

Bound love 201

Chapter 201:

Tracy was taken aback by the revelation. Glancing around, she lowered her voice. “So, did you two really have a fight? From an outsider’s perspective, it seems like you and Jayden deeply care for each other. You are a perfect match. He’s always so attentive to your needs and emotions. Honestly, despite his leg issue, he seems like the perfect husband.”

Elyse’s bitter smile betrayed her inner turmoil at Tracy’s assessment. “You think we’re a perfect match, huh? Sometimes I do too. He supports me through everything, like a pillar. Even in our intimate moments, there’s a strong connection.” After a pause, Elyse continued thoughtfully, “But there’s always a distance between us. I never know what’s on his mind, how he’s feeling, or what plans he has for the future.”

Tracy hesitated, then cautiously prodded, “Are you saying Jayden’s wary of you? He hasn’t fully opened up to you.”

“That’s what I think,” Elyse admitted, uncertainty tingeing her voice.

Tracy had a realization. “Could it be that Jayden’s been too guarded after his accident, maybe even suspicious?”

Elyse pondered for a moment before responding tentatively, “It’s possible. But then again, maybe not. I can’t shake the feeling that he’s hiding something from me.”

Tracy paused, then asked curiously between bites, “Hiding what? What secret do you think he’s keeping?”

Elyse recalled and confessed, “Sometimes I wonder if he’s capable of standing.”

Tracy nearly choked, hastily swallowing her food before responding hoarsely, “That’s absurd. If Jayden could stand, he’d be just like anyone else, right?”

She struggled to find the right words. After knowing Jayden for so long, she couldn't imagine him being physically impaired. He seemed perfectly normal. But without evidence, doubts lingered.

"Perhaps rushing into marriage was a mistake. You need time to truly understand each other," Tracy concluded, opening a bottle of beverage and taking a few sips. "It's all about learning to accept one another."

Elyse found Tracy's perspective reasonable. She raised her beverage and clinked it with Tracy's, saying, "Perhaps I'm being overly sensitive. I'll try to talk to him when I get the chance."

"That's a good plan. Make sure to cherish him," Tracy smiled, ready to take a sip of her beverage, but her phone interrupted with a sudden ring.

Elyse grabbed the phone and glanced at the screen. "Call from Liverton. Recognize the number?"

Tracy took back her phone and promptly ended the call, adding the number to her blacklist. With a grim expression, she muttered, "Who else but Shaun?"

Elyse's eyes widened. "Shaun again? Is he trying to stir up trouble for you?"

Tracy impatiently ran a hand through her hair. "No clue. Last time, it wasn't from this number. Picked up by mistake. He had the audacity to claim the wedding wasn't off."

Tracy's chest rose with agitation, clearly seething at Shaun's audacity. "Who does he think he is? Does he expect me to pine for him forever? I have a right to choose. Since he's still hung up on Dolores, I'll let them have their way."

Tracy's anger flared, punctuated by a forceful bite of food.

Elyse drew closer to Tracy. "Calling off the wedding was the right decision. Let's focus on brighter things."

Tears welled in Tracy's eyes at Elyse's words, but she held them back, mindful of her makeup. Rolling her eyes, she quipped, "Your words are truly touching."

Elyse remained still, cautious not to disrupt Tracy's makeup. At that moment, several people approached carrying large boxes. Elyse observed their actions, puzzled. "What's going on here?"

"Probably an artist's treat. Not sure who, though. Let's join the line and find out," Tracy suggested, preparing to stand up. However, she noticed others passing by with human-shaped cutouts on their shoulders.

Elyse glanced at the cutouts, then turned to Tracy with a puzzled expression. "Are you treating the crew?"

Tracy's lips twitched. "With such a large crew, it'd cost tens of thousands. I don't have that kind of money."

As if on cue, Elyse's driver approached with two bags of food. Elyse was shocked. "Why are you here?"

Handing the bags to Elyse, the driver explained, "Mr. Owen tasked me with delivering food to the crew under Miss Tracy Bernard's name." With that, the driver set off to distribute the snacks.

Tracy nudged the stunned Elyse. "Thanks to you, I'll be quite popular today."

Chapter 202:

Tracy teased Elyse, leaving her flustered. She shyly turned away. Just then, she caught sight of a woman nearby staring intently at her. Puzzled and a bit startled, Elyse quickly faced Tracy, grabbed her sleeve, and whispered, "Who is that woman over there?"

Peering in the woman's direction, Tracy replied softly, "That's Morgan Welch. She's recognized for portraying the mothers of male leads in different productions. She gained a bit of fame from a notable play recently, which has somewhat elevated her status."

Pausing to reflect, Tracy added, "Though she's still not widely recognized."

Anxious, Elyse urged, "Can you check if she's been watching me this whole time?"

As Tracy turned to look, Morgan began walking towards them. "May I know your name?" Morgan inquired, her voice shaking slightly as she stood before Elyse.

Intimidated by Morgan's intense gaze, Elyse stepped backward and answered in a subdued tone, "I'm Elyse Lloyd."

