

## Bound love 821

Chapter 821:

Elyse approached Theo and carefully placed her violin in its case. She lifted it with ease.

Theo extended his hand, intending to help her with the case, but she stepped aside.

His offer hung awkwardly in the air. "I just wanted to help," he said, the awkwardness palpable.

Elyse paused, then responded with a polite reserve, "I appreciate it, but I'm used to handling things on my own. The violin isn't heavy."

Theo was reminded then that during the three years they were together, he had never once carried her things. Yet, he had carried a backpack for a flirty junior, a designer handbag for a brief affair, and even delivered cakes and coffee to Kaelyn on set, always eager to lighten their burdens.

As he reflected on his past behavior toward Elyse, he recognized a troubling pattern. Despite her genuine affection, he had kept his distance, donning a mask of indifference.

He pondered this deeply, realizing that perhaps he had believed no one could genuinely care for him without wanting something in return. This belief stemmed from his experiences in an environment rife with ulterior motives, where everyone seemed to seek a piece of his family's fortune.

Back then, Theo had convinced himself that Elyse was no different, that she was just another opportunist. So he guarded himself, waiting for her true colors to show, expecting to uncover a facade of greed and deceit. But that revelation never came. Instead, the news of her impending marriage to Jayden reached him, sending him into a state of unexpected panic and anger.

Why did he react so strongly? Was it because Elyse had proven to be just like everyone else, insincere and untrustworthy? He had believed it was right to push her away.

Yet, over time, he recognized a painful truth—no one had ever loved him as genuinely and unconditionally as Elyse had during those three years. Now, as he stood beside her, realizing her indifference to their past, he felt a profound sense of loss.

Elyse's voice broke through his thoughts. "Let's go back. It's past midnight; our date is over."

He checked his watch; it was indeed past midnight. He nodded, and they started walking back in silence.

As they walked on, the silence stretched uncomfortably between them until Theo attempted to break it. "Your violin performance earlier—it took me back. The very first time I saw you, you were playing just like that."

Elyse, reminded of the memory, offered a soft smile and nodded. "Yes, I remember that day well. The school had organized an event, and I had signed up despite feeling completely unprepared for the stage. I was so nervous about not being good enough that I would practice in secret."

"You were mesmerizing," Theo admitted, his voice carrying a warmth that touched the cooler evening air. "I was captivated from the first note and found myself following the sound just to see who was playing with such passion."

A shadow of discomfort momentarily crossed his face as he reflected on those days. "It's funny; I was the one who approached you first, wasn't I?"

Elyse's brow furrowed in mild confusion at his sudden introspection. "What are you getting at?"

"Nothing," Theo replied, his smile twisting into a wry, self-deprecating curve. "I'm just realizing now how arrogant I was back then. How foolishly I behaved."

Chapter 822:

In that moment, he understood with painful clarity that he had never truly deserved the unreserved love Elyse had always offered him.

As Theo walked, a snowflake landed on his left eye. The sudden cold sent shivers through him. As he reached up to brush it off, he noticed his fingers were moist.

He gazed at his fingers, tears forming in his eyes, and whispered, “I was so harsh with you before. Why did you stay with me for three years?”

Elyse glanced upward as the snow began to fall heavier and slowly said, “Because I liked you. I chose to stay with you no matter what.”

Back then, Elyse felt small and desperate for affection, crushed under the weight of Lanny and Glenda’s cold treatment. She couldn’t recognize her own value, wandering through each day in a haze.

But Theo arrived like a ray of sunshine, brightening her dark world and breathing new life into her desolate days.

Elyse watched the snowflakes dance in the breeze and smiled. “Honestly, I’m so grateful to you. You entered my life when I needed rescue and brightened my darker days.”

“Is that so? I was your knight in shining armor, wasn’t I?” Theo said, his heart twinging with pain.

He knew about Elyse’s past struggles, and it led him to wonder if she saw him as just a way to escape her troubles.

