

Bound love 111

Chapter 111:

Elyse's husband has prepared afternoon tea for everyone. "Guys, please join us," he announced cheerfully. The orchestra manager was delighted; the complimentary afternoon tea provided an excellent opportunity to ingratiate himself with the leaders of the TV station. As the group dispersed towards the food, only Kaelyn and Theo remained behind.

Ignoring them, Jayden prepared to leave hand in hand with Elyse. The sight of them together irked Theo, prompting him to step forward. "You can't possibly make Elyse happy. If you are kind, you'll let her go."

Jayden gave him a sidelong glance. "You're not in any position to tell me what to do. Just watch. I won't let you have what you want," Theo retorted, his frustration evident.

Elyse, taken aback by Theo's sudden outburst, wondered about his motives. "Then try to take her back if you think you can," Jayden responded indifferently, leading Elyse away.

As they walked, Elyse looked back at Jayden and asked, "Aren't you upset?"

Jayden retorted, "Do you want me to be upset?"

"I'm not sure," Elyse confessed, feeling troubled. "Theo's behavior is baffling. He's been following me around, even suggesting I should divorce you."

Jayden laughed softly. "Don't listen to him. Taking him seriously would be as absurd as a pig climbing a tree."

Elyse chuckled and nodded, acknowledging the irony of Theo's demand for a divorce while he continued his affair with Kaelyn.

"There's an event in two days; come with me," Jayden invited.

"Sure," Elyse agreed readily.

Days later, at a charity event, Elyse clad in a dark green dress arrived with Jayden. Despite being in a wheelchair, Jayden still managed to draw attention. Occasionally, people glanced their way. Unfazed by the onlookers, Elyse fetched desserts and red wine for Jayden.

I sense some tension in the air tonight. Everyone seems preoccupied,” Elyse remarked as she returned with a plate of desserts, observing the attendees and noting their serious and guarded expressions. “The head of the Bayzee Group is here tonight. If Bayzee enters specific markets and locations, local property values could skyrocket. So, tonight feels more like conducting business than attending a charity event.”

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Elyse remembered that Bayzee Group had gone public last year and expanded rapidly due to its successful investments. She knew the company’s president kept a low profile and that it might be the acting president who would show up tonight. Turning to Jayden, she asked curiously, “Are you considering a partnership with the Bayzee Group?”

Jayden nodded calmly. “Somewhat. The potential benefits far outweigh the risks, making it a worthwhile venture.”

Elyse nodded thoughtfully.

“Jayden, Elyse, good to see you both here,” Brook approached, dressed sharply, wine glass in hand, his smile wide. Elyse was surprised to see Brook. Remembering their last encounter, she felt uneasy. “You haven’t attended these kinds of events in over a year. What brings you out tonight? Are you comfortable here?”

Staring at Jayden, Brook asked with a smile, “Brooks’ tone was light but seemed more probing than concerned.”

Jayden replied coolly, “I’m just here to enjoy the evening. But what brings you to this charity event?”

With a hint of pride, Brook responded, “I’m here on business. Unlike you, I don’t have the luxury of a beautiful companion to simply pass the time.”

After Brook's remark, Jayden affectionately patted Elyse's hand and said, "You're right. It is wonderful to have a beautiful woman by my side."

Elyse blushed and looked down. Brook watched their affectionate interaction, a sly smile crossing his face. "You two seem closer than ever."

Unperturbed, Jayden retorted, "If you're envious, find yourself a partner."

"No need. I'm just here to fulfill my obligations. I don't have time for romantic distractions," Brook said before moving on. He raised his glass to Elyse, remarking pointedly, "Enjoy the charity event tonight, okay?"

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Brook's words confused Elyse, but she kept her displeasure in check. "No worries," she chuckled. "I will enjoy it."

The smile that Brook gave her was grim and a little forced. He nodded once, then left.

"Is he here for the Bayzee Group collaboration?" Elyse asked when Brook finally left.

Jayden nodded. "That's right. Grandpa likes to maximize his profits in any way he could. So he is quite determined this time."

"I wonder who the Bayzee Group rep is, though. I didn't hear news of their arrival," Elyse looked around curiously but didn't notice anything worth mentioning.

"They must take every precaution," Jayden pointed out lightly as he sipped his wine. "It's no secret that people would be looking for Bayzee Group's rep tonight, but I don't think they would reveal their identity easily."

Elyse nodded in agreement. She and Jayden milled around for half an hour, but there was still no news of Bayzee Group's rep.

"Bored," Elyse set her wine glass aside and said, "I need to use the bathroom."

“Go ahead. I’ll wait for you here,” Jayden replied.

Elyse left the main hall and headed to the ladies’ room. It was there that she saw Joanna, clad in a slinky black dress.

“What are you doing here?” From what she heard shortly after Joanna left Enzo’s residence, she had been sent back to her family to be punished. Elyse had no idea what sort of punishment they could have dealt her, but she did know that Joanna would be released eventually. Even so, she was surprised to see the woman here of all places.