Repeating the name, Morgan seemed to ponder over it as if it were a puzzle. Stepping forward to shield her friend, Tracy said, "Ms. Welch, Elyse isn't involved in show business. If she has inadvertently upset you, I sincerely apologize on her behalf."

Morgan's expression softened, and with a gentle smile, she responded, "I apologize for scaring you. You looked familiar, and I thought I had seen you somewhere." Attempting to manage her feelings, Morgan apologized again to Elyse. "I wasn't myself. I'm sorry."

Elyse felt a wave of relief, realizing there had been a misunderstanding. "It's alright. I'm not offended." She gestured toward a group nearby and suggested, "Tracy is treating the crew to snacks over there. Why don't you join them?"

Morgan smiled and declined. "No thanks, I'm trying to watch my weight for a role."

After offering another apology, Morgan walked away.

Curious, Tracy asked, "Have you met Morgan before?"

Elyse shook her head. "No, I've never seen her."

Tracy devoured the food provided by Jayden's driver and, feeling satisfied, fell asleep leaning against Elyse.

Elyse, holding her phone, hesitated for a while before sending a message to Jayden, "Thank you for arranging everything. Tracy is very grateful to you."

Jayden did not respond immediately. Elyse figured he was likely busy working for Clive and let out a sigh. More than ten minutes passed before Jayden's reply came through. "When will you be heading home today?"

Reading his message, Elyse unexpectedly recalled the morning's events, her cheeks flushing as she typed back, "In the evening. I'll wait for you at home for dinner." Jayden responded instantly.

Elyse stared at his words for a long time before burying her face between her knees, hiding a smile she couldn't contain.

Later that evening, as Tracy was still busy filming, she noticed Elyse approaching with her purse. Her expression tensed. "Are you leaving? Didn't you promise to spend the whole day with me?"

Feeling embarrassed, Elyse admitted, "Jayden asked when I'd be home."

Despite her frustration, Tracy managed a smile and said, "Since your husband has gone to such lengths to impress me, I'll let you go back to him."

Elyse grinned sheepishly, waved goodbye, and walked away. As she reached the parking lot near the shopping mall to wait for her driver, she unexpectedly bumped into Theo. Standing next to him was an attractive woman.

"Elyse, what brings you here?" Theo asked.

Elyse glanced at the woman beside him but remained silent. She replied lightly, "Just waiting for my driver."

After she spoke, Elyse tried to walk past them, intending to wait elsewhere, but Theo stopped her. "Excuse me, she is my friend. I need to speak with her privately," Theo addressed the woman next to him with a polite nod. However, without waiting for her reply, he swiftly guided Elyse to the side.

Elyse thought she was really unlucky to run into Theo today. "Don't you have anything to say about all this?" Theo halted Elyse's departure, his voice tinged with challenge. "Didn't you notice I was with another woman?"

Chapter 203:

Elyse looked at Jayden, puzzled by the intent behind his question. She met his gaze with a calm expression. Theo's familiar presence, once so captivating, now barely stirred her. She responded evenly, "When we were together, there was always another woman by your side. It's the same now. I'm not surprised."

Theo was dissatisfied with her response; he had hoped for something different. Taking a deep breath, he said, "I know I was a jerk. But you didn't need to marry someone else just to get back at me. Aren't you just hurting yourself?"

Elyse shook her head, her voice steady. "You're wrong. I truly love Jayden. I don't regret marrying him." Her smile was tinged with sarcasm. "Theo, do you really think I married Jayden just to get your attention? That everything is a plot to make you jealous and come crawling back?"

Theo remained silent, his expression almost confirming her suspicions. Elyse's amusement was evident as she tilted her head and continued, "I did love you once. But I also grew disillusioned and chose someone else. Don't dwell on the past. You never valued what we had. Now you're always looking back. I don't get it. Do you think the world revolves around you?"

Her words seemed to strike Theo deeply. After a tense silence, he reluctantly asked, "Why didn't you ever mention that you saved me? If you had, I would have asked Kaelyn. Then I'd know who was lying."

Elyse pressed her lips together, clearly contemptuous of the question. She spoke slowly, "Because that memory belongs to both of us. On that desperate night, we clung to each other for warmth, not knowing if we'd see tomorrow. Whether I mentioned it or not, we both knew what we meant to each other." She smiled, her expression a mix of self-mockery and sadness. "But I was too naive."

Theo clenched his fists, his frustration apparent. He had been feverish and half-conscious that rainy night, unable to clearly see her face. But he remembered the feelings, the heartbeat, the warmth. Theo's gaze on Elyse was complex. "Is this really how it ends between us?"

Elyse scoffed. "What else did you expect? Take care of that girl. She seems a lot better than Kaelyn. Just don't make the same mistakes again."

Elyse pushed him away and strode forward determinedly. Theo stood rooted to the spot, watching her diminishing figure. For a brief moment, he feared she was truly leaving him for good, a thought that left him feeling both scared and alienated.

“Theo, I saw that woman leave, so I came over,” said the beautiful woman as she approached him slowly in her high heels.

Noticing Theo’s pale face and the sweat on his brow, she expressed concern. “Are you okay?” She reached into her purse, pulled out a handkerchief, and attempted to dab his forehead.

