

## Bound love 241

Chapter 241:

That night, Elyse struggled to find sleep. She tossed and turned before finally succumbing to exhaustion. When morning came, Elyse rose from her bed with a heavy heart, her eyes still clouded with sadness. Soon after, she was greeted by a sight that puzzled her: nearly twenty maids stood in formation, flanking her on either side.

After a brief moment of confusion, Elyse asked, "What's going on?"

"Mrs. Owen, your birthday party is scheduled for today. We are here to assist you in preparing," the lead maid announced, motioning for the others to gather around Elyse.

It suddenly dawned on Elyse that Jayden had promised her a birthday celebration to make it up to her. However, their argument from the previous night had dampened her enthusiasm for such festivities.

"I think we should hold off on the preparations. I need to have a word with Jayden," she said.

The lead maid nodded understandingly. "He is currently out. I'll notify you as soon as he returns. Please take a bath first."

With a clenched jaw, Elyse wondered where Jayden had gone.

Meanwhile, Jayden had left home early, heading straight to Owen Group's headquarters. Inside the chairman's office, Enzo stood by the French window, gazing out at the city skyline. Brook and Jayden were behind Enzo, enveloped in a heavy silence that no one dared to break.

After what felt like an eternity, Enzo finally spoke, his voice heavy with disappointment. "Bayzee Group has refused to sign the contract with us. Why was I not made aware of this sooner?"

Jayden bowed his head, his silence hanging heavily in the tense air. Beads of cold sweat trickled down Brook's forehead, a testament to his nerves. Feeling Enzo's piercing gaze upon him, Brook lowered his head even further.

“Bayzee Group has decided to collaborate with another company whose parcel of land has seen an unexpected surge in value. Regrettably, the land we acquired from the Foster family has depreciated even before our investment.”

Enzo turned his gaze to Jayden and asked, “What do you think we should do, Jayden?”

Without a word, Jayden handed over a meticulously prepared file to Enzo. “I have thoroughly reviewed the land purchase contract. Apart from this particular land, the terms heavily favor the Foster family, leaving us little room for maneuver. It’s a tough situation to reverse.”

Enzo asked, “Can’t you devise a solution to salvage this situation?”

“I have a proposition. Unless Bayzee Group severs ties with the Ellis family, our company stands to incur substantial losses,” Jayden stated bluntly.

At the mention of potential losses, Brook dared not lift his gaze.

When he assumed control of the partnership, he vowed to protect the company from any financial losses. Yet reality had veered far from his expectations. With clenched teeth, Brook silently urged himself to remain composed. He had to safeguard his position within the company.

Supporting himself on a crutch, Enzo approached Jayden with a penetrating stare. “In the past, you never allowed the Owen Group to suffer financial setbacks. What’s going on now?”

Unfazed by Enzo’s scrutiny, Jayden responded calmly, “As you rightly noted, that was in the past. When I was in charge, I ensured the company never found itself in such dire straits. But now, I’m no longer in management.”

Jayden’s words sent a shiver down Brook’s spine. He instinctively clenched his fists. Jayden met Enzo’s gaze calmly, absorbing the scrutiny without flinching.

Enzo’s demeanor softened, a slight chuckle escaping his lips. “Given Brook’s mistake, what do you suggest I do?” he asked.

Jayden didn't immediately respond. His gaze drifted momentarily to Brook, who met his eyes with a hint of apprehension. "According to the company's protocol, I lack the authority to determine Brook's punishment," Jayden responded impeccably.

Brook let out a breath he hadn't realized he had been holding. Still, his heart raced as he anticipated the senior executive meeting later, where his fate would be decided. Brook acknowledged his error had resulted in significant losses. While not catastrophic, it tarnished his reputation internally. If he wanted to take over the Owen Group, he knew he couldn't afford any more slip-ups. Winning over the support of the employees hinged on his flawless performance going forward.

After a brief pause, Enzo directed his attention to Brook. "Put a hold on any support for the Foster family for now. Their recent transactions have yielded negligible returns for us while disproportionately benefiting them."

Brook gave a solemn nod. "Understood, Grandpa."

"Grandpa, I'm home!" A woman's voice rang out, drawing everyone's attention.

Dressed in sleek black sportswear, Debora Owen, Brook's sister, removed her cap and approached Enzo with a warm smile. "I missed you so much, Grandpa." Adopting a cute demeanor, Debora approached Enzo.

Upon seeing her, Enzo's expression softened, a rare smile gracing his lips. He asked, "Have you just landed?"

"Yep. I was planning to head home for a change of clothes, but upon hearing about the company situation, I decided to come straight from the airport." Jokingly admonishing Brook, Debora said, "What's the deal, Brook? How could you mess up like this? Are you ready to face the repercussions?"

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With his eyes widening in surprise, Brook blurted out, "Why're you back? Weren't you studying abroad?"

"I've graduated. I just thought I should come home early and contribute to the company," Debora sighed, frustration evident on her face. "But as soon as I got back, I heard about your slip-up at

work. Did I come back just to clean up after you? You're my big brother, can't you set a better example?"

With just a few words, Debora had brought Brook crashing down. Brook was so nervous he didn't even dare to look at Enzo. What if his grandpa was disappointed in him? Would he even have a leg to stand on when it came to taking over the Owen Group?