Joanna shot her a look of hatred. “You sure are lucky,” she all but hissed.

Elyse pulled back with a frown, immediately on alert. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Joanna gritted her teeth and thought of her family. They had subjected her to hell in the last few days. Those people were monsters. They only cared about their interests and the glory of their family name. She always wondered what sort of glory could be had in selling their daughters for profit.

The moment she returned to her family’s residence, she was stripped, hung by the wrists, and whipped. They told her she was being punished for her disobedience, for humiliating the family, and for letting another woman take her rightful position.

Joanna seethed the entire time. No matter how much pain they inflicted on her, it would never change the fact that she didn’t want to waste her life away as a cripple’s wife.

Fortunately for her, Brook had reached out and offered her help, provided she did everything he ordered. It was the only way she could be free.

Elyse, I’m being direct with you. I plan to marry Jayden, and you’re an obstacle. You need to vanish. Elyse grew alarmed, scanning the room for anything to defend herself with, but the ladies’ room lacked any useful items. “What exactly do you mean?” Elyse asked, stepping back cautiously, trying to buy time. To her horror, Joanna brandished a taser from her purse, treating it like a weapon. “If you cooperate, you won’t face much trouble.”

Elyse refused outright. She dodged Joanna and attempted to flee, but her dress snagged on a stall. Joanna took advantage, using the taser on Elyse, causing her to collapse. As Elyse struggled to rise, Joanna repeatedly shocked her until she lost consciousness. Joanna looked down at the unconscious Elyse, proud of her actions.

How dare you try to go against me, you bitch! From now on, I will be the only woman standing beside Jayden.

Jayden had been waiting for a while now, but Elyse still hadn't returned. A nagging suspicion formed at the back of his mind; something must have happened to her. He maneuvered his wheelchair to the ladies' room and ran into Brook along the way.

"Why are you alone?" Brook asked in mock concern. "Where is Elyse?"

"She's in the bathroom."

"Oh, I see. I thought you made her mad, so she dumped you and left." There was a cunning glint in Brook's eyes when he said that, but he didn't continue the conversation any further. Instead, he turned away from Jayden and began chatting with other guests.

Jayden's temples were throbbing, and a keen sense of foreboding rose in his heart. He opened the door of the ladies' room to find it empty. He looked around but couldn't see any surveillance cameras. The thing was, there should be one outside every restroom door of this hotel. Were they removed from this area on purpose?

Jayden clicked his tongue. It seemed that he had kept a low profile for too long. His enemies probably thought he had become a pushover. He sat in his wheelchair for a moment, brooding in silence. "How dare you," he muttered under his breath, his voice laced with danger. "You must have a death wish."

Chapter 113:

Elyse couldn't discern how long she had been unconscious. When she finally came to, she found herself confined in a dark room, likely a basement given the absence of natural light. Suppressing her rising panic and feeling of helplessness, Elyse moved her limbs to alleviate the stiffness, thankfully finding herself unrestrained. She kicked around, hoping to contact something useful, but her efforts were futile; she was alone.

Her mind raced as she pondered Joanna's motives for kidnapping her. All she hoped for now was that Joanna would provide at least some food and water. Her throat felt parched in the pitch-black environment, and Elyse lost all track of time. She eventually drifted off to sleep but was abruptly awakened by approaching footsteps.

Joanna entered, carrying a glass of sugar water. Upon seeing Elyse looking listless on the floor, she snorted disdainfully and kicked her. "Still alive?" Joanna asked coldly.

Struggling, Elyse managed to open her eyes and met Joanna's mocking gaze. "As you can tell, I'm still alive," she responded, her voice hoarse as she licked her dry lips.

Joanna scrutinized Elyse's weakened face and sneered, "A mere 24 hours without food and you've become this feeble. Gee." After a brief pause, she mocked, "Should I be preparing a coffin for you two days later?"

Elyse, who had fasted to fit into her dress for the charity banquet, had barely eaten a small piece of cake that evening. She had no desire to engage in verbal sparring with Joanna; preserving her strength was her main concern.

Bored by Elyse's silence, Joanna forcefully pulled her up and held the sugar water to her lips. Revitalized by the liquid, Elyse drank it eagerly, like a parched fish revived in water, not missing a single drop. Seeing Elyse's desperate state, Joanna taunted further, "I have a secret to share. I'll be Jayden's woman tonight. We'll have shared the same man. Aren't you thrilled?"

Elyse stiffened but remained silent, her gaze frosty as Joanna grabbed her chin forcefully. "This is your fault. If you had complied willingly, I wouldn't have had to return to the Fosters. Now, you'll experience their cruel methods firsthand," Joanna accused.

Elyse shot her a glare. "Your family members are depraved. How is their behavior my concern? Two women for one man? It's laughable that your family condones such things," she retorted.

Joanna laughed heartily, her laughter turning to tears. "That's why I say you're lucky. You weren't born a Foster. You're the luckiest of all," she said, her voice tinged with bitterness.

