

Bound love 211

Chapter 211:

The following morning, Elyse stirred from her slumber and was greeted by Jayden's sleeping form. Instantly alert, she impulsively nudged him out of bed, causing Jayden to thud onto the floor. Clutching his side, he instinctively moved to rise, but the reality of his paralyzed legs hit him hard. He met Elyse's innocent gaze and clenched his jaw. "What was that about?"

"I had a nightmare. I didn't mean to shove you," Elyse explained, shrugging.

Rubbing his brows, Jayden hoisted himself back onto the bed. Noticing Jayden's effortless return to bed without using his legs, Elyse was taken aback by his ease. Locking eyes with her, Jayden couldn't shake the feeling that she was lying. "You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

"How could you think that? You left me last night. I wasn't upset. And now you are accusing me," Elyse retorted, hurt evident in her voice.

Listening to her words, Jayden's intuition whispered that Elyse was furious, and it seemed unlikely he could mend things swiftly. Determined to avoid further conversation, Elyse changed her clothes and made her way downstairs, seeking refuge from Jayden. She found Tracy amidst filming and settled into a nearby chair, biding her time.

Soon, Morgan approached with the script in hand. "Mind if I have a word?" she inquired.

Taken aback, Elyse nodded. Taking a seat, Morgan fixed her gaze on her intently. Despite not feeling uneasy under her scrutiny, Elyse found herself uncertain of how to proceed.

"What's with the intense look? Do we know each other from somewhere?" Elyse questioned, perplexed by her scrutiny.

Morgan shook her head. "No, we haven't crossed paths before. Yet it's odd. I sense a strange familiarity when I look at you, like I've seen you somewhere."

Elyse was at a loss for words. After a prolonged silence, Morgan continued slowly. “Truth is, I once lost some memories. My husband found me by the river, saved my life. He told me I’d been in a coma for a month at the hospital before waking up. So, my past is a blur.”

Extending her hand, Morgan reached out to touch Elyse’s face, her eyes brimming with tenderness. “I thought I’d live without answers, but seeing you, I feel hope of uncovering my past, discovering who I am.”

Elyse stood rooted, caught off guard by Morgan’s revelation. She studied Morgan’s face for a while, then sheepishly scratched her head. “Honestly, I don’t recognize you, and you don’t seem familiar. I’m pretty sure we’ve never met before.”

“It’s okay,” Morgan reassured, a gentle smile gracing her lips as she affectionately tousled Elyse’s hair. “Seeing you just sparks a familiar feeling. Maybe I’m just looking for a connection, any excuse to cling onto.” Entertained by her remark, Elyse whipped out her phone and added Morgan as a friend, pledging to assist her in recollecting the past.

As the two conversed, Tracy approached them. “Damn. There’s a Maybach parked outside the mall. It’s stunning.”

A passerby exclaimed, “I saw a guy in a wheelchair come out. Damn, he’s good-looking, even better than the actors.”

Elyse’s face briefly registered panic upon overhearing the conversation. Noticing Elyse’s reaction, Tracy leaned in discreetly. “Is your husband here? I only had a minor role. Is it necessary for both of you to be here?”

A grimace flickered across Elyse’s face. Recalling their exchange from the previous day, Tracy couldn’t help but speculate. “Did you two fight? So he came to find you?”

Elyse awkwardly replied, “Maybe he’s not here for me.”

“Stop deceiving yourself,” Jayden interjected, seizing her shoulders and lifting her up. “Let’s discuss at home.”

Initially, Elyse felt a twinge of guilt, but as she reflected on the events of the previous night, anger surged within her. “I’m not the one at fault here. Why should I cooperate with you?”

Wary of Jayden's commanding presence, Tracy discreetly tugged at the hem of Elyse's clothes, urging caution with her words. However, Elyse's eyes brimmed with discontent.

Amused by her reaction, Jayden tightened his grip around her. In a hushed tone, he remarked, "I've had a change of heart. We'll deal with it in the car later."

Understanding his undertones, Elyse's fragile frame trembled, her arrogance dissipating.

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Morgan watched as Elyse walked away. Noticing the man's behavior toward Elyse, she inquired, "Tracy, who is that man? Is Elyse safe with him?"

Tracy dismissed the concern with a wave of her hand. "No need to worry. That's Jayden Owen, Elyse's husband. They've just had a disagreement, but they'll make up soon."

"Jayden Owen," Morgan repeated the name, pondering it as several images surged through her mind. She envisioned a couple holding hands, walking ahead of her. They glanced back at her, said something, and then shared a smile before looking away. In another vision, the man was in a hospital bed connected to a ventilator, and the woman was beside him on the bed. Both looked very pale.

Taking a deep breath, Morgan's mental images began to swirl, and the background noise faded away. Suddenly, she couldn't hear anything. A moment later, she collapsed.

Tracy was shocked and cried out urgently, "Morgan's fainted! Someone call 911!"

They quickly arranged for Morgan to be taken to the hospital. Meanwhile, Elyse got into the car with Jayden. The driver sensed the tension and immediately set up the partition separating himself from the couple in the back. Elyse turned her head to gaze out of the window, remaining silent.