Jayden didn't say anything. He had known Debora would come back ahead of time. Ambitious as she was, she didn't hide her hunger for power at all. Given the chance, she'd cut down her enemies without a second thought. And now her biggest adversary was Brook, and there was no way she'd let this opportunity slip through her fingers.

Refusing to be outdone, Brook gritted his teeth and said, "The chairman of the Bayzee Group is a mystery. I can't figure him out, but the loss is on me. I'll do everything I can to make up for it."

Debora's smile faded. "It better be on you."

Then she turned to Jayden. Perhaps it was because she hadn't seen Jayden in so long that she looked at him more closely. She glanced at his legs and said, "Jayden, when I was studying abroad, I consulted some doctors. They said there might be a chance for you to stand again, but they need to examine you to be sure." Then tentatively she added, "What do you think? If you're up for it, I can arrange everything."

Jayden patted his leg and sighed. "Truth be told, I've seen my fair share of foreign doctors. They've all sung the same tune. I'm stuck in this wheelchair for good. But I appreciate your concern."

Debora nodded, holding her tongue. She approached Enzo, her eyes alight with purpose. "Grandpa, I'm back. I need a role in the company to learn the ropes and gain experience."

Brook's nerves were on edge again. He knew Debora had her sights set on his spot.

"Your brother's made a hash of things. Until he proves otherwise, you'll step into his shoes," Enzo declared with a grin.

Debora's eyes sparkled. Enzo's decision was exactly what she wanted to hear. "Thank you, Grandpa. I'll make the Owen Group soar to new heights," she vowed. A smug smirk played on her lips.

But Brook's expression was anything but joyful.

Before Debora's return, he'd been coasting. He had time to infiltrate the company with his allies and secure loyalty. But now, he was probably facing the greatest crisis of his career.

Enzo saw their reactions plain as day. He played dumb, engaging Jayden in small talk. "I hear it's Elyse's birthday party today."

At the mention of this, both Debora and Brook turned to Jayden.

Jayden nodded. "That's right. It's Elyse's first birthday celebration with me. I have to make it one for the books."

Enzo nodded sagely. "Absolutely. I've got a little something for her. My assistant will drop it off later. I won't make it to the party. These old bones of mine are creaking." He thumped his thigh for emphasis.

"Thanks, Grandpa," Jayden replied.

"Now you can leave and get back to the grind," Enzo dismissed them with a wave of his hand.

Jayden left first. Debora had hoped to strut her stuff in front of Enzo, but now she had to bide her time. With a sour expression, Brook followed suit.

Once out of the office, Debora hastened to Jayden's side. She'd heard about Elyse from her folks but had yet to meet her.

"Is it your wife's birthday today?" she inquired eagerly.

Jayden nodded. "I didn't expect you back so soon, so I didn't send an invite your way."

"I can't make it today, but I'll prepare a little gift for her. I'll drop by later to see your missus," Debora replied.

Jayden remained silent, looking at Brook. "And you, Brook? You coming?"

Brook was stewing over his demotion. He was tired of pretending now that Enzo was not there. Through gritted teeth, he said, "I'll be there. And I'll bring a friend with me."

## Chapter 243:

After Brook finished speaking, he suddenly added, "You know, this friend I'm taking with me. You can catch up with her." Jayden sensed his ulterior motive but didn't take it seriously. "Looking forward to it," he said.

Debora prodded Brook to clear out his things so she could use his office. With a grim expression, Brook complied and left with her. Jayden stayed behind, heading for the elevator. Thoughts of Elyse occupied his mind as he checked his phone for messages. Finding none from Elyse, he couldn't help but purse his lips. Was she still upset?

As the elevator doors parted, a man with a laptop bag awaited. He addressed Jayden respectfully, "Mr. Owen, I'm here to pick you up." Exiting the elevator, Jayden continued to stare at his phone, musing, "Tobin, did you send the gift as planned?"

Tobin Carman responded, "It's en route. Mrs. Owen will receive it before the party begins." Jayden hoped the gift would bring her joy.

"There's a meeting you need to attend, sir. We have 40 minutes before it starts. We should head there promptly," Tobin said, checking his watch.

Exiting the Owen Group building, Jayden entered the car and murmured softly, "We must arrive on time for the birthday party." Tobin noted Jayden's genuine concern for his wife.

Elyse, clad in a white bathrobe, sat before the dressing mirror, her gaze fixed on her phone, lost in thought.

"If you're itching to send him a message, just do it. No need to stare at your phone like that," Tracy remarked, leaning against the door frame with her arms crossed.

“Who said anything about messaging him?” Elyse tucked away her phone.

“Stop fibbing. It’s written all over your face that you miss him,” Tracy observed.

Observing the tension between Elyse and Jayden, Tracy inquired, “What’s going on? Did you two have a major spat?”

“Nope,” Elyse replied, lips pursed. She wished for a heated argument with Jayden, but he couldn’t even grasp what she was upset about.

After pondering for a moment, Elyse sighed, “We can’t start a fight.”

Tracy blinked in confusion. Unaware of the details of their disagreement, she could only offer solace to Elyse. “He’s throwing a birthday bash for you today. Even if it’s not your actual birthday, he cares about you. Cheer up. You can’t dazzle everyone looking like that.”

Upon hearing this, Elyse gave her cheeks a pat and determinedly declared, “You’re right. I should be happier. After all, I was appointed concertmaster yesterday. I need to dazzle everyone at the party.”