“I’m fine, Miss Jimenez. Don’t worry,” Theo declined Freda’s offer of intimacy.

Astonishment flickered across Freda’s face. She vividly remembered how Theo had held the other woman’s wrist, his expression showing no signs of reluctance.

With the memory fresh in her mind, Freda queried, “Is that girl a friend of yours? She seemed quite upset. Did you two have a disagreement?”

Theo paused for a few seconds, then massaged his forehead and replied wearily, “Yes, we had a disagreement.”

Freda chose not to probe further. Instead, she smiled and suggested, “I’m quite hungry. Could you take me to dinner?”

“Sorry, I’ll take you there right now,” Theo responded. He was on a mission today. His mother, Zandra, intended for him to marry Freda Jimenez, believing that an alliance with the Jimenez family could greatly benefit the Ward family business. Moreover, Freda was Zandra’s ideal choice for a daughter-in-law. Freda was well-educated, gentle, and kind, with the support of a reliable family. Zandra often remarked that Freda was vastly superior to Elyse, who came from a more modest background.

Theo felt a pang in his heart. Logically, he knew he should be thrilled to be with Freda, yet his thoughts invariably drifted to Elyse whenever they were together.

Chapter 204:

Theo realized, after much reflection, that his feelings for Elyse were deeper than he had initially thought. Yet he couldn’t understand why. What was it about Elyse, a woman from an ordinary family with ordinary abilities, that captivated him so deeply? When had he fallen for her? He once asked Mabel what being in love felt like. According to her, it seemed he didn’t truly love Elyse. But if he didn’t love Elyse, why did he feel so devastated each quiet night at the mere thought of her

marrying Jayden? Theo found himself unable to decipher his own emotions. He was preoccupied with making money yet confused about his feelings.

Regarding his potential marriage to Freda, his initial thoughts mirrored Zandra's; it was a lucrative arrangement. However, he soon questioned his perspective. Was marriage merely a transaction? Should he really be discussing interests and resources with the woman he would spend his life with? Shouldn't his wife be the love of his life? For the first time, Theo pondered deeply about something other than finances: love, which he had previously deemed useless and trivial.

Upon arriving at the restaurant, Theo let the waiter lead the way while Freda followed, admiring the establishment's stylish decor. Instead of taking the menu himself, Theo gestured for the waiter to hand it directly to Freda. Resting her chin on her hands, Freda smiled and declined, "Isn't this the perfect time for you to learn my preferences? Why not take this chance?"

Theo observed Freda for a moment before accepting the menu. He flipped through it and inquired, "Are there any foods you particularly dislike?" After Freda listed some, Theo selected several dishes. Freda nodded approvingly, "Well chosen. I really like what you've ordered."

Theo smiled, ordered some desserts and red wine, and then handed the menu back to the waiter. Freda looked at him and inquired, "Aren't you going to share your preferences with me?"

Theo responded dismissively, "I'm not particular about food. There's nothing special for you to remember." Freda played with her short hair and asked, "If you don't want to engage much with me, should I bring up the girl we just met?"

Theo was taken aback by Freda's mention of Elyse. He replied, "She's just a friend. Don't read too much into it." "Really?" Freda pressed on. "But if she's just a friend, why were your eyes and attention always drawn to her?"

Freda seemed to see right through him and questioned, "Theo, you're not good at pretending. Is it so hard to admit you like her?" She sighed, "I understand we are marrying for business reasons. It's normal for you to have feelings for someone else; after all, everyone has a past."

Theo sighed deeply. He knew Freda was sharp and perceptive, but he hadn't expected such an outlandish idea from her. "I think you're misunderstanding. Yes, she is my ex-girlfriend, but our relationship wasn't as serious as you think."

Seeing his reluctance, Freda retorted sharply, “If you didn’t deeply love her, why did you look so devastated when she left?” Theo protested, “You’re misinterpreting what you saw.”

“Theo, I studied psychology in college. Sometimes people deny the truth, but their body language speaks volumes.” She gestured towards Theo’s hand and continued, “You recoiled from my touch but reached out to that girl naturally.”

Theo fell silent. In truth, he was unclear about his own heart and his feelings for Elyse. Freda waved her hand dismissively, “But don’t worry. I’m not bothered by who you fancy. I understand my role here. Let’s move on.”

Theo observed Freda’s nonchalant demeanor and realized he was the one feeling uneasy. He queried, “Can you really accept a marriage like this? One without any emotional connection, based solely on mutual benefits?”

Freda chuckled, finding his concern somewhat endearing. “Yes. A man might betray me, but money won’t. I’d rather be committed to wealth than be a slave to love. I’m not going to sacrifice myself for any man.”

Theo remained silent, reflecting on his own changing perspectives.

Chapter 205:

Freda noticed Theo’s quiet contemplation and skillfully steered the conversation towards lighter territory, asking, “Any fun plans after dinner?”

After a brief pause, Theo’s face lit up with a suggestion. “Actually, there’s an auction happening nearby. If you’re interested, I’d love to take you there.”

