They’re safe now. Let’s cherish this moment of joy.”

Chapter 1658:

Anthony’s shoulders shook as he nodded. “These are tears of happiness, I promise. Not sorrow.”

Though tears threatened to spill from her own eyes, Elyse found solace in watching Cathy console Anthony with such tenderness. The sight of Anthony—usually a pillar of strength—finding someone who could see past his stoic facade and truly understand him touched something deep within her soul. As she watched their tender moment unfold, she felt her own melancholy begin to lift, like morning mist.

Turning to Jayden, she spoke in hushed tones. “It warms my heart to see such profound love between them. Their connection is beautiful.”

A fond smile played across his lips as he gently ruffled her hair. “Their joy has a way of lighting up everyone around them, doesn’t it?”

“As if we’re any different?” Elyse quipped with a hint of mischief.

Jayden's soft laughter filled the air. "We certainly aren't. Though, if memory serves, you were threatening to kick me out of the car just minutes ago."

"And you understood every word of it," Elyse retorted with an exaggerated eye roll, choosing to let the matter rest.

Under Cathy's comforting presence, Anthony gradually collected himself. He accepted her offered tissue with a grateful smile, dabbing at his eyes before speaking sheepishly. "I'm sorry for breaking down like that. Seeing everyone safe just... overwhelmed me."

Jayden clapped a warm hand on Anthony's shoulder. "No apologies needed, buddy. How about we celebrate with dinner and drinks tonight?"

Anthony's eyes lit up with hope as they darted toward Cathy, accompanied by a nervous clearing of his throat.

Cathy fixed him with a stern look that couldn't quite hide her affection.

"Just this once. But don't push your luck."

"Oh?" Elyse's interest was piqued. "Is Anthony on a drinking ban?"

"His recent medical check-up raised some concerns," Cathy explained, a protective edge to her voice. "I've had to keep a close eye on his alcohol intake since then."

Elyse absorbed this information with a thoughtful nod before turning her scrutiny toward Jayden.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Jayden protested, straightening defensively. "I'm the picture of health, I'll have you know."

Without hesitation, Elyse's voice took on a no-nonsense tone. "The moment we head back home, you're making that doctor's appointment."

“Come on, where’s your faith in me?” Jayden protested, gesturing at himself. “Haven’t you seen how much energy I’ve had lately?” Before he could continue his defense, Elyse pressed her palm firmly against his lips.

“Save your breath. If you’re going to be stubborn about this, then so be it!”

Jayden couldn’t help but let out an amused snort, knowing full well she had the upper hand.

Having regained his composure, Anthony’s expression softened. “I’m fine now, truly. But what brings you all here today?”

In response, Jayden placed a violin case on the counter with careful movements. As he opened it, the lid revealed an aged violin covered in a layer of dust.

Chapter 1659:

Anthony’s eyes widened in recognition. “This is…” His voice trailed off in disbelief. “My father’s masterpiece. How did it end up in such a state?”

A flush crept across Elyse’s cheeks as she admitted, “The violin’s condition is my fault. That day in the chaos, I really didn’t have time to protect it.”

After examining the instrument carefully, Anthony’s face brightened. “Don’t let it trouble you. While it looks worse for wear, it’s nothing beyond repair. I’ll take you to my father—he’s the only craftsman who can restore it to its former glory.”

“Is this the same violin you mentioned?” Cathy leaned forward, her eyes alight with interest. “The one your father held onto for two decades, waiting for the perfect musician?”

“The very same,” Anthony confirmed with pride. “It’s his finest creation, capable of producing the most enchanting melodies.”

Hope danced in Cathy’s eyes as she turned to Elyse. “Would you play it for us?”

Elyse's face lit up with genuine warmth. "Of course! Once it's restored, I'd be honored to perform for you."

Cathy was thrilled. After sending a quick text to George and receiving confirmation, Anthony announced, "Let's get going. I'll drive us over—my dad's at home tending to his beloved garden."

"You all go ahead," Cathy said, gesturing to the shop around her. "I'll hold down the fort here."

Anthony drew her into his arms, pressing a tender kiss to her forehead with a gentle smile. "I'll come back for you after your shift."