This idea made him feel like slapping himself. Even if Elyse had leaned on him to deal with her dreadful family members, why couldn’t he just be okay with it?

Watching Jayden effortlessly deal with Elyse’s family and shield her from further pain, he couldn’t help but think that Elyse must be falling deeply for Jayden by now.

Theo thought he could have been the one who put an end to all her troubles.

But why did he let the opinions of others bother him so much? Didn't he understand her better than anyone else?

Each time these thoughts crossed his mind, Theo felt a deep pang in his heart.

Elyse gave a soft nod and said, "Thanks for being my boyfriend back then. You really did look out for me for those three years."

Theo felt a sting in his nose and shook his head, disagreeing. "No, I was a terrible boyfriend. I should have done more. I didn't treat you right."

Elyse laughed lightly. "You did well enough. After we broke up, sure, I was upset and I really resented you. But looking back, life was actually pretty good while we were together."

Theo clenched his teeth, holding back tears, his voice shaking as he said, "I could have been better to you."

Elyse stopped and turned to face Theo. "Don't focus so much on what went wrong. Remember the good times instead."

Theo's smile was tinged with sadness. He couldn't recall any truly good moments with Elyse.

Because the qualities Elyse valued in him were ones she mistakenly believed were good. In truth, they were mere excuses for his actions, and he had made many mistakes behind her back, too shameful for him to admit.

Chapter 823:

Elyse crouched to meet the downcast eyes of Theo and said softly, "Don't be sad. You were my first boyfriend. Thinking about it now, I don't feel shortchanged. Besides, so many girls admire you."

Theo responded with a hint of petulance, “I just wish you could be one of them.”

Elyse said with a touch of resignation, “Move on. You can’t let three years in a relationship halt your progress, can you?”

Theo stayed quiet, knowing that nothing he said now would make a difference.

Elyse had moved on. She wasn’t anchored to the past.

Theo wanted to move forward too, but it seemed beyond him. Unlike Elyse, who had poured her whole heart into their relationship, he had given very little, always putting himself first.

Almost a year after their breakup, he still found himself stuck in the past.

He said with a wry smile, “Getting stuck and not moving on is just the price for letting you down.”

Elyse rubbed her forehead, unsure of how to console him any longer.

After a brief pause, she said, “I’ll head back alone. You don’t need to walk me. You should also go back to the hotel and rest.”

Theo wanted to hold onto Elyse, but he knew he had lost that right. All he could do was watch her walk away, feeling like a forgotten teddy bear abandoned by its owner.

The snow intensified, blanketing Theo’s face, where the flakes clung before melting away.

Slowly, his face bore the traces of melted snow, forming tiny streams that cascaded down his cheeks.

“Elyse, I can’t move on. I need you. Please, come back to me.” Theo remained, emitting soft, sorrowful cries. “If only you hadn’t married Jayden. I know I could make you happy now. You wouldn’t have to endure so much.”

Theo's sobs echoed through the silent, snow-covered alley, his grief consuming him entirely. From the shadows, a woman in a black coat slowly emerged, her presence like a wraith materializing from the darkness.

The snow crunched softly beneath her delicate steps, and in the dim light, she moved with the grace of a specter.

She stopped in front of Theo, her gaze lingering on his tear-streaked face. But Theo, lost in his sorrow, didn't notice her at first. His tears flowed freely, blurring his vision, as the weight of his despair kept his head bowed.

It wasn't until the tears began to subside that he realized someone was standing before him. Assuming it was a concerned passerby, Theo lifted his head. But before he could fully take in the figure in front of him, a searing pain tore through his abdomen.

His eyes widened in shock, his breath caught in his throat as the agony coursed through him. Through the haze of pain and tears, he finally focused on the face before him.

"You... You're..." he stammered, the realization crashing down on him like a wave.