Jayden looked over at her and felt a twinge of annoyance. He inquired, "Are you upset with me?"

"No, you're overthinking it," Elyse responded curtly.

Jayden sensed her irritation and asked, "Is it about what happened last night? I didn't mean to upset you. There was a reason behind it."

Hearing this, Elyse's annoyance grew. She closed her eyes, seemingly unwilling to listen to him any further. Realizing she was truly upset, Jayden wondered why she was angry.

He was at a loss and unsure how to soothe her, so he chose to remain quiet. After closing her eyes and resting for a bit, Elyse opened her eyes, curious to see where they were, only to realize they weren't headed home.

"Where are we going now?" Elyse asked.

"To the nursing home," Jayden responded.

Hearing this, Elyse closed her eyes once more. Upon reaching the nursing home, Elyse swiftly exited the car, catching the driver off guard as he was about to open the door for her. He turned to Jayden in surprise.

Jayden remained silent and exited the car, maneuvering his wheelchair. After a moment, the driver said, "Sir, Mrs. Owen seems upset. It might be wise to coax her."

Jayden shot him a look and responded, "I'm not blind. I noticed." But he didn't understand why she was so angry. Could she possibly be jealous?

Inside the nursing home, Elyse was greeted by a nurse at the entrance. After verifying her details, she followed the nurse to that elderly woman's room. The elderly lady was neatly dressed, her silver hair combed back, her eyes behind presbyopic glasses. She was busily knitting.

As Elyse approached, she noticed the old lady was making tiny baby socks. She was confused and asked, "Who is she knitting socks for?"

The nurse shrugged. "I'm not sure. She's been knitting with wool for the past couple of days, and she's been calm. Sometimes she steps outside to enjoy the sun."

Having heard this, Elyse slowly approached the elderly woman, crouched down, and gently asked, “Ma’am, who are you knitting these little socks for?”

With a loving gaze fixed on the socks, the old lady replied with a smile, “For little Elyse. She likes them.”

Elyse was surprised. “But I’m too grown up for such tiny socks.”

The elderly lady turned to Elyse, studying her face for a moment as if recognizing her for the first time. Excitedly, she exclaimed, “Elyse! My Elyse! You’re all grown up. How have you been all these years? It must have been tough without your parents.”

As Jayden approached, he heard the part about Elyse being without her parents and narrowed his eyes, deep in thought. Unsure of what was happening, Elyse assumed the old lady was confused and reassured her, “I have my dad and mom. Don’t worry. I’m doing well.”

The elderly woman shook her head, tears welling up in her eyes. “Poor child.”

Elyse wrapped her arms around the old lady, offering comfort. Jayden entered and asked the elderly woman, “Ma’am, may I know your name?”

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Jayden addressed the elderly woman with a question. “You previously mentioned Rickey Owen and Janet Lawrence; however, I couldn’t locate them. Is there any additional information you can provide to help me narrow down my search?”

Upon hearing Jayden’s inquiry, the old lady regarded him with a vigilant gaze, clutching Elyse even tighter to her side. She exhibited profound apprehension, fearing Jayden’s intentions of separating her from Elyse. Elyse looked pained; the old lady held her too tightly.

Jayden attempted to persuade the old lady by highlighting Elyse’s longstanding sorrow. “Elyse has endured considerable sadness over the years. Although she now has parents, their treatment of her has been less than ideal. Sometimes I even doubt if Elyse truly belongs with them as their daughter.” He gently coaxed the old lady, saying, “Madam, surely you don’t wish to cause Elyse further sadness, do you?”

The old lady's initial vigilance gradually dissolved. Embracing Elyse tightly once more, she conceded, "Take her away. Those who brought her here are not good people. Her true parents are kind individuals."

Elyse found herself perplexed, convinced that the old lady's mental affliction had resurfaced. However, Jayden held a differing perspective. The old lady seemed to possess crucial information, yet her struggles with a mental illness hindered her ability to articulate it clearly.

"What's your name, Madam?" Jayden asked, probing the old lady for information since he couldn't find any clues elsewhere.

"My name..." The old lady's demeanor suddenly shifted, her gaze wandering into emptiness. "My name is..." She faltered, unable to recall it.

Realizing that the old lady couldn't remember her name, Jayden decided not to push her further. Instead, he engaged her in a different conversation to distract her. As Elyse interacted with the old lady, she eventually prepared to leave, but the old lady unexpectedly stopped her.

With a sudden burst of grandmotherly affection, she remarked, "You've grown up and can't wear little socks anymore. I'll make big socks for you. You're not a girl without anyone's care. I care about you."

Elyse was taken aback at first, but her face soon lit up with a happy smile. "Thank you. It means a lot to have someone like you who cares about me."

Observing the exchange, Jayden realized it was time to depart and escorted Elyse out of the room. Once outside, he glanced at Elyse's profile and inquired, "What are your thoughts on her words?"