“An auction? Trying to show off your wealth on our first meeting?” she asked with a playful glint in her eye.

Freda’s stunning looks and flirtatious glance exuded a charming and alluring presence.

Theo chuckled. “Your humor is delightful. I’ve always been surrounded by friends ever since I was a kid. People just seem to enjoy my company.”

Her words amused Theo once more, her charm and confidence bringing a smile to his face.

Freda's eyes narrowed slightly as she gazed at Theo's smiling face, his charm and warmth radiating from him like a gentle glow.

Theo had taken a liking to her, and after a pleasant dinner, he invited her to the auction.

The auction was a relatively low-key affair, with the starting bids for the items on offer hovering around the modest sum of one million.

Freda's eyes scanned the catalog until she spotted a jewelry necklace, her expression transforming from indifference to interest. "This sapphire's nice, but the design's off. This ruby's design, though, is stunning, but red doesn't suit me, I must say."

As Theo browsed through the catalog, his eyes landed on the same ruby necklace that had caught Freda's attention. "The ruby outshines the sapphire," he said casually.

Freda brushed off Theo's comment. The auction began, and soon the sapphire necklace Freda had admired was on the block.

"As I said, it's a lovely piece, but the design really detracts from the gemstone's value," Freda's eyes sparkled with interest as she gazed at the gemstone, her chin resting thoughtfully on her hand.

Theo encouraged her. "If you like it, bid on it."

She turned to him with a playful smile. "As a gentleman, shouldn't you be the one bidding on it for me?"

His eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled. "Bidding on it would be like sealing our love with a promise, wouldn't it?"

She teased, "Don't you just want to be with me without all the frills?"

“Pledging my love on the first day would make me seem rash and impulsive, don’t you think? Let’s take the time to get to know each other better and see where this journey takes us,” Theo said, smiling casually.

Freda lounged against the chair, her chin nestled in the palm of her hand, her head tilted to one side. She could understand Theo’s undertones. She wasn’t bothered at all. It seemed like a normal response.

As they talked, the sapphire necklace was auctioned off in quick succession.

Freda’s preferences didn’t lean towards red, so the ruby held no allure for her either. She waited patiently to see if someone else would claim the next item, her eyes scanning the room with interest. But then, to her surprise, Theo jumped into the bidding beside her.

Freda’s eyes widened in surprise. “You’re bidding on the ruby necklace?”

“It is lovely, don’t you agree? Its design reminds me of a sunflower,” Theo whispered, his eyes locked on the ruby.

“It looked like a sunflower,” she doubted it. Freda observed in silence, her eyes fixed on the scene, her expression thoughtful.

Her curiosity was piqued. Was he genuinely enamored with the necklace, or was he simply enjoying the thrill of the bidding process?

As she watched him bid, her mind wandered to the Ward family’s recent calendar, devoid of special occasions. If Theo was to win the auction, it couldn’t be for his own indulgence. Perhaps he had a surprise in store for someone. It was either her or someone else’s. Could he be planning to give the necklace to her?

Freda’s reverie was abruptly shattered when a nearby bidder suddenly outbid Theo, shattering the silence and jolting her back to the present moment.

Theo turned to face the new bidder. A woman in a black coat and pants, her dark hair pulled up high, sat in the chair. The woman flashed him a mischievous grin, her eyes sparkling with playfulness. “Sorry, handsome, but I’m head over heels for this necklace. Mind letting me win?”

Freda's gaze was fixed on the woman, her silence palpable as she waited to see if Theo would yield or counterattack.

Theo's eyes locked onto the mysterious woman, a hint of determination flickering across his face. With a deliberate motion, he raised his paddle, increasing the bid by another hundred thousand.

The woman looked embarrassed but didn't give up. She raised her bid again, matching Theo's latest offer.

The bidding started with multiple parties, but as it intensified, the others backed off, leaving only Theo and the woman engaged in a fierce one-on-one contest.

The bid amount shot up, reaching dizzying heights. The necklace, initially valued at three million, saw its price double to six million.

The woman's expression turned puzzled, her brow furrowed in concern. She knew the necklace's true value, and this astronomical price was simply absurd.

After a brief moment of deliberation, she gracefully conceded, relinquishing her bid and yielding the prize to Theo.

The necklace was finally Theo's, the bidding war won.

"Congratulations, you've emerged victorious," Freda congratulated him warmly. She saw a tinge of sadness in his eyes, a melancholy that contrasted with his win.

Chapter 206:

The auction came to a close, and Theo secured the necklace after paying. Freda trailed after him, intrigued by the way he admired the necklace. She asked, "What's the allure of this necklace? Why do you want it so badly?"

Theo tucked the necklace away and responded vaguely, "No particular reason. I just felt like buying it."

“Does your money burn a hole in your pocket? Well, why don’t you spend it on me? My mom says I’m a spendthrift, that I’ll blow through any money I get, which is why she’s so eager for me to tie the knot,” Freda shrugged helplessly. “She is hoping my future hubby will be generous with his spending on me.”

“Your mom sounds as amusing as you are,” Theo said, a faint smile playing on his lips. Glancing at his watch, he said, “It’s getting late. I’ll take you home.”