As evening fell, the party commenced. Seated in the dressing room, Elyse glanced at Driscoll through the mirror, inquiring, “Where’s Jayden? Hasn’t he returned yet?”

Driscoll felt a cold sweat bead on his nose. “He hasn’t shown up yet.”

Elyse furrowed her brow. She had spent the entire day preparing herself and had received a black pearl crown from him, perfectly complementing her dress. But there hadn’t been a single message from him. “What could he possibly be doing? Are you keeping something from me, Driscoll?” she prodded.

As Driscoll prepared to explain that Jayden had gone to see Peyton, Elyse’s voice lowered. “Don’t tell me Jayden went to see Peyton. Peyton called me an hour ago, promising to be here on time.”

Driscoll fell silent. Hadn’t Jayden and Peyton coordinated their stories? Why concoct another excuse?

Judging by Driscoll's expression, Elyse's heart sank. She had suspected Jayden was attending to his own business affairs, but no one had informed her.

Driscoll hesitated to disclose the truth to her. He adhered to Jayden's directive; if Jayden wished to keep her uninformed, Driscoll couldn't defy him.

Jayden truly seemed to exclude her from his affairs.

Drawing a deep breath, Elyse pressed on. "Can you reach Jayden? He's the party's host. What if he doesn't arrive?"

Driscoll shared her concern; he too felt the weight of anxiety. He sympathized with Elyse's predicament. "What was Jayden thinking? Why prioritize work on such a significant occasion?"

"I'll attempt to reach him," he assured. Then he walked out of the dressing room with a somber expression.

Left alone in the room, Elyse gazed at her reflection in the mirror, lost in contemplation. Her attire was opulent; the black pearl crown alone was valued at a staggering one hundred million. She had never envisioned herself adorned in such splendor. Yet she appeared unfamiliar to herself in the mirror, a sense of estrangement creeping over her.

As the dressing room door creaked open, anticipation rose. Was Jayden returning?

Chapter 244:

Balancing a plate of dessert, Tracy beckoned to Elyse, saying, "Look what I've brought for you. Have a taste. You barely ate at lunch, all for this dress."

Seeing Tracy, Elyse's disappointment etched deeper onto her face.

Sensing Elyse's sour mood, Tracy hurried over, asking, "What's wrong? Why the long face?"



Elyse's fists clenched, a feeling of anxiety forming in her chest. "Jayden hasn't come back yet. Do you think he's ditching me just like Theo did before?"

She remembered that similar things had happened before. Once, on Elyse's birthday, Theo had promised to host a celebration for her. That day, she had dressed up gorgeously in a pink gown. But Theo never showed up, even after the party ended. Elyse couldn't reach him at all. Embarrassed and under the pitying gazes of her friends, Elyse had fled. The next day, Elyse managed to contact Theo. She asked why he hadn't come. He mentioned he had to handle something and then simply forgot. However, the truth was that Theo had gone to the theater with Kaelyn. From then on, Elyse never expected Theo to celebrate her birthday again. It would have ended badly regardless.

Elyse feared a repeat of such a scenario. She was concerned that Jayden might abandon her at her birthday celebration, subjecting her to everyone's pity on her special day.

"Tracy, what should I do now? I can't reach Jayden. Am I being abandoned again?" Elyse grasped Tracy's hand, looking lost.

Tracy quickly set down her plate and embraced Elyse tightly, reassuring her. "No, Jayden is not like Theo. He wouldn't do that. Don't worry too much."

After thinking for a while, Tracy tried to make up an excuse. "Maybe something unexpected happened, like a car issue."

Elyse's face turned paler. "Goodness, no, I didn't mean that. I'll check with Driscoll. Don't worry." Tracy then smacked her lips regretfully and headed towards the door.

Watching Tracy leave, Elyse felt messed up. She sat anxiously in the chair. Suddenly, the dressing room door swung open.

Thinking it was Tracy returning, Elyse asked gloomily, "Did you find out anything?"

The person who entered remained silent.

Growing suspicious, Elyse turned around and found Theo in a dark blue suit looking at her with a complicated expression.

With a stern expression, Elyse got up and questioned cautiously, “What are you doing here?”

No one had invited Theo. Elyse wondered how he knew and dared to show up uninvited.

Theo said, “If I decide to show up, I’ll find a way.”

Elyse just stared at him, full of wariness and discomfort.

Meeting her cold gaze, Theo fought back his own emotions and asked, “I remember that today isn’t your birthday, right? Does Jayden care so little about you that he doesn’t even know when it is?”

Elyse retorted, “What’s it to you? You’re just an outsider. Stay out of it.”

Theo persisted, “If you feel mistreated, you can always come back to me.”

Elyse scoffed, “Come back to you? Why would I do that?”

Theo proposed, “If you divorce Jayden, I’d consider getting back together, even marrying you after we reunite.”

Elyse looked at Theo amusedly for a moment, then asked, “I heard you were getting along well with your blind date. What would happen to her if we got back together and you married me?”

Theo assumed Elyse was considering his offer. He believed that she still had feelings for him, assuming she had married Jayden only because she was hurt by him.

“If you marry me, it will just be you and me,” Theo said. “I’ll cut ties with my blind date.”

Elyse thought Theo was ridiculous. Did Theo really think he was charming enough to say those things and sway her?

Theo continued, “If you agree to marry me, you’ll always be my wife, and I’ll give you whatever you want.”