The woman tilted her head, her face lifting to reveal a sweet, familiar smile. Her red lips parted slightly as she spoke, her voice like silk laced with venom. "Have you forgotten me, your beloved Kaelyn?"

Chapter 824:

"Why are you here?" Theo's sorrow evaporated, replaced by a storm of hatred and suspicion.

Kaelyn's smile widened, a twisted amusement flickering in her eyes as she watched the emotions play across his face.

"You and Elyse have been pouring your hearts out for a while now," she mused, her tone mocking. "Did she agree to get back with you? I guess not, or you wouldn't be out here, crying like a lost child."

She sighed, a feigned sadness dripping from her words as she continued, “You know, Theo, when you were with me, you were so perfect. The perfect boyfriend. Everyone envied me. But then you left me for Elyse. Do you have any idea how unreasonable you were with her?”

Kaelyn’s voice was like a dagger, each word cutting deep into Theo’s already wounded heart. “You probably don’t know, so let me enlighten you. With Elyse, you became someone else entirely. A spoiled child, selfish and self-centered. But at the same time, you were so effortlessly genuine, so brutally honest.”

Kaelyn paused, her smile widening as she tilted her head playfully. “So, here’s the real question. Did you enjoy being with me more, or was it Elyse you truly craved?”

Theo’s chest heaved, his breath ragged, eyes red with a deep-seated loathing as he glared at her, his silence a refusal to play her twisted game.

“You don’t know?” she continued, her voice dripping with mock sympathy. “Then let me spell it out for you.” Her eyes gleamed with a mix of pity and satisfaction as she leaned in, speaking softly but cuttingly. “You liked being with Elyse more. It was painfully obvious how real you were with her, how you shamelessly basked in her love, and took everything she offered without a second thought.”

Theo’s breathing grew erratic, his hatred for Kaelyn intensifying as she exposed the truth he’d kept buried deep.

Kaelyn’s smile stretched wider, a glint of cruel amusement in her eyes. “But the moment I crooked my finger, you came running back, didn’t you? That’s when I realized that no matter how much you liked Elyse, you and I are cut from the same cloth. We’re the same, you and I.”

“Nonsense!” Theo’s voice was raw with fury. “I’m nothing like you. You’re the one who twisted everything, who ruined everything!” Theo refused to admit that he and Kaelyn were cut from the same cloth.

Kaelyn laughed, a cold, mocking sound. “How long are you going to keep lying to yourself? Do you really think you’re some noble hero just because you ran away from your responsibilities, abandoning the Ward family in the name of love?”

She leaned in closer, her voice dropping to a whisper that felt like nails on his skin. “You’re your mother’s only son. If you don’t take over the family business, who will? You ran because you wanted to control her, to force her hand. It was all just another way for you to get what you wanted. Did I hit the spot? I know you so well, don’t I? Of course, I’ve been watching you all along, darling. You and I are a match made in heaven.”

“No! No! You shut up!” Theo screamed, the sound echoing in the night as blood pooled at his feet, seeping into the snow.

Kaelyn merely twisted the knife, delighting in the agony on his face.

Then, with a swift jerk, she pulled it free, casually flicking the blood from the blade as if discarding an insignificant piece of trash. A car pulled up, its headlights slicing through the darkness. She spared Theo one final glance, a look of utter contempt, before turning on her heel and stepping into the waiting vehicle.

Chapter 825:

Weak, Theo collapsed backward, his body giving out, the snow cushioning his fall. The cold, indifferent ground felt almost comforting as he listened to the fading sound of the car driving away. He had always known that Kaelyn would come for him one day. He had just been careless.

Slowly, he raised his hand, reaching for the falling snowflakes. They danced just out of reach, slipping through his fingers like a fleeting dream. Everything felt surreal.

As Elyse walked back to her hotel, the snow began to fall heavier, making the cold pierce deeper into her bones. She thought about catching a cab, but just then, a car sped by, its rear window slightly open.