Freda nodded in agreement. “Sure.”

Having indulged in a few drinks at the auction, Theo wasn’t fit to drive. Therefore, he called a driver and dropped Freda off at her house first.

As Freda stepped out of the car, a thought struck her, prompting her to turn back and knock on the window. Theo lowered the window with a press of a button. “Is there anything else?”

Meeting Theo’s gaze, Freda asked candidly, “Now that tonight’s over, can we still see each other in the future?”

Before Theo could reply, Freda continued, “I quite like your handsome face. Moreover, I have a good impression of you.”

After a moment of surprise, Theo quickly regained his composure, a faint smile touching his lips. “Future meetings depend on my work schedule, but I’ll do my best to fit you in.”

Freda’s eyes sparkled mischievously. “You are quite a busy man. Even your dates have to be booked in advance.”

Theo chuckled, his demeanor relaxing. “Well, I’ll have to pencil you in for another appointment then.”

“I’m looking forward to it,” Freda replied with a playful wink before turning on her heel and heading home.

Back at his place, Theo found Zandra lounging on the couch in her pajamas. He knew she had high hopes for this blind date, and a shadow passed over his face as he sat across from her.

Zandra slowly opened her eyes, catching sight of Theo's somber expression. She asked sternly, "What's wrong? Were you not pleased with Miss Jimenez?"

"It's not that," Theo replied. After taking a sip of water, Zandra continued, "Then why aren't you happy?"

Theo hesitated before speaking. "I'm not unhappy. Just tired."

Raising her gaze, Zandra glanced at him once more and asked, "What's Freda's impression of you?"

"She asked me out again," Theo replied.

Zandra nodded, a satisfied smile finally gracing her lips. Her demeanor towards Theo softened slightly. "Good. Keep her interested. A union between our families could yield tremendous advantages for us."

At that moment, Zandra's eyes sparkled with ambition as if she could already envision the grand future of the Ward family's business empire.

Theo gazed at Zandra for a while, feeling not the expected happiness but rather a gradual chill in his heart. He wasn't content. It felt like a part of his heart was empty, and he didn't know what could fill it.

Growing more fatigued, Theo stood up and murmured, "I'm exhausted. I need some rest."

"Of course, take your time." Satisfied with Theo's performance, Zandra refrained from probing further into his interaction with Freda, allowing him to retire to his room.

Entering his room, Theo made a beeline for the bathroom, craving the soothing embrace of a shower. After drying his hair, he collapsed onto his bed.

He chose not to flick on the lights, preferring the solace of darkness. At the auction earlier, he had bought the ruby necklace for a singular reason – Elyse liked rubies.

When they were in college, Elyse would often join him in the library for study sessions. As he pored over complex finance textbooks, she'd pick up random magazines, hoping to find something more captivating.

Leafing through the pages, she'd point out a ruby necklace, exclaiming, "This necklace is gorgeous! The rubies are stunning!"

Theo glanced up casually, asking, "Do you like this necklace?"

With a nod, Elyse had replied, "It's exquisite. Reminds me of a blooming sunflower, don't you think?"

"I don't think so," his nonchalant response brushed off Elyse's excitement, but she wasn't offended.

He had overheard Elyse's soft mutter, "But I like rubies."

At the time, Theo didn't pay much attention to Elyse's excitement over the necklace. After all, he couldn't see the connection between her admiration for rubies and himself. Buying her jewelry was the furthest thing from his mind.

But now, Theo's perspective had changed.

When his gaze fell upon the ruby necklace at the auction, Elyse was the first person to come to mind.

Chapter 207:

When Elyse returned home joyfully, she noticed Jayden in the garden sipping tea. She approached and inquired, "Have you been waiting here for me for a long time?"

Jayden glanced up at her and replied, "No."

Elyse gave an awkward smile and mentioned, "I'm going to change my clothes." She then hurried off.

Jayden observed her cautious demeanor, shook his head, and muttered affectionately yet helplessly, "Just like a startled rabbit."

Once Elyse had changed and come back downstairs, she noticed several servants bustling around with various items. She approached curiously and saw Driscoll directing the servants to tidy up the collection room. All the items being moved belonged to Jayden. She wondered if they were relocating these items.

"Where are all these things being moved to?" she asked with curiosity.

Upon spotting her, Driscoll greeted her warmly. Elyse nodded. Her eyes then sparkled as she spotted her cherished motorcycle. Driscoll watched her as she walked over and caressed the silver motorcycle. He then gently pulled her away and said with a smile, "Mr. Owens' collections are cleaned here every three months. Since the collection room isn't opened often, it tends to gather dust."

Elyse had wanted to touch her silver motorcycle even in her dreams. Now that she finally could, she was reluctant to pull her hand away when Driscoll intervened.

Just then, a servant walked by carrying a rabbit. It was so close she could see its fur, its eyes, and its red pupils staring back at her.

"Ah!" Elyse jumped back swiftly, startled.

Driscoll steadied her as she nearly stumbled and instructed the servant to remove the rabbit quickly. He then explained, "This was a rabbit Mr. Owen once cared for. After it passed away, he had it preserved and kept here in the collection room."