However, beneath her facade of laughter, Joanna was seething with anger. Born into the Foster family, she loathed her destiny and, in a fit of fury, repeatedly slapped Elyse across the face. As

Elyse collapsed to the floor, Joanna felt a rush of satisfaction, believing she had released her pent-up anger.

“Whenever the Foster family patriarch gets angry, he whips others. I never understood why until now. It turns out venting on others is quite thrilling,” Joanna remarked, her tone dark with resentment.

Gritting her teeth from the pain burning across her cheeks, Elyse responded bitterly, “Joanna Foster, I’ll remember what happened today.”

“So what? You’re imprisoned. No one will know even if I kill you,” Joanna retorted coldly, her demeanor icy and calculated.

She then stood up, straightened her clothes, and subdued her lethal impulses. With a smirk, she said, “I’m off to see Jayden now. He’s a cripple. How does he manage? Should I take the lead and sit on his lap?” She taunted Elyse deliberately. “Aren’t you his wife? Tell me, how did you manage? I’ll learn from you and ensure he’s satisfied.”

Elyse, clenching her jaw, snapped back, “Jayden won’t accept you.”

“Think it’s up to you? I have countless ways to make him accept me if he refuses,” Joanna boasted, her focus solely on her own agenda.

All she needed was for Jayden to marry her, and she would gain her freedom—a freedom she desired so deeply that she believed nothing could stand in her way. Elyse suspected that Joanna would resort to drugging Jayden, given her previous statements.

“You desperate bitch. Jayden will never accept you! Never!” Elyse shouted, her voice filled with conviction.

Joanna merely laughed at her words. She harbored no affection for the disabled man nor desired his acceptance. Her only goal was to complete her mission.

Chapter 114:

Joanna's gaze remained fixed on Elyse. After Elyse's disappearance, Jayden's men combed the city in search of her. Their frantic efforts even reached Enzo's ears. It seemed that Elyse held a significance to Jayden deeper than anyone had imagined.

With this thought, Joanna's fists clenched tighter, a surge of jealousy and resentment coursing through her. Never before had anyone valued her in such a profound manner. The sensation of being taken seriously eluded her entirely. Joanna's understanding crystallized, acknowledging her jealousy toward Elyse, even though the object of Elyse's affection was someone she had previously dismissed as useless.

"You're fortunate, Elyse. Encountering the man I abandoned and then forging a happy life," Joanna's voice dripped with bitterness.

Elyse, upon hearing Joanna's words, responded with a derisive sneer, meeting Joanna's gaze head-on. "Your choices are your own. They hold no sway over me. Now you envy me because Jayden and I share a love that runs deep, don't you?"

Instead of succumbing to anger, Joanna chuckled. Her laughter reverberated with a chilling edge. "I admire your sharp tongue. You've managed to incense me successfully," Joanna remarked, her eyes casting a menacing gaze upon Elyse, who lay vulnerable on the ground.

Sensing Joanna's ominous intent, Elyse's nerves prickled. "What are you planning?" she asked, her voice tinged with anxiety.

Without offering a reply, Joanna turned on her heel and exited the basement, a sly smile adorning her lips. Elyse's heart raced with fear. She fervently hoped for Jayden's swift arrival, her mind a tumult of desperate prayers.

Emerging from the basement, Joanna went directly to Jayden's residence. In the wake of Elyse's disappearance, the household staff and security were preoccupied with the search, affording Joanna unhindered access. No one showed up to stop her.

Ascending to the second floor, Joanna approached Jayden's room with caution. With a gentle push, she peeked through the partially open door. Through the crack, she caught sight of Jayden. He sat quietly in his wheelchair, his back turned to the door, his gaze fixed upon the world outside through the windowpane.

From behind, Joanna sensed the weight of his sadness, a silent echo of worry, perhaps for Elyse. Was his heart burdened with concern for Elyse? Suppressing traces of jealousy, Joanna summoned her courage, gently pushing open the door. Softening her voice, she spoke, "Jayden, word has it that Elyse is missing. My heart aches for you, so I've come to keep you company in this trying time."

Jayden's response was a frigid command: "Fuck off."

Undeterred by his coldness, Joanna scanned the room until her eyes fell upon the kettle. With measured steps, she approached it and poured water for him, all the while harboring a clandestine motive to administer a drug to Jayden. As Jayden remained oblivious, she seized the opportunity, surreptitiously slipping the drug into a glass before advancing towards him.

"Jayden, please have some water. Worrying about Elyse will only leave you drained. Be patient. Let us focus on what we can control," Joanna urged, trying to sound reassuring.

Jayden's voice dripped with skepticism as he replied, "Be patient? It's been nearly two days, yet you dare speak this nonsense before me."

Joanna felt her heart skip a beat, wondering if she had said something wrong. She continued, "I speak from the heart. Your distress clouds your judgment. Perhaps a moment of clarity might unveil a path forward."

"What brings you to my doorstep?" Jayden asked, fixing his gaze on Joanna.