A glimpse of a woman’s silhouette inside caught Elyse’s eye. The brief glimpse sparked a deep sense of recognition in her.



Elyse took a few more steps, but an unsettling feeling started to eat away at her. That woman seemed to be Kaelyn. But why would she be here? A dark premonition began to form in Elyse's mind, her heart beating with a heavy sense of dread.

Elyse considered looking for Theo, wondering if he knew anything about Kaelyn's whereabouts. However, she quickly decided against it, thinking it was too dramatic. What danger could Kaelyn really pose to her or Theo? With that thought, she kept walking, only to suddenly turn and start running, gripping her violin case tightly.

As she ran, her eyes were suddenly caught by a still figure lying on the pavement ahead. A wave of panic washed over her—could it be Theo?

Elyse's heart raced in her chest as she rushed forward. Her worst fears were confirmed when she saw Theo lying in a pool of his own blood. She knelt beside him and gently cradled his face, her voice heavy with worry as she whispered his name. But his eyes stayed tightly shut, and he didn't respond.

Elyse's hands shook, whether from fear or the cold, she couldn't tell. She fumbled for her phone and called for help. Shortly after, an ambulance came and took Theo to the hospital.

Elyse followed behind, her mind racing as she sank into a seat outside the operating room. She wrapped her arms tightly around her knees. Could Kaelyn be behind this terrible act? But everything she knew about Kaelyn suggested that Kaelyn had feelings for Theo. Surely, even if Theo had turned her down, Kaelyn wouldn't have reacted with such violence, would she?

Caught up in a whirlwind of anxiety and doubt, Elyse was jolted from her worried thoughts when Theo finally came out of surgery. She hurried to his bedside, her heart sinking as she looked at his pale, lifeless face.

Elyse had been awake all night keeping watch in the hospital when Theo finally started to move. When he realized where he was, he forced a pained smile. "I'm sorry, Elyse. I've caused you so much trouble," he said weakly.

Exhausted, Elyse rubbed her eyes. "It's okay. Did you see who attacked you?"

"Yes, it was Kaelyn," Theo said, his voice carrying a hint of irony.

Elyse was shocked. She couldn't believe that Kaelyn was indeed responsible for hurting him. "Why would she do such a thing?" she asked. "Didn't she care about you? They say love can sometimes turn into hate."

"Hahaha... Ouch!" Theo suddenly laughed, but his amusement quickly turned to a grimace of pain from his wound.

"Be careful. That knife wound was deep. You almost didn't make it."

Chapter 826:

Theo nodded. His voice was raspy as he continued, "You were the only one who thought Kaelyn cared about me."

Elyse fell silent, not sure how to reply.

Theo remembered aloud, "She was my first love, but we ended things after she was unfaithful."

Elyse stayed quiet, having already known bits of their troubled history.

"After we split, she left the country. Nobody knew what she was doing. But on her return, she had changed. She began trying to please me and win me back," Theo said softly.

"I'm not interested in what happened between you and Kaelyn," Elyse cut in.

Theo paused, his voice shaky as he said, "I later realized who truly loved me."

Elyse looked into his eyes, her own filled with hesitation. She didn't want to hear this.

Rubbing her temples, she stood up. "Have your bodyguard keep an eye on you. I need some sleep."

As Theo watched her start to leave, a mix of yearning and regret filled his heart. He reached out and grabbed the hem of her dress, his eyes red. “Will you come see me tomorrow?”

Elyse was tempted to say no. Their relationship seemed too damaged to mend. Yet seeing him so vulnerable softened her heart. She couldn’t bring herself to be harsh. “I’ll come if I can,” she said with a sigh.

Theo’s expression lightened slightly. “Then go and get some rest,” he murmured gently.

Elyse nodded and left the ward slowly.

Theo lay emotionless, tears rolling down his cheeks, each one slowly soaking into the pillow.

Elyse returned to the hotel, jumping slightly when Edward appeared out of nowhere.