Elyse patted her chest and breathed a sigh of relief. "I was almost scared to death. No wonder the rabbit looks so realistic. I felt like it was alive."

Driscoll reassured her with a smile.

Looking around, Elyse noted the vast array of items in the collection room, from antiques like vases and paintings to other peculiar objects that, as Driscoll mentioned, held great significance to Jayden.

Her attention was soon captured by a photo frame. In the frame was a picture of Jayden with an unfamiliar man, both with their arms over each other's shoulders, appearing to be close friends.

"May I take a closer look at this picture?" she asked the servant and quickly approached the photo frame.

The servant handed her the frame. Driscoll came over, and seeing the photo, sighed. "That's Mr. Owen's old friend, Louis Walker. They were quite close. Mr. Owen frequently invited him over for drinks."

"Louis Walker..." Elyse glanced at Louis a few times before her gaze settled on Jayden. The photo seemed to be from Jayden's college days. He looked much younger and less stern than he does now.

She stared at the photo intently. Driscoll noticed her reluctance to part with it and softly urged, "Perhaps it's time to stop looking at that."

Elyse hesitated. She traced Jayden's face in the photo with her finger, feeling a surge of curiosity about his past.

"Really, Mrs. Owen, you should focus on the present," Driscoll murmured, slightly embarrassed.

Looking puzzled, Elyse lifted her head and noticed Jayden at the collection room entrance in his wheelchair. She realized that all the servants had departed, leaving just her and Driscoll.

She handed the photo frame back to Driscoll without a word, walked over to Jayden, and bowed her head in silence.

Jayden clenched his teeth and said, "It turns out you headed to the collection room. I've been waiting for you, but you didn't come to find me."

Elyse offered an awkward smile. Under Driscoll's sympathetic look, Jayden took her away.

She was about to be taken back to her room. Elyse clung to the sofa, protesting, “I won’t go back to my room. I refuse.”

Jayden gritted his teeth and said coldly, “You need discipline. Come back to your room with me.”

“No! At least let me eat dinner first,” Elyse desperately thought of an excuse to stall for time.

Jayden found her attempt amusing. “So you need to be full before my punishment, huh?”

Elyse blushed and bit her lip. “Fine, you can have dinner now. We’ll do it later.”

Jayden embraced her and murmured into her ear with a suggestive and forceful tone, making her too shy to look up.

When Driscoll and the servants reappeared, they witnessed the couple hugging and whispering intimately, appearing like the perfect loving pair.

“Alright, don’t stare at them anymore. Go and do your own work,” Driscoll dismissed the servants and left the couple to their privacy.

Chapter 208:

During dinner, Jayden informed Elyse that the elderly woman with an unidentified identity had been relocated to a prestigious nursing home. Her mental state has improved, though she remains unable to recognize anyone; she’s emotionally stable. “The nursing home provides the optimal environment for her,” Jayden conveyed, serving Elyse some food as he spoke.

Recalling the elderly woman’s earlier remarks at the hospital, Elyse asked in confusion, “Who are Rickey and Janet? Have there been any updates?”

Jayden shook his head. “Not yet. Despite searching nationwide, their names are relatively common. It’s challenging to narrow down our search. The investigation is ongoing.”

“That’s quite a challenge,” Elyse remarked, furrowing her brow in thought. “I plan to visit the nursing home in a few days. Perhaps the woman can provide some insight.”

Jayden nodded in agreement. After dinner, he received a call and promptly retreated to his study. Elyse sat cautiously on the sofa, her demeanor cautious. As Jayden disappeared into his study, she released a quiet exhale, a subtle sign of relief washing over her.

Silently, she hoped he wouldn’t spend the entire night locked away in his study. As the evening wore on, Elyse occupied herself by watching TV for a while before deciding to practice playing the violin. By the time the clock struck 10 PM, fatigue began to set in. Just as Elyse was about to succumb to sleepiness, Jayden emerged from his study and entered the bedroom.

Observing Elyse preparing to drift off to sleep, Jayden’s lips curved into a faint smile. “Do I recall granting you permission to retire for the night?”

Elyse, feeling a shiver run down her spine, wrapped herself tighter in the blanket. Nestling her head against the pillow, she responded playfully, “I’ve had quite a day. Sleep seems like the best option right now.”

Despite her protest, Jayden switched off the light and approached her with a grin.

Sensing his proximity, Elyse squeezed herself even tighter in the blanket. Jayden leaned in closer, his touch gentle yet insistent as he whispered, “Be proactive tonight, and I might just release you.”

As Jayden’s warm breath caressed her skin, Elyse felt a chill run down her spine. Despite her reservations, she bit her lip, unwilling to entertain his words given his lack of credibility.

“You’re quite the rebel, aren’t you? Well then, perhaps you need a lesson,” Jayden teased, his eyes fixed on her flushed cheeks.

He extended his hand beneath the blanket, his chilly, calloused fingers gently caressing her waist, gliding back and forth across her delicate, smooth skin. Feeling her body tremble, Jayden’s grin widened, relishing in her reaction.