Elyse responded, “Jayden has already done what you’re offering. Impress me with something different.”

Theo was at a loss. He thought hard but couldn’t come up with anything that would appeal to Elyse.

Elyse smiled and teased, “What’s the matter? Run out of ideas?”

Theo frowned and said unhappily, “What condition can make you divorce Jayden? Tell me, and I’ll do it.”

Elyse asked with a smile, “Aren’t you my ex-boyfriend? Don’t you know me?”

Theo replied unhappily, “I’m not a mind reader. How am I supposed to know what you want?”

Elyse laughed without saying anything. This man barely knew her but was eager to marry her.

Theo, irritated by her laughter, asked, “What’s so funny?”

Elyse answered, “I find it amusing that you’re the president of a big company, yet you know so little.”

Chapter 245:

Theo realized Elyse was teasing him. He clenched his teeth and snapped, “Do you have any idea what happens if you push me too far? This is not your place. If you want to be arrogant, go somewhere else. Otherwise, I’ll have security throw you out,” Elyse replied coldly, “You’ve really changed since marrying Jayden Owen.” Anger surged in Theo. In the past, she’d been gentle and soft with him. Even when she was furious, she’d just cry. Now, she was bold enough to talk sarcastically.

“Theo, I don’t care about you anymore. Why do you keep showing up in front of me? Don’t you realize how ridiculous you look?” Elyse sneered. “Who put those words in your mouth? Jayden, I bet,” she added.

Seeing Theo grow more paranoid, a crazy idea suddenly crossed Elyse's mind. She blinked and asked cautiously, "Are you actually in love with me?" Theo was taken aback. He instinctively took a few steps back and stared at her. He wanted to call her conceited. How could he be in love with her? He just thought she was okay and had gotten used to having her around, so he figured he could let her come back to him.

However, Theo found himself unable to utter those words. There was a voice inside urging him to make a move. He had to tell her the truth. He had to tell her how he felt. Theo clenched his fists and wore a grim expression. "How could I ever fall in love with you?" he retorted. Elyse sneered. It made sense. No matter how wild he could have been, he couldn't possibly love her.

"Theo, where are you?" a woman's voice called out, searching for him. The voice was familiar to Elyse. She remembered the woman from the parking garage of the mall they visited recently.

"Quick, get going. Your date's searching for you," she told Theo, urging him to go.

Theo glanced at her without saying anything. Then he opened the door and left. As soon as he was gone, Elyse leaned on the back of a chair, her body weak. She felt a bit lightheaded. Reaching for the dessert on the table, she took a bite. Her thoughts were consumed with Jayden. "Why hasn't he returned yet?" she wondered.

"Mrs. Owen, it's time," Driscoll said awkwardly as he opened the door.

Elyse asked, setting down her dessert, "Where's Jayden?"

"I haven't been able to reach him. His phone is off," Driscoll replied. "I've asked Dr. Ellis for help. Please don't worry."

Elyse shook her head. "I'm okay. Nothing can go wrong today. This party was organized by Jayden. He had invited many influential figures. Even if he isn't there, I, as his wife, need to keep the party going."

When Elyse appeared in her evening gown and pearl crown, she captured everyone's attention. "Is that Mr. Owen's wife? Didn't they say he didn't love her? That dress isn't cheap."

"Those are just rumors. Just like when someone spread gossip about Jayden mistreating his wife, it seems like jealousy is at play here for having married such a beautiful spouse."

“But why isn’t Jayden here? Where is he?”

“Yes, I didn’t see him either. The party has started.”

Peyton and a few other guys were calling Jayden from a corner of the celebration hall. “Peyton’s frustration showed. ‘Jayden’s lost it. Why is he busy elsewhere during his wife’s birthday party? His phone’s off.’”

Despite Jayden’s absence, the party continued. Driscoll stepped on stage on Jayden’s behalf and shared his best wishes, which drew applause from the crowd. But when it was time for dancing, Jayden’s absence was noticeable. According to the original plan, Jayden would be seated in a wheelchair while Elyse danced around him. If they skipped this part, it would become evident that Jayden wasn’t present. The party was for Elyse’s birthday, so if Jayden wasn’t there, did that mean Elyse wasn’t important to him? Driscoll found himself in a bind.

However, Elyse remained incredibly calm. She had anticipated this, just like when Theo abandoned her at their wedding, and now Jayden had deserted her at her birthday party. As the murmurs around her grew louder with everyone speculating about whether Jayden loved her, at this moment, someone holding a glass of wine approached and smiled, “Mrs. Owen, it’s been a while. Why haven’t I seen your husband around?”

Chapter 246:

Elyse didn’t recognize the man, yet he seemed familiar. Seeing her puzzled expression, he introduced himself. “I’m Egan Brooks. Pleased to meet you.”

Egan Brooks, brother of Xander Brooks and Hiram Brooks. It suddenly hit Elyse that she hadn’t encountered anyone from the Brooks family since Xander’s wedding.

Noticing Elyse’s silence, Egan raised his voice deliberately, saying, “I’ve heard that Jayden loves you very much. So where is he today? Does this mean he doesn’t really love you?”

At that moment, Kieran stepped forward, swirling her wine glass and said playfully, “That’s not necessarily the case. Everyone knows Jayden has rarely appeared at social events since his accident. He even threw this birthday party especially for his wife, which clearly shows his affection.”