“You scared me,” she gasped, clutching her chest to calm her racing heart.

Edward looked haggard, his eyes rimmed with dark circles and his expression sour. “Where have you been? I waited all night,” he complained, his voice tinged with accusation. “You weren’t with that guy from yesterday, were you?”

Elyse sighed, her fatigue evident. “Can you stop? I was at the hospital all night. I’m exhausted.”

“Hospital? Are you okay? What happened?” Concern flickered over Edward’s face as he reached for her hand, his earlier annoyance forgotten.

Pulling her hand away, Elyse explained, “It’s not me. It was Theo—he got stabbed. I had to take him to the hospital.”

Edward’s tension eased somewhat. “Oh, so it was him. You had me worried. I’m just glad you’re safe.” He then put on a smirk.

Elyse, feeling her energy drain away with every word, advised, “You look tired. You should get some rest too.”

Edward absentmindedly rubbed his eyes. “These dark circles? They’re nothing. Seeing you is what matters.”

Her patience thinning, Elyse didn’t bother to respond. She headed for the elevator, desperate for some rest. Edward trailed behind, his grin undiminished by her silence.

Chapter 827:

Elyse, exasperated, said, “Why are you following me? Go back to your own hotel.”

Edward, looking sheepish, replied, “Actually, I switched hotels. I’m staying next door to you now.”

Elyse frowned. “Are you stalking me?”

“Just trying to be close, in case you need anything,” Edward tried to sound casual. “Hey, if you can’t sleep, just knock on my door. We could hang out.”

Elyse took a step back, shaking her head. “Thanks, but no thanks. I value my privacy.”

Just then, the elevator dinged open, and she quickly stepped inside.

Edward, undeterred, slipped in beside her, still smiling. “Look at that, we’re even neighbors on the same floor.”

Elyse leaned against the elevator wall, a look of resignation on her face. “That’s exactly what I was afraid of. You’re going to make it impossible for me to get any peace.”

Edward chuckled. “Come on, a little noise is good. Keeps things lively.”

Elyse didn't respond, rushing out of the elevator the moment the doors slid open. She hurried to her room, calling over her shoulder, "Try to keep it down, okay? I'm going to sleep."

She quickly shut her door behind her, hoping to distance herself from Edward's overbearing cheerfulness.

From the hallway, Edward's voice followed, "Hey, if you need anything, just come to me. I'm right here."

Elyse, feeling overwhelmed, dropped her violin case by the door and went to fetch some clean clothes for a shower. But just as she opened the bedroom door to grab her laundry, she let out a startled yelp.

Edward lingered outside her door, and when Elyse screamed, he immediately started knocking. "Elyse, are you alright? Do you need help?" he called out anxiously.

Regaining her composure, Elyse reassured him through the door, "I'm fine. Please, just go back to your room and get some rest."

A quiet moment passed, signaling that Edward had heeded her request and returned to his room.

"How on earth did you get in here?" Elyse demanded, her voice a mix of anger and disbelief.

Jayden, sprawled out with a casual air, flipped through her study notes without looking up.

Elyse repeated her question with more urgency, "How did you get into my room?"

Unperturbed, Jayden finally looked up, meeting her eyes with a steady gaze. "Does it matter how I got in? What you should understand is, you can't get rid of me that easily," Jayden said with unsettling calmness.

Ignoring Jayden's presence, Elyse began to undress. His eyes lit up with eager anticipation, misreading her actions as a sign of reconciliation. Unfazed, she kept one garment on, snatched her clean clothes, and escaped to the bathroom for a shower, leaving Jayden unnoticed.

When Elyse returned, she found Jayden asleep in her bed. Annoyed, she prodded his face, "Why are you in my bed? Go back to your own hotel room."

In a drowsy state, Jayden pulled her closer, his voice muffled against her breasts, "I can't sleep unless you're next to me. Just let me stay here."