Elyse furrowed her brow in contemplation. "It seems she may have been confused again. From what she said, it sounds like I had a tough life. But in reality, I've always lived with my parents. Though they may favor my younger sister, I've led a relatively normal life."

Jayden disregarded her words and redirected the conversation, asking, "Are you still upset? Are you blaming me for not pleasing you yesterday and for leaving early?"

Elyse was taken aback by Jayden's assumption. She took a moment to compose herself before responding, her tone tinged with dissatisfaction. "Why would you think I'm upset about that?"

"So, you're upset because I answered a woman's call and left?" Jayden reflected on their previous encounter with Judy and explained, "The caller yesterday was Corrie Bates. I had no choice but to leave to assist her."

Elyse scoffed. "What do you mean you had no choice?"

Despite their intimacy at the time, Jayden still left her behind.

Observing her reddened eyes, Jayden sighed. "Please don't be upset. I didn't do anything to betray you."

After a brief silence, she ventured, "You don't want to tell me the reason, do you?"

Jayden furrowed his brow, remaining silent. Disappointment flickered across her eyes. "I understand."

Jayden was puzzled. "What are you thinking?"

Elyse gazed at Jayden, her emotions mixed. That was the impression Jayden left on her; he seemed to keep her at a distance, preventing her from getting close to his heart. Despite their physical intimacy, they had never truly opened up to each other. She had hoped things might change over time. Yet she hadn't anticipated...

Jayden struggled to grasp Elyse's feelings. He had previously relied on her forgiveness, but now it seemed inadequate to appease her. It was evident that Elyse was in a foul mood.

Jayden felt a twinge of irritation and impatience. "Why are you upset? I wasn't with anyone else. I left because I had no other option."

Elyse replied, "Fine, I didn't say anything. Let's just go home. I'm feeling a bit tired."

Seeing her demeanor soften, Jayden assumed everything was fine and escorted her out of the nursing home.

Unbeknownst to them, Lanny emerged from a corner shortly after they departed, casting an unfriendly glance. Why were they at the nursing home? Could they be visiting an elderly member of the Owen family?

However, Lanny had previously searched the nursing home and found no trace of Jayden's relatives there.

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Though puzzled, Lanny remained focused on his mission to find that old lady. He had combed through nearly a dozen nursing homes in the city after learning that the old woman had been placed in one. This one happened to be the last stop on his search. If he couldn't locate her here, he had planned to extend his search to the neighboring city's nursing homes.

Yet, the nursing home proved to be quite vigilant. Avoiding suspicion, Lanny refrained from directly asking about the old woman by showing her photo. Instead, he engaged in conversations with elders in the garden, hoping to build rapport with someone who could help him gain entry. After dedicating the entire afternoon to a conversation with an elderly man, Lanny befriended him.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, as the elderly man had to head back to his room, Lanny seized the chance to enter the nursing home, pretending to accompany him. Cautious to avoid misunderstandings, Lanny discreetly navigated through the corridors, peeking through doors. Starting on the fifth floor, he worked his way down. But on the fourth floor, he encountered a nurse and two security guards blocking his path.

Feeling uneasy, Lanny avoided the nurse's gaze and politely asked, "Is there something I can assist you with, miss?"

The nurse eyed him warily and turned to the security guards behind her, declaring, "It's him, the individual caught sneaking around on the surveillance cameras. There are no records of his visits. Remove him from the premises at once."

After the nurse's final words, two hefty security guards flanked Lanny, escorting him out. "It's all a big mixup. I just needed the restroom. I have no intention of stirring up trouble," desperately sought excuses to cloak his predicament.

Yet the guards remained unmoved by his plea, briskly ejecting him from the nursing home and sealing the gates. Out in the open, Lanny paced, unable to go inside again. "Damn it. Just a few floors left to search." Frustration gnawed at Lanny as he trudged home.

Stepping into the living room, he caught sight of Glenda and Mabel leisurely arranging their mall purchases on the table and sofa. "Mom, you have to see this dress. It's absolutely stunning." With a dress draped over her arm, Mabel gestured animatedly.

"Gorgeous. And check out this necklace. It's the perfect match for your dress. Isn't it stunning?" Glenda unveiled a necklace from its snug box.

With delight, Mabel accepted it. "Mom, when did you get this for me? I had no clue. It's just perfect."

Approaching, Lanny spotted a receipt on the floor.

Observing the necklace's hefty price tag exceeding a hundred grand, he seized Glenda by the hair. "You've been partying on my dime while I've been slaving away. How dare you splurge on a necklace worth over a hundred grand?"

Glenda shrieked, anguish etched on her face. "Are you out of your mind? Let go."

Terrified, Mabel abandoned the dress and rushed to Lanny, frantically patting him. "Dad, what's gotten into you? Let go of Mom."

Lanny's rage simmered, fueled by Glenda and Mabel's lavish spending. In a burst of fury, he released Glenda forcefully, crumpling the receipt and hurling it at her.

Mabel defended her mother and said angrily, "Dad, you've gone too far. What did Mom do to you? How could you do this to her? We're your flesh and blood. Why turn against us like this?"