Egan said, “Oh, then where is Jayden? Why isn’t he here?”

Observing the exchange, Elyse sensed the hostility from the two. She clenched her teeth. It seemed like these two were intent on making a spectacle of her in front of the guests, especially with Jayden absent. Their aim was to turn both Jayden and her into a laughingstock.

Taking a deep breath, Elyse said calmly, “Today is my birthday party. I’m the one celebrating, so why are you so focused on Jayden?”

Amidst the crowd, Freda held a glass of champagne in one hand and watched Elyse with keen interest. Since their blind date, Freda had investigated Theo’s past relationships and discovered that the woman she had seen in the parking lot was Theo’s ex, Elyse. She was taken aback to discover that Elyse had married Jayden on the day she was originally meant to wed Theo.

Freda observed Elyse thoughtfully and then slowly asked Theo, “Do you think Mr. and Mrs. Owen truly love each other?”

Theo didn’t answer. Looking up, Freda noticed that Theo was frowning, his expression filled with concern, and he was staring straight at Elyse.

Feeling uneasy in her heart, Freda raised her voice, saying, “I’m asking you.”

Snapping back to reality, Theo acted as if he hadn’t heard anything and inquired, “Sorry, what was that?”

Freda, trying to keep her irritation in check, asked patiently, “I was asking if you think Mr. and Mrs. Owen genuinely love each other.”

“I don’t know,” Theo answered simply.

Freda could clearly feel Theo’s displeasure and slight anger. What was making him angry? Was it because she brought up Elyse and Jayden? Why would that bother him? Could it be that he still loved his ex?

Freda's hand, clutching her glass, trembled subtly. She masked her emotions and downed her champagne in one swift motion. Moments earlier, Freda had been mocking Elyse, but now she found herself wishing for Elyse to embarrass herself so the whole city could ridicule her.

"How can that be? I hold you in high regard, Mrs. Owen. I'm just very curious about your husband since he's seldom seen these days," Kieran explained.

Egan chimed in, "Yes, it's well-known that you two get along well. I merely wanted to see you together to offer my blessings."

A cold smile crossed Elyse's lips. She was aware of their ulterior motives. Scanning the room, her eyes landed on Theo amidst the crowd. He was looking intently at her as if he wanted to say something. But then she noticed Freda standing next to him. She recalled Theo's words in the lounge, and now he was there standing next to Freda.

Elyse turned her gaze away in disgust, vowing to never again invite either of them. Observing her gaze upon him, Theo felt a sense of anticipation. He hoped she would reach out to him for assistance, willing to help her. Even if she couldn't voice her need, a mere look would be enough. If she just showed him her vulnerability and need, he was eager to step in.

Theo waited hopefully, but Elyse avoided his gaze with clear disgust this time around. Did she despise him that deeply? Would she rather face her troubles alone than ask for his help?

Theo was uncertain of his feelings, only experiencing a deep sense of bitterness. Why couldn't she see his good intentions?

Chapter 247:

Egan and Kieran were rather relentless in their demeanor towards Elyse. Peyton, unable to bear the situation any longer, stepped forward to her defense. "This celebration is for Elyse's birthday. Why persist in seeking Jayden?"

Sensing the need to take charge, Elyse halted Peyton's intervention with a poised gesture. She recognized that resolving the issue lay squarely on her shoulders; failure would only make her a laughingstock, as the two men undoubtedly anticipated.

Summoning the regal strength within her, Elyse projected an air of authority. “I extend courtesy to you if you are here to offer genuine well wishes. However, if your presence is solely to seek Jayden in the guise of celebrating my birthday, I request your patience in the lounge. I shall arrange a meeting with him at an appropriate time.”

Her gaze swept across the assembly with unwavering resolve. “For those keen on meeting Jayden, kindly accompany these gentlemen.”

Following a brief pause, a guest spoke up. “I’m here solely to extend my birthday wishes, Mrs. Owen, with no ulterior motive.”

Others in attendance echoed similar sentiments. As more guests voiced their intentions, Kieran and Egan, adamant about meeting Jayden, found themselves isolated.

Recognizing the inopportune moment to cause further disruption, Kieran relented. “In Jayden’s absence, what more can be said? Mrs. Owen, happy birthday.”

Though Elyse inwardly bristled at Kieran’s sarcasm, she refrained from retaliation. Confronting Kieran would only serve to underscore Jayden’s absence from her birthday celebration.

Hence, Elyse endured the moment with stoic composure, refraining from engaging with him. Observing the scene, Peyton’s indignation mounted, questioning Jayden’s whereabouts. Elyse had been subjected to ridicule, yet Jayden remained conspicuously absent.

With resignation that Jayden would not return to assist her in hosting, Elyse composed herself and resumed greeting the guests. She remained vigilant, deflecting inquiries about Jayden with grace and diplomacy, thereby safeguarding their dignity and pride.

As the evening progressed, Elyse courteously entertained numerous guests, discreetly navigating around inquiries regarding Jayden’s absence. Though lacking the brazenness of Kieran and Egan, these guests harbored comparable motives.

In the absence of any overt revelations, Elyse chose to maintain the facade of normalcy, adeptly shielding both her dignity and Jayden’s.



At last, Elyse found a moment of reprieve, retreating to a secluded corner. However, her solitude was short-lived as Egan unexpectedly approached her with two glasses of wine, gracefully extending one to Elyse, who accepted it with poise.