Chapter 828:

Elyse's cheeks reddened as she attempted to free herself from his grasp. Despite her efforts, his grip was unyielding, and he clung to her without budging an inch.

Elyse steadied herself with a deep breath before attempting to loosen Jayden's grip. His hands, however, clung to her stubbornly, unyielding. Growing increasingly frustrated and suspecting he was feigning sleep, Elyse yanked on his ear.

Jayden's eyes snapped open, annoyance flickering across his features. "What are you doing?" he demanded, his tone edged with irritation.

"I need some space to sleep, and you're smothering me," Elyse snapped back, her patience wearing thin.

"Such a hassle," Jayden grumbled. Before Elyse could react, he lifted her with surprising ease, pinning her beneath him on the bed.

Frozen in shock for a moment, Elyse's cheeks reddened with embarrassment as she realized her predicament. She pushed against him, exasperated. "Don't cling to me like this. We're divorced, remember? And you're with Aarya now."

At the mention of Aarya, Jayden's expression shifted to one of serious contemplation. "Are you jealous of her?" he probed.

Offended and cornered, Elyse responded defensively, “Jealous? Why would I be? I don’t even know her well. It’s only natural she’s with you...”

Before she could finish, Jayden silenced her with a kiss, abrupt and demanding. When he finally let her catch her breath, he pinned her down, his voice rough. “You claim you’re not jealous, yet you’re visibly upset.”

Struggling for a comeback, Elyse clenched her teeth, her mind racing for a way out of his hold.

Ignoring her discomfort, Jayden drew her closer, his voice tired but firm. “I’m exhausted. Just stay here for a bit.”

Though she resisted the idea of being close to him, her resolve wavered at the genuine weariness in his voice. Yet, the reminder of his current relationship lingered uncomfortably between them.

Despite Jayden’s behavior—his easy manipulation of relationships—Elyse knew she had to end whatever lingered between them. She needed to maintain boundaries, even if Aarya wasn’t the ideal partner.

Yet, Elyse found herself hesitating. She couldn’t fathom her own reaction; tormented internally, she still longed for the warmth of Jayden’s embrace.

A bitter smile curled her lips as a distressing thought hit her. Was she becoming as reprehensible as the situations she despised? This notion only deepened her distress, causing her to sniffle quietly.

Feeling her subtle shift, Jayden tightened his hold, his voice soft but steady as he patted her back. “It’s okay. I’ll handle everything. Don’t overthink it.”

“You call this okay? How can I not overthink?” Elyse muttered, disgusted with herself for falling for such a man. Could it be that she enjoyed her own misery?

Amid her tumultuous thoughts, Elyse eventually drifted into sleep, her mind too exhausted to continue its turmoil.

## Chapter 829:

She woke late the next afternoon, the previous night's snow having given way to a sunny day. The lively sounds of people enjoying the weather drew her to the window. She watched the activity below, the warmth of the sun soothing her chilled bones.

After a moment basking in the sunlight, a knock on the door pulled her from her reverie.

Elyse wrapped herself in a coat and approached the door to find her new neighbor, Edward, standing outside with a grin.

"Figured you'd be awake. How about lunch on me? Go change, and I'll meet you in the lobby," he suggested cheerfully.

The sight of Edward stirred Elyse's conflicted emotions, prompting a weary sigh. "Are you sure about this? I'm hardly a catch. You know about my past marriage."

Edward replied, "Does being married before mean I can't pursue you? Can't I chase someone I genuinely like?"

Elyse was baffled by his determination. "You know my history, yet you're willing to be with a divorced woman? With your prospects, you could find someone better suited."

Shaking his head, Edward insisted, "You don't see it. It's rare to find someone I truly connect with. If I let you go and settle for someone else, I'd be doing myself a disservice."

"But I don't feel the same about you," Elyse countered, her frown deepening. "I can't force feelings that aren't there."