Sensing the situation take a discomfoting turn, Elyse moved to flee, but before she could escape, Jayden anticipated her actions, pulling her back and pinning her firmly to the bed.

Startled, Elyse screamed, only to be met with Jayden's calm demeanor. "Thinking of running away? Do you truly believe you can escape?"

"No, no, I don't want it," Elyse curled up, keenly sensing Jayden's intense desires for their intimate moments. Recalling his relentless passion over the past few days, she noticed her waist was sore from their encounters.

Do you really think you have the right to refuse?" Jayden's hand cupped her face, his lips pressing gently against her forehead. "That's my good girl. Let me show you how much I adore you."

Elyse was speechless. "I feel so helpless allowing myself to be toyed with by you," Elyse expressed, her voice trembling as she shielded her cheeks.

Raising an eyebrow, Jayden responded by spanking her. "And what else can you do? Turn around."

Elyse complied obediently, turning around as instructed. At that moment, she remembered Jayden's immobile legs, wondering how he appeared lying in bed. Previously preoccupied with his mood, Elyse had never dug deep into it. Yet an inexplicable desire surged within her, compelling her to seek answers tonight.

As she pivoted, stealing a glance back, Jayden noticed her subtle movement. He shifted his weight, fully reclining onto her. "If you're hesitant to turn around, then let's make the most of this position."

"What do you mean?" Elyse, feeling both annoyed and embarrassed, resorted to playfully hitting Jayden with her fists.

Jayden chuckled, indulging her without halting his actions. Suddenly, his phone buzzed, interrupting the moment.

Hearing the persistent vibration, Elyse halted and pushed Jayden gently. "Your phone is ringing. Someone's trying to reach you."

"Let it be," Jayden insisted, maintaining his rhythm. His nonchalant attitude left Elyse feeling flustered. Reluctantly, she acquiesced to his request and disregarded the interruption.

Yet to their surprise, the phone's incessant ringing persisted. Initially, it paused briefly before resuming, but soon it rang continuously without a pause. Jayden found himself unable to tolerate the incessant ringing, wondering who could be so persistent.

With an irritated expression, he reached for his phone, swiping to answer the call. "Hello?"

"Jayden, I'm at the bar. I'm not feeling well. Can you come and get me?" A woman's sweet voice resonated through the phone, carrying an intimate tone that struck a chord with Jayden. Elyse's senses abruptly sobered as she listened to the woman's voice, which cut through the passion that had enveloped her moments before.

"It's you," Jayden recognized the voice immediately, his expression darkening as he glanced at Elyse.

Chapter 209:

Elyse's mind went blank, leaving her at a loss for words. In the blink of an eye, Jayden released Elyse. She was stunned. The weight pressing down on her vanished, leaving behind a void of warmth. She felt empty inside.

"Send me the location, and I'll swing by to get you," Jayden said to the person on the other end of the line before ending the call. When he turned back to Elyse, she had turned away, her back facing him. This was her silent fury.

Jayden felt a pang of guilt. Before leaving, he leaned down and planted a kiss on her forehead. "I'm sorry. I'm in the wrong this time. I'll make it up to you when I get back." With that, Jayden changed clothes, settled back into his wheelchair, and wheeled out of the room, paying no heed to her reaction.

As the door clicked shut behind him, Elyse felt a stifling sensation welling up inside her, an uncomfortable lump lodged in her throat. After lying in bed for a while, she sat up, using her hands for support, and donned the pajamas Jayden had removed earlier. Suddenly, she noticed a damp spot on the bed, a remnant of their intimate moment. Biting her lip, she felt a mixture of shame and anger.

"Jayden, you are such a jerk," she muttered bitterly, yanking the covers over herself. Jayden could go anywhere he liked. It was none of her business.

After leaving home, Jayden made his way to the bar flanked by his bodyguards. Upon arrival, he spotted a woman surrounded by a group of men who tried to take the woman away. Jayden shot a meaningful glance at the bodyguards, who promptly understood his silent command and advanced to escort the men away.

Approaching, Jayden fixed his gaze on the drowsy Corrie Bates leaning against the chair. He paused for a while before asking, "Are you asleep?"

Corrie remained motionless. Looking at the litter of empty beer bottles on the table, Jayden sighed. Taking action, he grabbed the ice bucket and tipped its contents over her head.

Startled by the sudden chill, Corrie sat up abruptly, her drunken haze dissipating. When she met Jayden's unfeeling gaze, she was stunned for a moment. Gathering her thoughts, she pointed at Jayden and asked, "Did you just pour ice on me?"

Jayden offered no apology, his tone even as he stated, "Get up. I'll take you home."

Defiantly, Corrie crossed her arms, pouting. "No way. I'm not ready to call it a night. I want another drink." Without hesitation, she lifted the half-empty bottle of beer from the table and downed its contents in a single gulp.

Seeing her actions, Jayden frowned and said, "It's been a year since we last met, and you are still the same." Eyeing Jayden thoughtfully, Corrie's gaze eventually settled on his legs. Sighing, she reminisced, "I didn't expect you to still be confined to that wheelchair after all this time. I miss the days when you could stand tall and proud. You were so handsome."