Mabel's defiance stoked Lanny's fury. Her disobedience had escalated from losing her innocence to being held captive by Theo for days. He lashed out, striking Mabel across the face. "Who do you think you are? You squander our wealth and offer nothing in return. You're even worse than your sister."

Enraged by the unjust blow, Mabel seethed, teeth clenched. "I know you blame me for spending. I won't sell myself off like my sister for your gain."

"How dare you speak to your father like that!" Glenda, taken aback, tried to silence Mabel.

Pushing Glenda aside, Mabel spat out her resentment. "I'll make it big in entertainment. I'll find my agent and land a job." With a sneer, Mabel boasted, "And when I'm rich, you'll apologize for hitting me today."

Unfazed, Lanny remained resolute. Even if Mabel struck it rich, she'd still answer to him. "I hope so," Lanny fixed Glenda with a steely glare. "Come to the room with."

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Lanny strode towards his bedroom as soon as he finished speaking. Reluctantly, Glenda found herself compelled to follow him.

"Mom, don't go after him. Dad will hurt you," Mabel warned, her hand tenderly covering her reddened cheek, her eyes brimming with resentment.

Suppressing her own emotions, Glenda forced a smile. "It's alright, dear. Your father must be facing difficulties at work. He doesn't usually resort to violence."

Feeling a pang of sympathy for Mabel, Glenda gently stroked her cheek before instructing the butler to fetch an ice pack. With that, she trailed after Lanny into the bedroom, closing the door behind her.

Glenda's frustration surfaced as she questioned Lanny crossly, "Why did you want me to come in here with you?"

Standing by the window, Lanny took a deep breath before speaking. "I've been researching nursing homes for the past few days, except for Sunshine Nursing Home."

Recalling Lanny's frequent departures and late returns over the past few days, Glenda finally pieced together his motive: he had been searching for that old woman. "Could she be in Sunshine Nursing Home?" asked Glenda.

Lanny's expression furrowed with worry. "I'm not certain. I managed to reach the fifth floor before the security guards escorted me out. They barred me from the visitors list."

Anxiety gnawed at Glenda as she contemplated their next move. "What should we do then? She may be indeed in Sunshine Nursing Home."

Turning to face her, Lanny proposed a plan. "I may not be able to enter, but you can. You need to find a plausible excuse to gain entry. Meanwhile, I'll explore nursing homes in other cities. We must locate that woman no matter what."

Glenda hesitated, her fear palpable as she took a step back. "You want me to go? How am I supposed to search for her? I've never done anything like this before."

Observing Glenda's hesitation, Lanny couldn't help but snort mockingly. "You're trying to distance yourself from this, aren't you? Do you believe you'll remain unscathed if the truth comes out?"

Glenda's denial came without hesitation. "I would never think that way."

Lanny seized her wrist firmly, gesturing towards her jade bracelet with an unsettling demeanor. "If you refuse to assist me, you risk losing everything: your clothes, possessions, jewelry, and even Mabel's financial security. Remember where that money comes from."

Glenda trembled under Lanny's intense gaze, understanding that she couldn't reveal her true intentions. If she wanted to maintain her current peaceful and lavish life, she had to stand by Lanny's side and aid him.

"I don't care when you go to Sunshine Nursing Home, but you must go. The sooner we locate her, the better for us," Lanny insisted, releasing his grip on Glenda's wrist.

Mabel is still unmarried. If you want her to have a better future, you need to find that woman quickly. Once the threat is eliminated, the truth will remain hidden,” Lanny continued, emphasizing the urgency of the situation.

Glenda nodded, fully comprehending the gravity of the situation. “By the way, I saw Elyse and Jayden there today,” Lanny added casually. “You might want to inquire about their presence while you’re there,” he said calmly, making his way to the closet to remove his suit jacket.

His words sparked worry in Glenda’s expression. She quickly approached him and whispered urgently, “Do you think those two might know something?”

“It’s impossible,” Lanny denied without hesitation. “Elyse has never had any contact with those people. She’s always been loyal to us.”

Despite Lanny’s reassurances, Glenda harbored doubts about Elyse. She couldn’t shake the feeling that Elyse sometimes treated them coldly. After all, she wasn’t their biological daughter and might not hold the same level of loyalty toward them.

“When do you intend to arrange Mabel’s marriage?” Glenda asked, her thoughts drifting to her daughter’s future. “Elyse married Jayden, who is disabled. However, his family holds significant influence. We can’t allow Mabel to marry into a family inferior to the Owens, can we?”

Glenda was eager to find a suitable husband for Mabel, one who not only loved her deeply but also came from a family even better than the Owen family. “Our daughter deserves nothing less than an exceptional man,” she stated emphatically.

Lanny’s frustration boiled over whenever the topic of Mabel’s marriage arose. “Shut up!” he exclaimed. “I set up a blind date for her back then. Not only did she lose her virginity, but she also ruined our relations with the Ward family. That blind date has called off the meeting.”

Glenda’s concern for Mabel’s marital prospects was palpable as she anxiously asked, “What should we do now? Our daughter may not be a virgin anymore, but does that mean she’s ineligible to marry into a respectable family?”