Edward's expression turned earnest. "You're lying. How can you say you feel nothing? I'm quite a catch."

Overwhelmed, Elyse found herself at a loss for words.



Edward seized Elyse's hand and pressed it firmly against his chest. "Can you feel my strong chest muscles?" he asked, his voice filled with pride.

Elyse quickly yanked her hand away, stepping back in alarm. "Can you not be so forward?" she exclaimed, her shock evident.

Undeterred, Edward reached out again, a smug smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "You're too passive, so I have to take the lead. Otherwise, how are we ever going to have a future together?"

Before Elyse could respond, a faint noise came from the direction of the bathroom, like something had just hit the floor.

Edward's eyes narrowed, a chilling glint flickering within them. "Is there someone in your room?"

A cold shiver ran down Elyse's spine. The look in his eyes was terrifying. But was there really someone in her room? Could Jayden still be here?

Elyse instinctively moved to close the door, but Edward was quicker, blocking it with his hand. He peered through the narrow gap, his tone turning pitiful. "Are you hiding something from me?"

Elyse's heart raced, and she quickly denied, "No. Besides, we're not even seeing each other, so even if I were, you have no right to ask."

"Why are you so distant with me?" Edward persisted, shamelessly attempting to push the door open further.

Chapter 830:

Elyse quickly slammed the door shut and locked it, her heart pounding. Without pausing to catch her breath, she hurried to the bathroom. There she found Jayden, nonchalantly lounging in her bathtub.

She stood frozen. “You didn’t leave?”

From the comfort of the warm water, Jayden looked up at her and said casually, “Did I ever say I was going to?”

Elyse couldn’t help but complain, “You always used to leave without saying goodbye.”

She stood momentarily stunned after her words. What was she doing? Accusing Jayden of being inconsiderate in the past?

Jayden watched her carefully before responding dryly, “I left quietly because I didn’t want to wake you.”

Elyse regained her composure, her expression hardening. “Your explanations are meaningless now.”

After a pause, Jayden asked, “Was that Edward who came by earlier?”

Elyse nodded. Turning her back to him, she said firmly, “Finish your bath and leave. I need to handle Edward.”

Jayden simply nodded, his eyes following her as she exited the bathroom.

Once outside, Elyse rubbed her temples, feeling an unexplainable annoyance. She took a deep breath, steadied her emotions, and opened the door to confront what she expected next. As anticipated, Edward was still there, greeting her with a broad smile, eager to share his joy. However, Elyse wasn’t in the mood to entertain his cheerful demeanor. She avoided his eyes and instructed, “Go downstairs and wait for me. I’ll join you after I change.” At that moment, she preferred Edward’s company over Jayden’s.

“What are you doing here?” Edward’s voice sharpened as he gestured behind her.

Elyse froze and turned to see Jayden standing in the doorway, a white towel wrapped around his waist, his upper body exposed and well-defined. He was casually shaving.

“You’re going out? With him?” Jayden’s voice was laced with disdain.

Edward’s smile faltered, his jaw clenching. “You’re the one who should be elsewhere. Shouldn’t you be with Arya?”

Jayden’s laugh was cold, his eyes glinting with scorn. “Aarya is just a girlfriend, not my wife. I’m not tied to her side.”

Edward’s forced smile returned. “And Elyse? Is she your wife then?”

Jayden’s response was firm, edged with defiance. “If I say she’s my wife, then she is.”

Caught in the middle of this tug-of-war, Elyse’s frustration peaked. She pressed her lips tightly together, her expression one of sheer irritation, and headed back to her room to change.

Jayden reacted quickly, seizing her arm. “Are you really planning to go out with him? Does he deserve your time?”

Elyse yanked her arm away, her tone sharp. “Who said I’m going out with him? I’m just going to have dinner alone. I don’t want either of you to follow me.”

But Jayden blocked her way, his presence imposing. “No, you’re going to have dinner with me.”