Joanna maintained her composure as she drew the glass closer to Jayden's lips. "I am here out of genuine concern. In times of turmoil, one must not neglect their well-being. Please take a sip. Hydration is key, especially in moments of distress."

Jayden casually took the glass in his hand, inspecting it. As he lifted it towards his lips, Joanna's nerves coiled tightly. However, Jayden set the glass aside, his expression softening into a faint smile. "Are you truly insistent on me drinking this water?"

Joanna summoned a gentle smile, attempting to maintain her composure. "I noticed your lips were dry, so I thought a glass of water might help. It's nothing to dwell on."

"I'm not thirsty. Perhaps you should have it instead," Jayden replied, handing the glass back to Joanna.

Startled by his reaction, Joanna's grip on the glass faltered, and it slipped from her fingers, crashing to the floor and shattering into pieces.

"Get out of here," Jayden's fury reached a crescendo, his emotions boiling over until blue veins bulged prominently on his neck.

Joanna was momentarily taken aback by Jayden's imposing demeanor, but as she collected her thoughts, she reminded herself that despite his outward demeanor, he was still confined to a wheelchair. How could he dare to be so arrogant in her presence?

Chapter 115:

Joanna glared at Jayden. He was just a cripple now, and they were alone. What was there to fear? So, she dropped her act. Her face twisted into a grimace of contempt.

"Elyse! Elyse! You see only Elyse. You adore her," she bellowed. "I'll destroy her!"

Jayden fixed her with a cold gaze. "It was really your doing, huh?"

Joanna burst into laughter. "What if it was me, Jayden? Do you think you're still the man you once were?"

She curled her lips in scorn. "Now you're even discarded by your family. What future lies ahead for you? Running from our wedding was the only sensible thing I could do. But she was dragged back."

She remembered Brook's promise that if she could have sex with Jayden and ruin his relationship with Elyse, he would grant her freedom. The thought of freedom was intoxicating to her.

With a twisted smile, she pulled a bottle of powder-shaped drugs from her pocket and advanced toward Jayden.

"I excel in bed. You'll gain from this cripple," she said with excitement, trying to make him swallow the powder.

In annoyance, Jayden swung his hand forcefully. The bottle Joanna clutched fell, scattering powder everywhere.

Before Joanna could respond, a kick sent her sprawling to the floor. She clutched her stomach, wincing in pain.

Jayden pulled back his foot and slowly rose from the wheelchair. Seeing him stand, Joanna's face went pale. Her finger trembled as she pointed at him.

"You—you're not a cripple!" Her voice quaked with fear.

Jayden ignored her frantic question and asked icily, "Where is Elyse?"

As Joanna stared at his legs, the realization dawned on her: Jayden had never been crippled. He had feigned disability for a year, concealing his true strength.

In that moment, she understood everything she had missed by fleeing their wedding. Terrified, she crawled towards Jayden, seized his leg, and fearfully kissed the back of his shoe.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Owen. I didn't mean to do that. Please forgive me. I can do anything for you," she pleaded.

Jayden looked down at her and asked, "Really? Then tell me, where is Elyse?"

Joanna trembled and fell silent, afraid to speak. Noticing her hesitation, Jayden grasped her hair and stared at her coldly.

"Tell me where Elyse is, and I might let you live," he said icily.

Fearing for her life, Joanna quickly confessed, "She's at an abandoned factory in the western suburbs. I've asked people."

She stopped, unable to continue or meet Jayden's intimidating gaze, fearing she might be turned into a lifeless corpse at any moment.

Meanwhile, Elyse was confined in a sack and tossed into a car, unaware of her destination. Starving and exhausted, she struggled to think clearly. Eventually, the car halted.

Moments later, the door opened, and someone dragged her out and hoisted her over his shoulder. Having not eaten for too long, Elyse felt her stomach revolt. She retched several times, but the man carrying her showed no reaction. He continued to his destination and then dropped her to the ground.

“Why hasn’t that woman sent us any message yet? Maybe she’s busy in bed. It’s normal for her to forget about us. Normal? Are you kidding me? I just want to be done with this woman and get out of here. This place is cold, and it’s unnerving to stay here.”

Overhearing the conversation, Elyse was horrified. Was Joanna planning to kill her? Despair welled up in her heart. Was there really no way for her to escape this fate?

Chapter 116:

If that woman doesn’t give me the signal soon, I’ll do it myself.” The other man made no response. From where Elyse lay on the ground, she heard footsteps approaching her.

Someone pulled the sack open, and she was horrified at what she saw. The men had hulking figures.

“Hot damn! That woman never told me that our captive is a beauty!” Their vulgar comments and hideous laughter grated at Elyse’s ears, punctuating her fear. She tried to back away from them, but she was bound. Try as she might, she couldn’t dodge their filthy hands.

Suddenly, the man who was fondling her seemed to have an idea. He turned to his cohort and said, “It would be a pity to just kill her. Why don’t we enjoy her for a bit before we get rid of her? What do you think?”

The other man guffawed. “What the hell is wrong with you? Once we finish this task, we can have any woman we want. Why would you want to bother with her?”