With a belch, she grabbed her phone and scrolled through her contacts. "Talking to you makes me not want to go home even more. I need to round up our old friends for a drink. It's been too long."

Corrie and Jayden had known each other for years. They shared mutual friends such as Peyton. Currently on holiday, Peyton initially hesitated when he received Corrie's call. However, after learning of Jayden's presence, he hurried over.

Upon arrival, Peyton found a group of guys he hadn't seen in ages already gathered, engaging in lively conversation and drinks with Corrie. Jayden was indeed present. However, he sat alone in a wheelchair, detached from the group's banter. He exuded an aura of isolation and loneliness.

Peyton rubbed his chin thoughtfully. He approached him and asked, “What brings you out here instead of being at home? You are not one to frequent bars.”

After all, since Jayden got married, they hadn’t frequented bars together like they used to. They usually gathered in Peyton’s basement. Jayden’s demeanor was notably chilly, signaling his sour mood.

With a chilly expression, he explained, “She called, claiming she was too drunk and needed a ride home.”

Peyton was taken aback. “And you actually came?”

Leaning closer, Peyton whispered, “When you were leaving, did Elyse know you were meeting another woman?”

Jayden responded calmly, “She did.”

“Fuck,” in a disappointed tone, Peyton continued, “Buddy, you know you are married, right?”

Looking at Peyton with a mixture of incredulity and annoyance, Jayden retorted, “Of course I know. I’m married.”

Silence settled between them as Peyton pondered whether this idiot before him was his friend.

Chapter 210:

Peyton realized Jayden didn’t grasp it yet; he hadn’t anticipated this level of obtuseness. After contemplating for a while, he inquired, “Corrie gave you a call, and now you’re here. Why did you do as she asked?”

Jayden responded calmly, “Certainly, there’s a motive.”

“What motive?” Peyton pressed.

Jayden remained silent, controlling the wheelchair as he pivoted, stating, "I'm steering clear of drinks. You'll handle the aftermath."

Speechless, Peyton pleaded, "Oh, come on. All I craved was some homebound gaming."

Jayden departed without a backward glance, bidding Peyton farewell with a wave. Peyton pondered following suit, but Corrie seized him, coercing him to take a seat beside her.

"Peyton, been a while. How's the doctor gig treating you?" Corrie slurred, leaning heavily against him.

With a grim expression, Peyton attempted to push Corrie away, but his efforts were futile. "You reek. Have you been throwing up?"

Clutching onto him tighter, Corrie protested, "That's harsh, Peyton. How could you say that? I don't stink."

After uttering those words, a thought struck her. When she sought out Jayden, he was nowhere to be found. Thus she inquired, "Where's Jayden?"

Pinching his nose in disgust, Peyton didn't mince words. "Why are you after Jayden? He's married now. He's not at your beck and call anymore."

Corrie was taken aback by this revelation. Struggling to maintain clarity, she questioned, "Jayden tied the knot. When did this happen? Why wasn't I informed?"

Pushing aside the bottle before him, Peyton massaged his throbbing temples. "Because you've been studying abroad."

Corrie looked blank, the weight of the news too heavy to bear. After a moment, she composed herself and remarked, "But Jayden's bound to a wheelchair for life. Who'd willingly marry him?"

Peyton scoffed, "Love can conquer all. What do you know? And don't pull that stunt again. Jayden's off-limits now that he's married," he warned.

Unsettled by his words, Corrie arched an eyebrow, intrigued by the mention of Jayden's wife. "Do you have photos of her? I'm curious to see Jayden's true love."

Peyton's response was firm. "No, she's not my concern. Why would I keep her photos?"

"Boring," Corrie muttered, her demeanor somber despite the merry atmosphere around her. "Hey, sober up. Head home on your own. I'm out," Peyton declared, rising to leave as he checked the time.

As he made to depart, Corrie halted him, voicing her concerns. "What did I do? I sense your dislike for me. Was it because I called Jayden in the dead of night?"

Turning to face her, Peyton cast a fleeting glance at Corrie. Amidst her uncertainty, Peyton wrestled with words, swallowing them in the end.

"Don't you realize you disrupted my sleep? I was out cold," Peyton retorted.

Corrie was taken aback but quickly rebounded. "My bad. I had no clue you were snoozing."

With a sigh, Peyton bid goodbye and exited. Leaving the bar, raindrops started to patter down. He tilted his head skyward, whispering, "Corrie's back. Time to visit Louis."

Upon Jayden's return, he discovered Elyse already asleep, her breathing steady, half her face veiled by covers. Jayden approached the bedside, careful not to disturb her slumber. He gazed at her peaceful visage, struck by her beauty in repose.

Unable to resist, Jayden lightly prodded her cheek with his finger. "You're not mad, are you?" Jayden whispered to himself.

Wearing a slight frown, Elyse mumbled softly and shifted in her sleep. Amused by her reaction, Jayden couldn't help but chuckle. Stepping closer, he gently lifted the covers and leaned in, reaching out to encircle her waist with his arm.