“What can I do for you?” Elyse inquired.

Egan’s gaze danced over Elyse, admiring her curves and charming waist. After a delicate sip of wine, he asked, “I must confess my curiosity. Such elegance as yours begs the question, why Jayden?”

Observing the glint of anticipation in his eyes, Elyse gracefully maintained her composure, subtly withdrawing from his proximity. “Perhaps it was destiny,” she replied calmly.

Egan’s gaze traced the contours of Elyse’s figure from head to toe, like a painter admiring the delicate lines of a masterpiece.

He couldn’t deny that Elyse possessed a captivating, graceful silhouette. His eyes blazed with desire. “Don’t you think it’s a waste for you to be Jayden’s wife? You’re worthy of a finer man.”

Elyse remained resolute. “Jayden is the epitome of goodness in my eyes.”

“That’s simply because you’ve yet to encounter a man of finer caliber,” Egan remarked, his face a picture of lust. His hand went out to Elyse.

A tremor of fear swept through Elyse as she instinctively retreated, finding herself cornered. The chill of the wall at her back sent a shiver down her spine.

Egan, sensing her fear, found a perverse thrill in her vulnerability. For Egan, the shadow of past failures loomed large—his futile attempts to best Jayden in business and personal vendettas. Furthermore, his younger brothers also harbored resentment towards Jayden. In Egan’s heart, a fierce desire burned to finally conquer his rival. At last, he thought he had a chance. And if it meant winning Elyse over, Jayden’s wife, he would gladly seize the opportunity to strike at Jayden’s pride.

Egan’s laughter echoed wildly. “Why not spend a night with me? I’ll show you the essence of a true gentleman.”

But before his hand could reach Elyse, a sudden forceful yank sent Egan crashing to the floor, his cries of pain piercing the air.

Elyse, shocked and trembling with fear, lifted her gaze to meet Jayden's fierce expression. "Jay... Jayden," she stammered, her voice betraying her terror.

Seeing Elyse's distress, Jayden's heart softened with pity. "Come to me," Jayden beckoned gently.

Slowly shaking off her stupor, Elyse gathered her resolve, lifted the folds of her dress, and hastened to Jayden's side. Jayden, enfolding her in his protective embrace, fixed Egan with a chilling glare.

Struggling to rise, Egan, nursing his wounded pride, leaned heavily against the wall. Upon laying eyes on Jayden, Egan's lips curved into a disingenuous smile. "Mr. Owen, it seems even with your physical limitations, your fiery temper remains intact."

"How dare you touch my wife! I'll make you pay for your insolence," Jayden growled through clenched teeth, his tone dripping with menace.

But Egan, feigning innocence, refused to acknowledge his wrongdoing. "What have I done to deserve this? You're the one hurting me, aren't you?" he countered, his words laced with deception.

Jayden emitted a disdainful snort, his expression remaining stoic. "If you seek vengeance, confront me directly," he commanded, his voice resolute.

And with that veiled threat hanging in the air, Jayden departed with Elyse by his side. Egan watched their retreating forms, his features contorting into a growing mask of fury.

Chapter 248:

As Elyse walked, she gradually composed herself. She asked Jayden calmly, "Where have you been? Why are you back so late?"

Jayden reassured her by gently patting her hand, saying, "I faced a bit of trouble, but it's all sorted now. I'm here to stand by you, so you don't need to worry about anything now."

Elyse didn't say anything. She received no real explanation, and Jayden seemed to dismiss the issue too casually. He didn't understand how vulnerable she had felt waiting for him.

"Jayden, where were you? Why didn't you inform me?" Elyse could no longer hide her disappointment, feeling defeated.

Jayden tried to soothe her again, "Don't worry about it. I haven't betrayed your trust. Something unexpected came up. I'll make it up to you later."

Elyse inquired, "What unexpected thing happened to you?"

Clearly irritated by her persistent questioning, Jayden did not mask his annoyance and responded, "I've already mentioned that it's not important. Why do you keep bringing it up?"

Elyse stopped in her tracks. "I'm your wife, aren't I? Shouldn't I be aware of what's going on with you?"

Maintaining a serious expression, Jayden said word by word, "Elyse, you're going too far."

She was shocked and stared at him in disbelief. Jayden clenched his jaw, seeming about to speak. However, she looked away and continued walking in silence.

Observing this, Jayden let out a quiet sigh and trailed behind her at a slow pace.

When they returned to the banquet hall, the guests engaged Jayden in conversation while Elyse was left out. Noticing Elyse's disappointment, Tracy approached, draped an arm over her shoulder, and murmured, "What's the matter? Aren't you glad Jayden is back?"

"Why should I be? I'd prefer it if he hadn't come back at all," Elyse responded sharply.

Tracy picked up on the tension in her voice and realized they had fought, though she hadn't expected it to be so serious.

"Come on, it's your birthday party. Try to enjoy it. Don't look so upset," Tracy did her best to cheer up Elyse.

Just then, Brook Owen approached. He came over to Elyse with a gift, accompanied by Corrie.

“Happy birthday, Elyse,” he said, presenting her with the gift.

Thank you.” After accepting the gift, a servant approached to take it from her. “I was caught up with something important today. That’s why I’m late.” As he explained, Brooks’ gaze involuntarily drifted towards Corrie. Meanwhile, Corrie looked at Elyse from head to toe, her expression thoughtful.