“Bah! I don’t have to explain myself to you.” The first man looked back at Elyse and stared at her for what felt like an eternity.

His leering eyes made her shudder in a mix of terror and disgust. For some reason, her display of fear seemed to entice the man. Without a second's hesitation, he reached for her binds and tried to untie her.

But the rope that had been used was an exclusive creation of the Foster family. It wasn't easy to undo the knots without knowing a very specific and special method. Joanna had never taught it to them, so the man had to take a good long while before he finally managed to free Elyse.

The moment her hands were untied, she grabbed a fistful of dirt and threw it at the man's face. Caught off guard, the man fell back, his hands over his eyes, and let out a litany of curses.

Elyse scrambled to her feet and was about to make her escape when the other man grabbed her arm and kicked her back to the ground. She curled up and put her arms over her belly. That attack made her dizzy, and she ultimately felt a lot worse.

"You want to run away, eh, bitch? I'm going to fuck you until you pass out." The man she had blinded with the dirt regained some of his vision through his squinted eyes. He rushed over to where she lay.

Desperate and hopeless, Elyse closed her eyes and waited for the shoe to drop.

All of a sudden, there was a rumbling sound. The man who had been in the process of pulling her dress off sensed that something was not right.

Was the factory building shaking? Was it an earthquake?

The rumbling sound grew louder and louder, and then came the strong gusts of wind.

The two men rushed to the door to investigate what was going on, but they stopped in their tracks as they passed by the large windows. A helicopter passed by the building.

It was making a slow descent on the open space near the factory gates.

"Shit! We'll fail our mission."

The two men whirled around to grab Elyse. Elyse was delirious from pain at this point, and all she wanted was to survive this ordeal in one piece. As soon as the helicopter landed, all noises disappeared. A moment passed, and then came the sound of unhurried footsteps. Each step sounded deliberate. The air grew thick with tension as they came closer.

“Who is it? Who are you?”

With only the light of the moon streaming in through the windows, Jayden’s shadow stretched farther than usual. He stopped when he was finally facing the pair of goons, then he glanced at their hostage, Elyse.

Jayden could instantly tell that she was in a bad state. He swallowed his rage and pushed his tongue into his cheek. “Joanna Foster’s mission failed. If you still want to leave, let that woman go,” his voice cut through Elyse’s daze. She wanted to raise her head to see if he had really come to save her, but she was too weak to move an inch.

“Who do you think you are? I don’t care if you believe it or not, but I will kill her if you come closer,” one of the goons threatened.

Jayden scoffed and shook his head. “If you touch her, you both will die.”

The thugs exchanged a look, hesitating. “I know you’re killers hired by Joanna,” Jayden continued. “There’s no need for you to gamble with your lives over a woman now, is there?”

This seemed to make the two men ponder their options. “Then we…”

Something suddenly cut through the air. The two men froze as the bullet wound in the center of their heads began to bleed. They exchanged another look, this time of disbelief, before collapsing dead on the ground.

Without their support, Elyse also crumpled into a heap.

“Clean up the mess,” Jayden barked at the two bodyguards hiding not too far away. He strode over and gathered Elyse into his arms.

Why was she so light? He frowned as he studied her pale face. Her lips were cracked and dry.

“Damn it.”

Jayden held her tightly and stormed out of the factory building.

Vaguely, Elyse felt a familiar warmth engulf her, and she slowly opened her eyes. The blurred image of Jayden came into her vision.

“Has she finally died? Why was she hallucinating things?”

Chapter 117:

Jayden whisked Elyse off to the helicopter, which promptly soared towards the city’s premier hospital. Peyton, having been alerted earlier, had made all the necessary preparations at the hospital and successfully suppressed any news of the incident to prevent investigations. Doctors immediately rushed Elyse to the emergency room upon her arrival on a hospital bed. At the end of the queue, Peyton performed a swift check and confirmed Elyse was not in immediate danger, which prompted Jayden to make his exit.

“Where are you headed? Won’t you stay by Elyse’s side?” Peyton inquired.

Looking down, Jayden held a purple rubber band – Elyse’s, which had slipped from her hair as he had carried her. “There’s something I need to handle before she wakes,” he explained.

Although Peyton didn’t attempt to detain him, he eyed Jayden’s legs critically and warned, “Stay under the radar. The Owen family has noticed your search for Elyse. My contacts tell me Brook is monitoring you. Have they figured out the truth about your legs yet?”

“What does it matter if they have?” Jayden retorted dismissively.

“Have you lost your senses? We’ve concealed that for an entire year,” Peyton argued, trying to persuade him. “The culprit behind the car accident hasn’t been caught. They’re still lurking in the shadows, waiting. We need to draw them out. You should maintain a low profile until we’re absolutely certain of your situation.”

Jayden stood with his back to Peyton for a few moments before departing. Peyton sighed internally, unsure if his words had made any impact. He knew well that Elyse's condition profoundly affected Jayden. It was crucial to ensure her recovery soon, or Jayden might lose himself completely.