“You’ve indulged her too much. She’s become uncontrollable,” Lanny replied angrily, expressing his frustration at the situation.

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Mabel watched Glenda enter the bedroom with Lanny. After catching sight of the shopping bags on the couch, she felt a wave of depression wash over her. The butler cautiously handed her an ice pack, but Mabel, in a fit of anger, smashed it to the floor and snapped, “Just leave me alone.”

The butler, sensing her mood, obeyed silently, stepping aside. Mabel’s expression darkened. She was fed up with Lanny. Sure, he’d given her and her mother some money, but he’d become insufferably arrogant. Mabel was convinced she could make her own money.

Grabbing her phone, she marched into her bedroom. Once inside, she scrolled through her contacts and dialed her agent’s number, someone she hadn’t contacted in a while.

The phone rang three times before her agent impatiently answered, “What’s up?”

Mabel, despite her own frustration, knew she had to butter up her agent if she wanted to get back into the entertainment business and earn some money. “Aylin, people must have forgotten about my scandal by now, right? Can I come back to work in entertainment?”

Worried that Aylin Watts could refuse, she added humbly, “I’m willing to start small, even with minor gigs. I’ll do anything, just give me a chance.”

Aylin’s response was unexpected. After a long pause, she softened her tone. “Mabel, you know how it is. Your reputation now, it’s not good.”

Mabel’s heart sank. “But how? I still have fans, don’t I?”

Aylin sneered, “Fans? Do you mean those million followers on Twitter? We paid for those. They’re all fake. You’ve got less than a hundred real fans now.”

Mabel couldn’t believe it. She collapsed onto the floor. “Less than a hundred? That can’t be true.”

Aylin, tired of the conversation already, was ready to end the call, but Mabel stopped her. “Wait, Aylin. You can’t just ditch me. I need to make money. Tell me what I should do to get a job. I’m willing to start over.”

Aylin didn't want to talk to her. Mabel was the worst artist she'd ever worked with. She'd become famous for her own songs, but she wasn't a great singer. On variety shows, she lacked humility and humor. And her acting? There was no point in even getting started.

In a nutshell, Mabel's performance in the entertainment business left a lot to be desired. She wasn't ultimately blacklisted, but her reputation had taken a hit.

"If Mabel is given a position, our firm would take on the associated risks," Aylin continued. "If you really want to come back, you need to start writing songs again. That's how you got famous in the first place."

And with that, Aylin hung up. Mabel, hearing the suggestion, finally calmed down. She was ready to write new songs, but the truth was the songs she'd become famous for weren't even hers. They were Elyse's. And Elyse had moved out. How could Mabel steal her works again?

Returning home, Elyse saw a message from Tracy saying Morgan had fainted from hypoglycemia and been taken to the hospital. Frowning, she quickly replied, "Is she okay?"

Tracy responded almost immediately, "Yeah, it's nothing serious. After some glucose, Morgan went back to the film set. That one's a hard worker."

Relieved that Morgan was fine, Elyse put her phone away. When she turned, she found Jayden staring at her. Confused, she reached up to touch her face. "Is there something on my face?"

"I'm wondering when you'll stop giving me the cold shoulder," Jayden said.

"I'm not mad at you anymore," Elyse sighed.

Jayden didn't buy it. "How do I know that?"

Ignoring him, Elyse turned and headed back to her bedroom.

"Wait! Come to the study with me. We need to clear the air," Jayden insisted.

It was too obvious how Elyse felt. Her face would always be the first to express her unhappiness. It was obvious to Jayden that she was still upset with him.

But he couldn't understand why she could be unhappy for so long. It had been a long time since Judy had disturbed her in this way.

"I'm not going anywhere with you. We can talk here," Elyse, clearly not in the mood, crossed her arms.

Driscoll, grinning at other staff in the living room, took a quick look at Jayden's expressionless face. They all walked away in silence.

Elyse said unhappily, "They are all out. Now that we're alone, you can talk."

Seeing that the other servants had left the room, Jayden said, "Corrie Bates isn't a threat to you. I'll never be with her."

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He said in a resigned tone, "I know it's hard for you to believe, but trust me, I'm not interested in Corrie." Elyse asked calmly, "You are not interested in her? What's your relationship with her then? What transpired between the two of you in the past? When do you intend on explaining everything to me?"

Jayden was wearied by her questions. He asked, "Why do you bug with too many questions? You are my wife; I'll always protect and take good care of you. Is that not what matters?"

Deep inhalation couldn't suppress the emotions that surged in Elyse's heart. She thumped the back of the sofa so hard as she tried to vent her anger. "Jayden, do you really consider me your wife?" she asked resignedly.

He gave a big nod. "Indeed, you are my wife." He was certain the rest of his life would be spent with her as his wife.

“You regard me as your wife, yet you keep me in the dark. You make it difficult for me to connect with you. You make me feel so distant even when we’re together,” his calm eyes saddened her all the more. Her legs grew weak, and she squatted.

