

## Bound love 1291

Chapter 1291:

Celeste's eyes narrowed as she studied Elyse. "A slick talker, just like your worthless father. Always armed with a barrage of words for every one of mine."

Elyse responded with a serene smile, subtly shaking her head. "You're misunderstanding my intentions. I'm simply asserting my innocence."

Celeste's expression twisted into a derisive sneer, her eyes glinting with a complex, unreadable emotion as they locked onto Elyse. After a moment of silence, Elyse ventured cautiously, "I understand you're also a victor of the Swan Cup. Perhaps we could exchange perspectives on the event, if you're agreeable."

Celeste arched an eyebrow skeptically. "You believe yourself qualified to engage in conversation with me?"

Elyse met her skepticism with unwavering resolve. "Yes, I do believe so."

"Your confidence borders on arrogance," Celeste retorted, her tone dripping with disdain. "You truly are your father's daughter, inheriting his exact disdainful traits."

"Enough already!" The sudden, commanding voice cut through the tension like a blade. "Celeste, do you think I'm dead or something? If you've got an issue, deal with me directly—not my granddaughter. She doesn't even know your name, yet here you are, bullying her like some playground tyrant. Honestly, at your age, it's disgraceful."

All eyes turned as another elderly woman emerged from the crowd, her presence demanding attention. It was Felicia.

Clad in a striking dark red dress intricately embroidered, her eyes magnified by old-fashioned reading glasses, Felicia exuded authority with every purposeful step. She moved to Elyse's side, positioning herself like a guardian hen shielding her chick from a predator.

With her voice thick with contempt, Felicia confronted Celeste, her tone leaving no room for rebuttal.

“Take a good hard look at yourself, Celeste. By what right do you harass my granddaughter, expecting her to bend to your whims? Do you really think you deserve such deference?” Felicia’s voice was sharp, her presence unyielding.

Celeste’s eyes sparked with rage as she growled, “I was addressing her, not you. Who gave you the authority to judge me? Disappear. Vanish from my sight. I can’t stand even a glimpse of you.”

Felicia’s anger flared in response. “You don’t wish to see me? Well, the feeling’s mutual. Your presence shaves years off my life.”

Elyse, alarmed by Felicia’s words, quickly grabbed her arm and frowned. “Don’t curse yourself like that! Don’t you know words like that invite bad luck?”

Felicia’s anger softened as she noticed Elyse’s genuine concern. Taking Elyse’s hand tenderly, she said, “Oh, dear, you’ve been pushing yourself too much. You look thinner since your trip abroad—it breaks my heart.”

Elyse shifted uncomfortably under Felicia’s sudden warmth, her eyes darting toward Pearce in a silent plea for help.

Pearce caught her cue and stepped forward. “Grandma, perhaps this isn’t the right moment. Shouldn’t we focus on resolving Celeste’s issue first?”

Felicia scoffed, casting Celeste a disdainful look. “Her? Why not just throw her out? She’s worthless. Does she really deserve our respect?”

Celeste’s expression darkened at Felicia’s harsh words, her fury barely concealed.

Chapter 1292:

With a frown wrinkling her forehead, Elyse raised a hand to silence Felicia’s rising temper. “Ms. Griffin is my guest. Why would you suggest she leave?”

Despite Celeste's less-than-gracious behavior, Elyse understood the importance of tact. Dismissing Celeste outright, and by extension the Griffin family, carried no benefits.

Felicia's expression faltered, her pride making an apology impossible. Elyse, taking control of the situation, stepped in front of her grandmother and moved toward Celeste with deliberate, composed steps.

"My grandmother tends to speak plainly. Please accept my apologies on her behalf," Elyse said, her tone steady and respectful.

Celeste watched Elyse intently, her lips pressed into a firm line, her thoughts unreadable. After a moment, she spoke, her tone sharp. "Felicia's temperament is no mystery to me. I will disregard this incident for your sake, but..."

Her voice thick with disdain, Celeste continued, "You must admit your own lack of skills and that your victory in the Swan Cup was not honestly won."

The room erupted in murmurs of shock. Celeste's reputation in the music world was immeasurable; her favor could elevate someone to stardom. Her blatant disrespect toward Elyse was already damaging, but to publicly question her talent?

Celeste's words hung in the air, heavy with a subtle yet unmistakable threat to Elyse's career. Elyse stood frozen, caught off guard by the accusation.

Even if Celeste had longstanding grievances with Cody and her father, it didn't excuse this unwarranted attack on her.

"But with all due respect, I cannot agree. The Swan Cup was a result of my own effort and integrity," said Elyse, her voice steady despite the tension.

"Really?" Celeste's temper flared as she stood abruptly, her cane striking the floor with a sharp thud. "I gave you a chance to acknowledge your flaws and offered my guidance. Your refusal disappoints me. You will regret this decision."

Without another word, Celeste turned and exited swiftly, leaving a stunned silence in her wake.

Felicia, her face flushed with anger, chased after her, her words cutting through the air. “How dare you, Celeste? Threatening my granddaughter? You will not tarnish Elyse’s good name without consequence!”

“Grandma!” Elyse’s voice quivered, a mix of surprise and bewilderment. Why had the disagreement between Felicia and Celeste escalated so quickly into such a fierce confrontation?