After receiving treatment overnight, Elyse woke up around noon the following day. Her eyes fluttered open to find Driscoll by her side.

"Driscoll? Is that you? Am I still dreaming?" she murmured weakly, her hand trembling as she reached out to him.

Driscoll quickly clasped her hand and reassured her with concern, "Yes, it's me. You're not dreaming. You're safe now."

After a brief silence, Elyse's voice was hesitant. "Where is Jayden?"

"He's sorting out some matters. He'll visit as soon as he's done," Driscoll responded quickly, hoping to ease her worry about Jayden's absence.

Elyse then closed her eyes and drifted back to sleep.

When she woke again in the afternoon, she found Jayden in his wheelchair, a book in hand. The soft afternoon sunlight bathed him in a gentle glow. Watching him for several moments, she couldn't resist reaching out to tug at his clothes. Jayden closed his book and tightly held her fingers, asking softly, "Are you feeling better?"

After pondering for a moment, Elyse said, "I'm hungry. I want to eat something."

Observing her earnest expression, Jayden replied somewhat helplessly, "There's porridge. You can start with that."

Helped into a sitting position, Elyse gazed at Jayden, feeling groggy. Accepting the bowl of porridge from him, she murmured, "I thought I saw you come to rescue me."

Jayden looked up briefly but remained silent. "But I'm not sure it was you because it seemed like you were carrying me."

Jayden pressed his lips together as if to speak but then held back. "It must be your dream. Eat your porridge," he finally said. Elyse didn't argue, partly convinced it must have been a dream. After all, how could Jayden stand so suddenly?

While she was eating, Peyton dropped by to check on her. "Nothing serious. Rest well today, and you can go home tomorrow. Stick to light meals at home, or you might upset your stomach." With that, he left.

In the evening, Jayden stepped out to take a call and didn't return to the ward. As Elyse sat resting on her bed, a knock at the door came. She called out weakly, "Come in, please."

The door opened to reveal a young man strikingly good-looking in an almost delicate way. "Who are you?" Elyse inquired, not recognizing him.

The man smiled politely and introduced himself. "My name is Kieran Foster. I'm Joanna's cousin. I should have introduced myself sooner, but I've been tied up with family matters."

Upon hearing he was Joanna's cousin, Elyse's expression clouded. She vividly remembered her abduction by Joanna. How could the Foster family be unaware of the outrageous acts committed by one of their own?

Chapter 118:

Elyse had a negative impression of the Foster family. With evident displeasure, she said, "I don't want to talk to you. Please leave."

Kieran responded with an apologetic tone, "Ms. Lloyd, I understand your anger. I've heard about what Joanna has done. I'm here to offer an apology on behalf of the Foster family. I hope you can forgive and forget."

Elyse scoffed, "Forgive and forget? Your family knew I'm Jayden's wife, yet you pushed Joanna to get between our marriage. She even had me kidnapped and caused me great suffering. How can you expect forgiveness?"

Kieran pulled a box from his pocket and opened it to reveal a pink diamond bracelet, which he placed on the bedside table. Elyse eyed it warily and demanded, "What is this supposed to mean?"

"I know no gift can undo the pain you've endured," Kieran began. "But we want to make amends however we can."

"Make amends? You think a bracelet can compensate for everything your family has done?" Elyse was incredulous, seeing the gesture as an insult.

Kieran, laden with guilt, continued, "The Foster family is facing a critical situation. Perhaps it explains, but does not excuse, Joanna's impulsive actions." Then he made a bold request. "I know it seems unfair, but I must ask if you would consider stepping down as Jayden's wife. The stability and status of my family depend on Joanna's marriage with Jayden."

Elyse thought she had misheard and burst out laughing in disbelief. "Are you serious?"

Kieran nodded earnestly. "As compensation, I'm willing to marry you."

Stunned, Elyse couldn't believe what she was hearing. "Why would he think she would ever agree to marry him?"

Kieran, looking uncomfortable, explained, "Though your family is not well-known, I am prepared to accept you and make you my only wife if you relinquish your current position."

Elyse, taken aback, asked, "You think you're making a sacrifice?"

Kieran responded, "I am able-bodied, which is more than can be said for Jayden." He then leaned in and whispered in her ear, "I can also provide more pleasure than Jayden ever could."

Elyse's expression turned to one of shock as she pushed him away. "Shame on you."

Kieran replied innocently, "This is the best solution I can offer. Don't be too greedy."

Amused and annoyed, Elyse retorted, "Greedy? You guys are the greedy ones. Don't push your luck."

Seeing her disgusted expression, Kieran hesitated. “So, we’re not in agreement?”

Glancing at the bracelet on the bedside table, Elyse snapped, “Take your thing and leave. I don’t want to see you anymore.”

Kieran shrugged, picked up the bracelet, and said with regret, “What a pity. I can’t believe you’re refusing me.” He slid a business card across to her and murmured, “But I’m still willing to wait for you.”

“Get out.” Her gaze was icy. She wished she could physically eject Kieran from the room.