Elyse, sensing something unusual about Brook today, looked at him intently and asked with curiosity, “Why did you bring Miss Bates along? Do you know each other?”

Brook covered his mouth with his palm and coughed. He deliberately put on airs and said, “She’s my date today. She knew you were celebrating your birthday, so she wanted to join and asked me to bring her along.”

Corrie nodded with a bright smile. “I didn’t know it was your birthday. I just wanted to wish you well.”

Brook gave Corrie an arrogant look. Elyse was puzzled by his behavior. As he tilted his head back, he seemed as vain and self-absorbed as a peacock.

“Brook, you’re here!” From a distance, Jayden noticed Brook and approached slowly in his wheelchair. His gaze lingered on Corrie momentarily before shifting away. “I came for your wife’s birthday celebration.”

Upon seeing Jayden, Brook’s eyes sparkled. He wrapped his arm around Corrie and said confidently, “Allow me to introduce my date, Corrie Bates.” He paused, then added, “Today marks our first date. We both felt a good connection and are open to seeing where this leads.”

Corrie glanced at Jayden, perhaps expecting some reaction. But Jayden’s expression remained neutral as he teased, “So you’ve decided to finally settle down and get a girlfriend?”

Hearing Jayden’s words, Brook responded with a slight grin. “I was half expecting you to object, considering Miss Bates was your ex-girlfriend. I don’t want any hard feelings as your brother.”

Jayden responded casually, “It’s fine, don’t worry about it.”

Corrie felt a surge of anger at his indifference. Jayden was now disabled, but how could he still dismiss her so casually? Corrie and Jayden had shared a relationship built on mutual interests lasting for two years. How could he show no feelings for her? Were those two years with her less significant than his recent months with Elyse? How could that be the case? Did Jayden’s affection for Elyse run that deep?

Frustrated and feeling insulted, Corrie felt utterly degraded, as if even her pride and dignity had been trampled upon.

Chapter 249:

Corrie had noticed that Elyse was wearing a dress in the latest fashion, topped with a particularly stunning pearl crown that was clearly priceless. While Corrie and Jayden were together, his role was purely supportive, helping her stabilize the company. However, she was aware that she hadn’t achieved these benefits on her own. Reflecting on this made her even more reluctant.

“Alright, that’s a relief,” she said, her voice tinged with unease. “I was concerned you might be angry that I’m dating your ex-girlfriend.” Brook’s smile was warm and sincere. How much did he like Corrie? He held no real affection for her; quite the opposite. His distaste for her grew, particularly under the belief that she was once romantically involved with Jayden.

Complicating matters, Debora Owen had usurped his position within the company, and with a critical meeting looming—a meeting that threatened to castigate him—he needed to secure his influence. His solution was a tactical maneuver: a blind date with a Bates girl, a move designed to solidify his standing and appease company stakeholders.

The arrangement with Corrie was purely strategic, a temporary alliance until he could regain control. Once in power, he planned to sever ties with her. In the meantime, Brook tolerated Corrie’s company, partly to irritate Jayden, an added bonus. Yet Jayden appeared indifferent to his ex-girlfriend’s new involvement. His emotions were only stirred when he witnessed Elyse facing adversity.

To Brook, Corrie was merely a means to an end, her value limited to the resources and connections she could bring. Yet he was willing to feign interest if it served his purposes.

As music filled the banquet hall, a parade of elegant couples made their way to the dance floor. Amid the swirl of festivities, Elyse watched dispassionately. However, her friend Tracy leaned in, her voice low. "Are you going to ask Jayden to dance?"

Caught off guard, Elyse's gaze instinctively found Jayden across the room, their eyes locking in an unintended moment of connection. Contemplating his disability, Elyse responded awkwardly, "I don't think it would be appropriate."

Tracy's anxiety was palpable. Earlier, as the banquet began without Jayden, whispers circulated suggesting Elyse was unimportant, merely the companion of a cripple as some disrespectfully referred to Jayden. In Tracy's view, such comments were ignorant. Unbeknownst to the gossipers, Elyse and Jayden shared a deep, abiding love.

Tracy persisted anxiously. "Why not? You and Jayden are a perfect match, and it's your birthday party. Shouldn't Jayden be the one to dance with you?"

Brook, in a particularly good mood, chimed in with encouragement. "It's Elyse's birthday. Come on, Jayden, show her some respect, won't you?"

Jayden remained silent, his feelings conflicted. He wanted to dance with Elyse, especially after returning and hearing from Driscoll about the unsettling events of the banquet that had upset her.

Despite their recent argument, Jayden faced her with a serious expression. "Do you want to dance with me?"

At that moment, Elyse was struggling to contain her anger. She didn't want to cause a scene or embarrass Jayden in front of the assembled guests. She extended her hand towards him in response. Together, they made their way to the dance floor hand in hand.

Seated in his wheelchair, Jayden wasn't adept at dancing, yet they moved slowly together, drawing the attention of those around them.

"I've never seen Jayden dance before. This is a first."

“Now I understand. He must truly love Elyse, going to such lengths to dance with her despite his limitations.”

“But if he really loved her, why was he late? I don’t think he cares as much as we think.”

Surrounding murmurs continued, but they did not sway Elyse or Jayden.

“Do you think I embarrass you?” Jayden asked, concern lining his words.