She asked as she held her knees, “Jayden, you have secrets you are hiding from me. You don’t consider me your wife as you claim. If you did, you wouldn’t have built walls around yourself.”

For a second, Jayden was flustered. Did she know his secrets? Then he rebutted himself. Elyse wouldn’t have asked him the way she did if she knew about his secrets. Her sixth sense was right; he did have secrets he had kept hidden from her. Did she sense something was wrong?

His emotions towards her were strong, but he was unwilling to disclose his secrets now. With a flat tone, he replied, “I’m not hiding anything from you. You are the best thing that happened to me, and I’m lucky to have you as my wife.”

Elyse would have been moved by those words in the past, but certainly not in the present time. She was very indifferent to his words. She thought she’d been given the runaround. In her view, Jayden ignored her uneasiness. It would be her fault if she made a mountain out of this molehill.

Tears welled up in her eyes as Elyse looked at him. He didn’t love her so much as to let her into his life.

At that point, she understood why Jayden was regarded as cruel by his employees and business associates. He was not only cruel to his enemies and competitors but to her as well. She kept on crying, and that made Jayden frown. He pulled her closer to himself and comforted her softly. “Shed tears no more. This will not happen again, I promise.”

Elyse had something to say but felt it was pointless saying it. He didn’t know what she wanted from him as his wife. He only did and gave what he felt was good for her.

Jayden couldn’t bear it as he tried to be patient and to comfort her, yet she kept crying. “Elyse, am I too tolerant? Don’t push your luck. Who do you think you are?”

Elyse tried to hold back her tears as a tear dropped on Jayden’s pants. She was frustrated. “Who do I think I am? For heaven’s sake, you just said I’m your wife. Does it make sense to question my identity?”

Jayden was left dumbfounded. He had recklessly made that statement. He shouldn't have said those words to her. He was remorseful, so he gently patted her back.

It took Elyse quite some time to calm down. She straightened up and looked at Jayden with sadness in her eyes.

Jayden absorbed her gaze in silence. He gently ran his rough fingers down her hair when their eyes met occasionally. "Are you alright now? You've calmed down," Jayden asked hesitantly.

Elyse's heart flooded with mixed emotions. She had earlier contemplated various reasons why Jayden acted the way he did, considering the family he came from and the influence of his parents on him.

She had to be realistic. She found a plausible justification for his caution. She couldn't believe she had avoided facing reality the whole time.

"Yes, I'm fine now," she replied to him.

Jayden was relieved. "Your temper worsened lately. You fight me over trivial matters at any slightest provocation. Is this how we will live in the future, ignoring each other for a long time when we argue?"

Elyse retorted, "Why would I stay angry at you for a long time if you don't provoke me?"

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Jayden laughed bitterly. "So it is still my fault."

Elyse pinched him at the waist, her voice tense. "If it's not your fault, whose is it then?"

"Ouch," Jayden gasped, gently removing her hand and wrapping his arms around her. "Alright, it's all my fault, okay?"

Her expression softened, though somewhat reluctantly, and she allowed Jayden to embrace her.

Outside the door, the servants peeked in silently, observing the couple. The sight of Jayden and Elyse making up again brought a collective sigh of relief.

“Recently, they have been arguing a lot. It’s been quite unsettling.”

“Exactly. I’m always worried that one of their fights might end their relationship. It would be terrible if they split up.”

“But they’ve been at odds so much lately. I can’t help but wonder if there’s some unresolved misunderstanding between them,” Driscoll overheard the conversation and felt a pang of sadness. He had seen Jayden and Elyse’s relationship grow from the start. Yet he understood better than anyone the main issue they were facing now.

A servant noticed Driscoll looking distressed and asked with concern, “Are you worried about them? Don’t overthink it. Mrs. Owen is incredibly kind, and Mr. Owen is dependable. They’re bound to stay together forever.”

Driscoll gave the servants a wry smile. “Their love isn’t that deep. How can you be so sure? Anyway, get back to your work and try not to spy on them.”

After dismissing the gossiping servants, Driscoll pushed the door open and entered. At that moment, Elyse had returned to her room to change while Jayden had retreated to the study.

Driscoll stood at the study door hesitating to knock, but eventually, he decided against it. He reassured himself that as long as Jayden and Elyse kept reconciling, their love would endure.

The next day, Elyse resumed her usual routine at the orchestra. Her isolation had cut down many unnecessary social engagements. Apart from chatting with Darren, Freddy, and a few others, she spent most of her time practicing the violin alone, undistracted.

On the contrary, Vicky often made numerous errors during practice. It was either hitting the wrong notes or speeding up unnecessarily.

Noticing this, the conductor halted the session and approached Vicky with a serious tone. “What’s going on with you today? You’re usually not one to make such careless errors.”

Vicky lowered her head, silent, not responding to the question.

“Do you really think you can outdo everyone just because you won a competition? Take a good look at your team. Five of your rivals are right here,” the conductor said with sincere urgency. “If you don’t step up your game, you’ll lose your lead to one of them sooner or later.”