He left quietly, and Elyse tore the card up and tossed it into the trash.

When Jayden reentered the ward, he found Elyse visibly upset on the bed. Raising an eyebrow, he inquired, “What’s got you down?”

Elyse’s expression darkened further. “Kieran Foster was here just now.”

Jayden was taken aback. “The next head of the Foster family?” He quickly recalled any information he had about Kieran and asked sharply, “What did he want?”

With a scoff, Elyse relayed, “He came under the guise of apologizing, then tried to coerce me into leaving you. He even offered to marry me.” Her annoyance grew as she spoke. Kieran’s audacity appalled her.

Jayden didn’t show anger but chuckled instead. “The Foster family always has bizarre schemes, but they won’t be so bold for much longer.”

Elyse looked at him curiously. “What do you mean? Are you planning something against the Foster family?”

Jayden merely smiled, suggesting she would find out soon enough.

Outside, Kieran's demeanor shifted to a grimace as he strode from the hospital. He climbed into the waiting car where the butler in the passenger seat turned to him and asked, "Mr. Foster, did Ms. Lloyd accept your proposal?"

Kieran snorted dismissively. "She doesn't recognize a good deal. She'd rather stay with a cripple than marry me."

The butler clicked his tongue and pondered for a moment before saying, "They say Jayden married his true love by chance. Could he and Elyse actually be a devoted couple?"

Kieran responded with scorn, "True love? It's just that I didn't offer her enough money and leverage." His irritation flared as he thought of Joanna's failure. "Is Joanna back yet? Drive. She's been nothing but a disappointment."

Chapter 119:

Kieran returned home to find Joanna awaiting him in a dimly lit, cramped room adorned with various torture instruments. The lack of windows and the flickering light created an oppressive atmosphere. Joanna sat on the cold marble floor, gripping her garment tightly. As Kieran approached, her body shook with fear, and his eyes gleamed with deadly intent.

"Did you really think this was the way to execute the task our family assigned to you?" Kieran spoke in a measured, gentle manner, but to Joanna, his words sounded like a death sentence. He was the most feared member of the Foster family.

"What? Are you lost for words?" Kieran inquired as Joanna remained silent.

Observing her quiet demeanor, he sighed. "Since you have no explanation, I'll forgo politeness. You were clearly in the wrong." He retrieved a torture device from the cabinet, and Joanna's eyes filled with desperation. That night, her cries of despair echoed throughout the dark, cramped room of the Foster household.

On the second day, Joanna returned to her room covered in wounds. She noticed an unread message on her phone. After reading it, her despair deepened.

"Jayden, you want to drive me to death, don't you?" she whispered, her eyes wild with madness.

That afternoon, despite the Foster family's restrictions, Joanna secretly took a car and fled the city. She drove straight to a mountain and deliberately plunged her car off a cliff.

On the opposite side of the cliff, a woman in red high heels witnessed Joanna's fatal descent. Soon, the news reached Elyse, who had just come home from the hospital. When Jayden relayed the tragic event, her first instinct was to suspect his involvement.

"Did you do it?" she asked.

Jayden, fiddling with his watch band, replied nonchalantly, "You thought I did it. Show me the evidence before making such claims."

Elyse rolled her eyes. How could she possibly gather any proof? Yet Jayden's composed demeanor suggested he was uninvolved. Reflecting on Joanna's demise, a demise she admittedly felt no sorrow for, Elyse caught herself sighing inwardly.

Just days ago, Joanna had attempted to kill her. "What actions will the Foster family take following Joanna's death?" she inquired.

"They'll do nothing. To them, Joanna was merely a pawn. Her passing means little," Jayden responded, then remembered something else. "I also heard they didn't bother to bury her."

Elyse was taken aback by the Foster family's ruthless indifference, though it seemed consistent with their psychologically disturbed nature. Both Kieran and Joanna were mentally twisted.

Resting on the sofa, Elyse tried to relax. Later that evening, Brook arrived unannounced.

"Jayden, have you heard about Joanna's suicide?" he queried.

Without looking up, Jayden replied calmly, "Yes, I'm aware."

Brook stood in the living room, scrutinizing Jayden intently. "Any insights into her death?"

"Not at all," Jayden stated indifferently.

Despite Brook's persistent gaze trying to decipher Jayden's indifferent facade, Jayden showed no concern.

After a pause, Brook turned to Elyse with a forced smile. "I heard about your recent kidnapping. Are you okay? How did you manage to return?"

Elyse had her story ready. "Kidnappings are somewhat usual for the Owen family. I picked up some escape skills and seized an opportunity to flee."

Elyse had crafted that excuse long before. In truth, she didn't quite know how her escape had been successful. She had a vague memory of seeing Jayden, but given his mobility issues, how could he have rescued her?

Nevertheless, it was indeed Jayden's men who had come to her aid. To keep Jayden's capabilities concealed, Elyse felt compelled to fabricate her own story.