From the sidelines, Elyse watched their sweet exchange, amusement dancing in her eyes. Catching Elyse and Jayden's meaningful glances, Anthony cleared his throat self-consciously and stepped back from Cathy. "Right then, shall we?"

Once they settled into the car, Elyse couldn't contain herself. "It's beautiful seeing you two so content together."

Anthony's warm laughter filled the car. "The feeling's mutual. Seeing you and Jayden happy brings me peace. I remember when you first arrived—I could feel the tension between you two; I was even tempted to play matchmaker more than once."

Elyse's breath caught in her throat as she instinctively sought out Jayden's gaze. Their eyes met in a moment of shared remembrance.

"Back then, we were..." Elyse's voice trailed off softly.

"We were always at each other's throats. Things got so bad you even mentioned divorce, wanting to live separate lives," Jayden said, his voice carrying a hint of melancholy.

Anthony gave a thoughtful nod. "I remember thinking, at that moment, that you two seemed so perfectly in tune with each other, yet you were about to go your separate ways. It hurt me more than it hurt you both."

Elyse raised an eyebrow, curious. "You were shipping me and Jayden?"

Anthony's gaze softened as he spoke. "Without a doubt. And I think my father was secretly rooting for you too. After you left, he would often mumble to himself, wondering if the two of you might find your way back to each other."

Elyse sighed softly, a wistful smile crossing her face. She glanced at Jayden. "It seems like if we were to break up, it would break quite a few hearts."

Jayden looked genuinely surprised. "You didn't know? Driscoll was so heartbroken by our breakup that he'd often cry in secret when no one was around."

Chapter 1660:

Elyse's eyes widened in surprise. "I had no idea."

Jayden nodded, adding, "He tried to keep his tears hidden, but with all the staff in the house, it wasn't long before someone noticed him wiping his eyes."

Elyse took a moment to process, then spoke, her voice thoughtful. "So, it seems our reconciliation would bring joy to a lot of people."

Jayden adjusted his shirt with a touch of pride, a mischievous gleam in his eye. "Driscoll even consulted a soothsayer about us. The soothsayer said we were destined to be together, a perfect match for life."

Elyse blinked, momentarily speechless. "Do you actually believe that?"

"Yes," Jayden said, his tone unwavering. His eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. "Don't you think it's true?"

Elyse hesitated for a few seconds, feeling the weight of his gaze. Finally, she nodded, her voice quiet but sincere. "I think so too."

A smile spread across Jayden's face, his confidence shining through. "Not every couple can make it through a lifetime together, but I'm certain we will."

Now, Elyse found Jayden rather charming.

Anthony, watching the two of them interact, couldn't help but smile. Seeing their happiness filled him with a warm, genuine sense of contentment.

As they arrived home, George was finishing up washing some fruit. Hearing the car engine, he looked up and saw Anthony leading Elyse and Jayden into the yard, prompting him to rush over to greet them.

"You're back!" George exclaimed, his voice bright with excitement. Elyse's smile lit up the space. "It's been a while, George. Jayden and I came to visit you."

Noticing how close Elyse and Jayden stood together, George grinned and said, "You two are perfect for each other. I'm so glad to see you back together."

Anthony took Elyse's violin from the car and handed it to George. "Dad, take a look at this. How long do you think it would take to repair?"

George wasn't surprised to see the violin. He had already seen its condition on TV and knew how fortunate Elyse was to have survived that terrifying ordeal. He took the violin from Anthony, inspecting it closely before offering reassurance. "Don't worry, I'll have a good look at it and let you know when it can be repaired."

Elyse, wringing her hands nervously, spoke up. "I'm the one who caused all this damage. Are you upset with me?"

George smiled gently. "You've given this violin a new meaning. A few scars here and there are a small price to pay for that."

"Here," he added, "have some fruit. I'll let you know once I'm done checking the violin."

Elyse nodded, watching as George went inside. Anthony gestured for Elyse and Jayden to sit down.

After a few moments of conversation, Anthony seemed hesitant, struggling to find the right words. Jayden, sensing Anthony's unease, encouraged him, saying, "Just say what's on your mind."