These words struck a chord in Vicky. Overwhelmed, she burst out, “That’s not going to happen. I won’t let them take the top spot. It’s mine to keep, always.”

After her outburst, Vicky stormed out of the rehearsal room, her expression stormy. The other members and the conductor exchanged bewildered looks.

The conductor massaged her temples and then turned to the murmuring group. “Continue practicing on your own for now. We’ll regroup shortly.”

Once she finished speaking, she turned and left, presumably to find Vicky.

As soon as the conductor left, everyone seized the opportunity to relax.

Grace approached Elyse, her curiosity evident. “What do you think’s going on with Vicky? She made four errors today. That never used to happen.”

Elyse bit her lip, her voice tinged with uncertainty. “Maybe she’s just off today. I know I’d mess up too if I wasn’t feeling myself.”

Speaking softly, Grace countered, “But you and she aren’t the same. She’s always been on top of her game. I’ve never seen her falter.”

Darren joined them, his tone knowing. “It just shows that she’s under stress, and it’s messing with her performance.”

Elyse looked puzzled. “Vicky’s stressed because of me?”

Darren nodded. “Absolutely. Your presence is probably weighing on her. If she didn’t resent you, why would she encourage others to ignore you?”

Elyse hadn’t realized this before. Once she did, the isolation seemed to make more sense.

Hearing Darren’s analysis, Grace stroked her chin, surprised. “So Vicky can get scared too? I overestimated her. Thinking about it now, how could anyone always come out on top?”

After a moment of reflection, Elyse added, “Maybe Vicky’s never learned to handle defeat. Without losing, she doesn’t know how to cope with a real challenge.”

Chapter 219:

Darren’s upbeat demeanor was evident as he remarked, “Exactly, Elyse, seize the opportunity when it arises.”

Perplexed, Elyse inquired, “What opportunity?”

Surprised by her lack of awareness, Darren explained, “Don’t you know? If the concertmaster falters during practice and fails the subsequent assessment, a substitute will step in.”

Grace chimed in, offering further clarification. “Moreover, the runner-up in the concertmaster selection serves as a backup.”

Elyse’s realization dawned. “So if Vicky doesn’t perform well and fails the assessment, I could step in as the concertmaster.”

Grace and Darren affirmed her understanding.

Hearing the tour regulations, Elyse was eager to try her luck. Observing her excitement, Darren grinned. “No wonder Vicky is feeling the heat. You’re a force to be reckoned with.”

Raising her violin, Elyse retorted with a smile, “I’m just here to play the violin.”

Half an hour later, Vicky returned with the conductor. Though reluctantly, Vicky joined the rehearsal. Amidst the crowd, Bart's mocking remark caught Elyse's ear. "I thought she wouldn't come back."

Choosing not to engage, Elyse mused that if she were in Vicky's shoes, she wouldn't pass up this opportunity. As Abram's protégé, Vicky was permitted to display frustration during rehearsal. However, abandoning the tour would displease Abram.

Despite her unruliness, Vicky wasn't foolish. Upon entering the rehearsal room, Vicky positioned herself as the concertmaster, locking eyes with Elyse. Though tension simmered between them, the conductor intervened, urging them to focus on practice.

Feeling the tension, the conductor stepped in with a reprimand. Subsequently, both Elyse and Vicky composed themselves and proceeded to practice calmly. As the session progressed, Vicky remained error-free, delivering her best performance and concluding the practice successfully.

Afterward, Elyse packed up and headed home. Upon stepping outside, she noticed the driver waiting by the car, wearing an embarrassed expression.

Curious, Elyse approached him. "What's going on?" she asked in a hushed tone.

The driver delivered the message with a hint of awkwardness. "Mr. Owen said that his mother wants to have dinner together today. He instructed you to head directly to the Black Swan Restaurant."

Elyse inquired, "Should I go now? And where's Jayden?"

The driver replied honestly, "He went out in the afternoon and seemed to have some business to attend to. He might be running late."

A tinge of disappointment flickered across Elyse's face as she settled into the car. Then something struck her. "Why did his mother invite us to dinner today?"

The driver explained, "Today is Bryce Owen's birthday."

Surprised, Elyse realized it was Bryce's birthday, but she hadn't prepared any gifts.

“Let’s head to the shopping mall first. I can’t arrive empty-handed.”

Unlocking her phone, Elyse searched for a suitable gift.

The driver interjected, “Mr. Owen made it clear. You don’t need to bring any birthday gifts. He’s taken care of everything.”

“Did he buy gifts for Bryce?” Taken aback, Elyse set aside her phone, deciding not to push the matter.

Despite the tension between Bryce and Jayden, Jayden understood his brother better than anyone else. It would be more appropriate for Jayden to prepare the gift for Bryce.

Upon reaching the restaurant, Elyse entered and was escorted to the private room by the receptionist.

Inside, Tess and Bryce were already present, engaged in conversation, seemingly oblivious to Elyse’s arrival.

Nevertheless, Elyse greeted them courteously. They continued to ignore her even when she addressed Bryce directly.