Brook accepted Elyse's explanation without suspicion. It was common for heirs of affluent families to receive such training, and Elyse seemed particularly fortunate. He had been intent on uncovering the truth, but Joanna's suicide seemed to have severed all leads.

"Why would she take her own life if she wanted to survive badly?" Sensing a deeper mystery, Brook pressed further. "Jayden, you're quite fortunate. With Joanna gone, no one will challenge Elyse for her position anymore."

Jayden's response was icy. "Even if she were alive, she couldn't have contested Elyse's position."

Chapter 120:

Jayden remained as stubborn as ever. Brook smirked at him. "I never pegged you to be an affectionate person, nor did I expect you to end up being so deeply attached to Elyse."

Jayden didn't even look at him. "Instead of speculating on my personality and relationship, you should hurry and find yourself a wife."

Brook glanced at Elyse and gave a little snort. “Well, I need to get back to the company for a meeting.” Then he left.

“What did he mean?” Elyse asked Jayden once Brook was gone. “What does he have to do with Joanna’s suicide that he would specifically come and inquire about it?”

“He did go out of his way, didn’t he? That must mean there’s a connection between him and Joanna.”

Joanna had once managed to slip away from the whole Owen family’s watch, and on such an important day too. Not only that, but she was also able to hide away for a certain length of time. She would have never done these things without the help of someone powerful. Moreover, she was somehow allowed to show up at Enzo’s house afterward. If Brook hadn’t interceded on her behalf, she might have been beaten at first sight.

Jayden sneered inwardly. It seemed that Brook had really gone all out just to win their grandfather’s favor and seize leadership of the Owen family.

“Mr. Owen, your mother is calling,” Driscoll came over holding the home phone, looking a little worried.

Jayden was quite surprised. His parents had been cold to him ever since the accident. No one even called to greet him during the festivals or any other special occasions. Why was his mother calling now?

He took the phone and pressed it to his ear. Before he could even greet his mother, she spoke in a tired voice. “Come home, Jayden. Something happened to your brother.”

“If he is ill, then send him to the hospital,” Jayden said calmly. “What do you expect a cripple like me to do about his circumstances?”

This wasn’t the response Tess was expecting from him. “How can you say such things?” she snapped. “I tell you something happened to your brother, and this is how you react? You are his big brother for goodness’ sake. Come home right away, or you can just forget you ever had a mother.”

She was snarling toward the end in a voice so loud that even Elyse heard her. “What happened to your brother?” she whispered to Jayden with a frown. “Why would your mother talk about disowning you?”

“Mr. Owen,” Driscoll also asked with concern. “What happened?”

Jayden ignored their questions and handed the phone back to the butler. “Arrange for a car. I won’t know what happened if I don’t go there.”

And so, Elyse and Jayden drove over to his parents’ house.

They had barely stepped onto the porch when they heard the commotion inside. Bryce was sobbing while Tess and Andrew fought in the background. Taking a deep breath to brace herself, Elyse followed Jayden through the front door. She was greeted by a teacup soaring in her direction like a missile, landing on its target. Fortunately, Jayden caught it at the last second, or she would have been gravely injured.

Jayden fiddled with the cup and glared at his brother. “Bryce,” he said slowly, “if you throw another temper tantrum, I will throw you out.”

Elyse was surprised to see Bryce calm down the moment he saw Jayden, but there was obvious resentment in the younger man’s eyes. Now that Bryce had finally quieted down, Tess turned to Jayden and proceeded to berate him. “How can you say that to your little brother? Throw him out? Who do you think you are?”

Then she walked up to Bryce and took his face in her hands. “What is it, my baby? Why are you upset, hmm? Did something happen?”

Bryce just turned away without saying anything and stepped away from his mother. He had been kicking up a fuss out of nowhere, and Andrew was utterly exhausted. “If you have something to say, then come out of your room and discuss it with us like a proper adult,” he ordered the butler to prepare tea and plopped down on the living room sofa.

Tess took Bryce’s hand and urged him out of his bedroom. When they passed by Jayden, Bryce deliberately bumped into Jayden’s wheelchair. Bryce was an overweight person, and he didn’t hold back his strength. He used so much force that Jayden’s wheelchair was almost overturned to the side.

Elyse hurriedly took the handles and steadied the wheelchair. “What are you doing?” she asked, exasperated. “Are you trying to hurt Jayden?” Bryce just rolled his eyes at her and snorted.

Tess, on the other hand, turned sharply and glared at her with disapproval. “What are you being so cross for? Jayden didn’t get hurt, did he? He’s sitting right there. I’m warning you, don’t even think about criticizing my son.”

Elyse had already known about Tess’s favoritism toward Bryce, but she never expected it to be this bad. She opened her mouth to defend Jayden, but he stopped her.

“It’s okay. You don’t have to do anything on my account.”

He had long since grown used to this treatment. It didn’t even affect him now.

But it was all new to Elyse, and she couldn’t help but feel aggrieved for him. Just then, something caught her eye. On the floor just inside Bryce’s room was a phone. Its screen was lit up, and on it was Joanna’s photo.