Elyse’s response was firm and devoid of any doubt. “If I would be easily embarrassed, I wouldn’t marry you.” Her voice carried a calm, unemotional resolve, cutting through the noise of the crowd.

After a few seconds of heavy silence, Jayden acknowledged, “You are still angry.”

“Why can’t I be angry?” Elyse retorted. She had brought up her feelings to Jayden multiple times, but it seemed he never truly grasped what she meant.

Trying to contain her frustration, she said unhappily, “Anyway, it doesn’t matter what I say. You don’t need to listen to me. I don’t want to know about your affairs either.”

“You really don’t want to know?” Jayden asked tentatively, a note of uncertainty in his voice.

Chapter 250:

Feeling a bit self-conscious, Elyse turned and found herself staring directly into Corrie’s piercing and jealous gaze. Corrie didn’t mask her jealousy; instead, she shot a sly grin that said it all. Elyse felt uneasy, a sense of discomfort settling in.

At that moment, a guest approached them beaming and remarked, “Mr. Owen, I must say, I envy the love shared between you and your wife.” Another guest chimed in, “They say Mr. Owen is aloof, but it seems he showers all his affection on his wife.”

The guests all sang praises of Elyse and Jayden’s love. Suddenly, Corrie called out Jayden’s name, capturing everyone’s attention. When Jayden looked at her, he saw the sorrow in her eyes. As a tear slipped down her cheek, she fainted right in front of Jayden.

The unexpected turn of events shocked the crowd, leading to gasps and directing everyone's gaze toward them. "Corrie Bates!" Jayden cried out, startled, as she fainted. Unlike his Elyse, Corrie didn't respond. In that moment, Elyse felt a profound disinterest in anything to do with him.

Suddenly, Jayden pulled her into his arms and kissed her, catching everyone by surprise. Their stunned faces mirrored their shock. "Whoa!" The crowd gasped, marveling at the display of affection. It was clear how deeply Jayden and Elyse loved each other.

Elyse hadn't anticipated such a bold gesture from Jayden, especially not here amidst the influential crowd. Undoubtedly, Jayden was making a statement. By kissing Elyse, he was publicly declaring her as his wife and expressing his deep affection for her, all while disregarding the opinions of others.

After the kiss, Jayden released her, but she remained dazed. Holding her hand, he led her away from the dance floor as the music continued to play.

Watching Jayden and Elyse, Brook smiled and commented, "You two are really deep in love." Despite his usual indifference, he anxiously reached out to assist Corrie. "Corrie Bates! What's she doing here? Isn't she Jayden's ex?"

"Yes, that's her. Could she be so upset that she fainted when she saw Jayden happy?"

"It appears she still has deep feelings for him. I thought maybe they had moved on."

Despite the subdued conversation, a few words reached Elyse's ears. They suggested that Corrie fainted because she couldn't bear witnessing Jayden with another woman. This seemed to validate Corrie's deep feelings for Jayden, feelings that unfortunately were not reciprocated. The words stung Elyse.

In many people's eyes, Corrie and Jayden were meant for each other, making Elyse wonder about her place. Was she just an obstacle between them? Next to her, Jayden appeared deeply concerned for Corrie.

Elyse had a sudden realization. Corrie's fainting seemed orchestrated, especially considering the suggestive expression she had observed on Corrie's face just moments before. Snapping out of her thoughts, Elyse quickly stopped Jayden and whispered, "Corrie is fine. Don't get too worked up."



Jayden's face twisted into a frown as he scolded, "But she fainted." His tone suggested that Elyse had been inconsiderate, revealing his disappointment. Elyse froze. She could discern that Corrie had clearly feigned fainting, yet Jayden scolded her in front of everyone.

Upon hearing about the fainting, Peyton swiftly approached as a doctor. After examining Corrie, Peyton couldn't determine the cause with just a brief inspection. With concern, Jayden asked, "How is Corrie? Is she okay?"

Peyton responded, "I'm not sure. We need to get her to the hospital." Corrie was taken to the hospital, and Jayden went along.

Elyse felt a sense of unease and quickly followed, grabbing Jayden's hand. She pleaded, "Jayden, today is my birthday party. Can you stay or at least wait until after the party? Driscoll and Peyton will be there. With so many people around, Corrie will be fine."

Jayden pulled his hand away, looking bewildered. "Why are you acting so cold-hearted? You used to be understanding and wouldn't overreact."

Elyse felt a pang of hurt and asked, her voice strained, "Overreact, Jayden? Is this how you see me?"

Worried about Corrie's condition, Jayden quickly replied, "Corrie fainted at the party. I can't leave her alone. You stay home. We'll talk later." Without another glance, he hurried off.

In that moment, Elyse felt a chasm opening between them. Despite their marriage, she realized how little she knew about Jayden. His past, personality, thoughts, dreams, and ambitions were a mystery to her.

Tracy, concerned for Elyse, followed her closely. Seeing Elyse standing still, Tracy's concern grew. Understanding how deeply Elyse was affected, Tracy approached her cautiously. "Are you alright? I don't think Jayden..." Tracy tried to offer comfort, but Elyse interrupted, "I don't understand Jayden. Maybe I'll never get to know him." Elyse lamented her pessimism, leaving Tracy unsure how to console her. All Tracy could do was embrace Elyse warmly, providing a small bit of comfort.