Elyse touched her nose, realizing that Tess harbored no affection for her. Consequently, she decided there was no point in feigning warmth towards Tess.

She sat down, requested a cup of coffee from the waiter, and quietly began eating some fruit.

A few minutes later, Tess observed Elyse’s silence and rolled her eyes in displeasure. “You uncultured woman! I can’t believe you just walked in and sat down to eat, completely ignoring us. I really don’t understand why Jayden likes you.”

Elyse was speechless at Tess’s harsh words. She had made an effort to greet them, but they had shown no interest in reciprocating.

“Mom, honestly, it’s deeply embarrassing for me to think of Elyse as my sister-in-law. I’m even ashamed to be seen in public with her, fearing someone might recognize me as her brother-in-law,” Bryce declared, his voice dripping with disdain.

Elyse couldn’t suppress a laugh at Bryce’s exaggerated disdain.

Chapter 220:

“You’re laughing at me!” Bryce’s realization dawned, and he slammed his fist onto the table in fury. Tess, equally incensed, snapped, “Elyse Lloyd, you’ve crossed the line! Bryce is your brother-in-law. How could you make fun of him like that?”

Elyse’s smile faded as she offered a heartfelt apology. “I’m sorry, Bryce. It was wrong of me to laugh, especially today on your birthday. Can you forgive me?”

Bryce’s mood lifted with her apology. He thought to himself that Elyse, coming from a modest background, ought to show him respect. Tess, too, seemed relieved, as if Jayden had also made amends with her following Elyse’s apology.

“How’s your work been going?” Tess inquired about Elyse’s career, her tone firm like that of a strict elder.

“Everything’s going smoothly,” Elyse replied truthfully.

As Tess began peeling a tangerine, she questioned, “I heard you’re about to embark on a national concert tour. Are you leading as the concertmaster?”

Elyse shook her head, regret in her voice. “I’m sorry to disappoint you. I’m not the concertmaster.”

This response irked Tess, who threw the tangerine peel at Elyse, exasperated. “Useless! How did you not secure the position? I thought at least in music, you had some talent that you wouldn’t bring shame to our Owen family. Turns out you’re just mediocre.”

Bryce smirked and taunted, “You couldn’t even become the concertmaster. What makes you think you’re worthy of being a part of our family?”

Brushing off the tangerine peel, Elyse stifled her frustration. “Since when did you care about my career? Just the other day, you criticized me for pursuing a pointless job that tarnished the Owen family’s reputation, didn’t you?”

Tess’s anger intensified. “How dare you talk back! I’m going to make sure Jayden divorces you!”

Standing up, Elyse poured a glass of tea and handed it to Tess with a slow, deliberate gesture. “There’s no need for threats. The future of my marriage to Jayden is for us to decide, not just by your word. Please have some tea and try to relax.”

This provoked Tess further, igniting a fury within her. She silently accused Elyse of lacking manners.

As Elyse was about to walk away after serving the tea, Bryce surreptitiously stuck out his leg to trip her, hoping to put her in her place.

Elyse, however, noticed his maneuver in time and skillfully avoided his leg, instead stepping firmly on it with considerable force.

Bryce yelped in pain. “You did that on purpose, you witch!” Bryce shoved Elyse aside, cradling his throbbing foot as he wailed pathetically.

Elyse blinked, feigning innocence. “Oh, Bryce, this is all a misunderstanding. I had no idea your leg was there. I certainly didn’t see it.”

Tess caressed Bryce’s cheek sympathetically. “And you claim it was an accident? How, then, is my poor boy in tears?”

Standing off to the side, Elyse expressed her dismay. “I truly didn’t mean to step on Bryce’s foot.”

Suddenly, the door to the private room swung open. As Jayden maneuvered his wheelchair inside, he caught the tail end of Elyse’s explanation. Their eyes met.

Upon seeing him, Elyse's expression grew more sorrowful. She approached, took his hand with exaggerated tenderness, and gave it a playful shake.

Having made amends the day before, Jayden was particularly attuned to her feelings. In a hushed tone, he inquired, "What's wrong? Did someone upset you?"

Without hesitation, Elyse responded, "Your mother said she'd make you divorce me. I didn't want to, but her words really hurt me."

Tess, overhearing this, felt her anger surge, her face clouding over. "So, Elyse Lloyd, you think you've got your protector now? How dare you dismiss me like that!"

Elyse's voice was calm and soft. "I've never dismissed you. You'll always be respected as my mother-in-law."

Jayden barely suppressed a chuckle, pulling Elyse slightly to signal her to ease up on the act. He then sat down at the table. He poured Elyse some tea, set it before her, and said lightly, "Mom, I'd appreciate it if you didn't treat my wife harshly in my absence. Unlike you guys, she holds a special place in my heart."

Tess slammed her hand on the table, her anger peaking. "So, to you, your own family ranks below an outsider? She's bewitched you, hasn't she?"

Jayden retorted, "Mom, have you forgotten our family principles? If you need a reminder, remember how you treated me after my accident, when you thought I was useless."

He continued in a slow, deliberate tone, "I know who truly cares for me."