Pearce, equally shocked, stepped forward and gently held Elyse back to prevent her from intervening. Then, hurrying after Felicia, he tried to diffuse the situation before it spiraled further.

As Pearce restrained her, Felicia’s fury boiled over. She glared at Celeste’s retreating figure and turned to Pearce with fiery eyes. “Why are you holding me back? Celeste has crossed the line. I will not let her vile behavior go unchecked!”

Pearce whispered urgently, trying to calm her. “Grandma, this is supposed to be a celebration of Elyse’s return. Why start a conflict now with Celeste?”

“She attacked Elyse unprovoked. I cannot let her go unpunished!” Felicia said, her voice seething with determination.

Chapter 1293:

Pearce exhaled deeply, his tone soothing. “Grandma, try to ignore her. Her accusations are baseless. They’re not worth your anger.”

Elyse approached Felicia slowly, her gaze filled with a mix of emotions. Her feelings toward Felicia were complicated. She had once dreamed of Felicia, her father’s mother, as a source of unconditional family love. Yet moments like these left her torn between gratitude for Felicia’s fierce defense and unease at the intensity of her reactions.

Elyse had never experienced the love of her parents or any other family members. When she first learned of Felicia’s existence, she had imagined an idealized reunion—Felicia would embrace her, speak to her with warmth, and ask about her past, curious about the hardships she had endured. Yet the reality of their meeting had shattered those hopes.

For a fleeting moment, Elyse felt undeserving of family love, as though she was destined to remain alone. But she quickly composed herself, clearing away her idealistic expectations of Felicia. She resolved to face whatever came her way with calm and peace.

Facing Elyse now, Felicia's heart raced. Gripping her cane tightly, she managed a strained smile. "My dear, I hope your journey here was smooth. Please forgive my absence at your competition; I have been unwell."

Beside her, Pearce nodded in agreement. "That's true. Grandma had to undergo a minor surgery."

Elyse felt no resentment for their absence at her competition. Instead, she offered a gentle smile. "Grandma, you need to focus on your health. You're not as young as you once were."

Felicia mustered a smile, though she couldn't ignore the subtle gap Elyse had placed between them. Elyse's expression was cordial but cool, her polite smile as distant as a winter's day. There was no trace of warmth, only a thin veil of civility.

Guilt gnawed at Felicia as memories of past wrongs replayed in her mind. Masking her regret with a cheerful facade, she reached out and gently placed her hand over Elyse's.

Elyse instinctively flinched, ready to pull back, but the watchful eyes of the guests reminded her of the need for composure. She stiffened her arm, allowing Felicia to hold it, her restraint as firm as steel.

Without missing a beat, Felicia slid a jade bracelet off her own wrist and slipped it onto Elyse's. Elyse blinked in surprise, recoiling slightly.

"Grandma, this is far too valuable. I can't accept it," she said, her fingers already poised to return the bracelet.

Felicia clasped Elyse's hand tightly, her expression tinged with a mix of resignation and longing. "This bracelet was always meant for your mom. But I... I never approved of her, so I held onto it all these years."

She studied Elyse's hand with a faint, bittersweet smile. "I've come to realize it was selfish to keep it. It should've been hers. And since that's no longer possible, it belongs to you."

Felicia added softly, her voice trembling with emotion, “Passing it on to you brings me a sense of peace.”

The weight of Felicia’s words left Elyse bewildered, the reasoning behind the gesture slipping through her fingers like sand. She glanced down at the bracelet, her expression torn.

Chapter 1294:

“Wouldn’t this be better suited for Pearce’s mom? Why give it to me?”

Felicia chose not to elaborate, simply pressing Elyse to accept it.

Elyse hesitated, her gaze flickering to Pearce, who gave her a subtle nod of encouragement. At last, she relented, slipping her hand away from Felicia’s grasp without further protest. Felicia exhaled a sigh of relief, her smile growing eager.

“Elyse, why not come home for a while? The garden is blooming beautifully this time of year—it would do you good to see it.”

Elyse paused, carefully measuring her response. “I’ve been up to my ears in work, Grandma. I’ll have to check with my agent, but I’ll try to swing by for a meal soon.”

Pearce’s brows furrowed in confusion. “An agent? You’ve hired one already? Are they any good?”

Chloe, standing discreetly behind Elyse, cleared her throat and stepped forward with a polite cough. “I’m Chloe Jones, Elyse’s agent. You can rest assured she’s in good hands.”

Felicia gave Chloe a once-over before turning back to Elyse, her concern evident. “Only one agent? That hardly seems enough! Let me find a few assistants to help. You’ve got so much on your plate, and I want to make sure you’re looked after properly.”

Elyse’s lips quirked into a wry smile, her tone light but firm. “Grandma, I’m working, not running a royal court. I don’t need a whole entourage fussing over me.”

Felicia's face fell ever so slightly, her disappointment plain to see. She couldn't help but reflect on her granddaughter's fiercely independent spirit. The Benson family had wealth in abundance—surely Elyse could stay home and savor life's comforts instead of pushing herself so hard.

Felicia struggled to understand why Elyse willingly subjected herself to the grind, working under others' expectations and whims. Yet, she swallowed her thoughts, unwilling to risk upsetting Elyse.

Chloe, checking her watch, leaned in and whispered softly, "It's almost time. We should prepare."

Elyse nodded, then turned to her family with a polite smile. "Excuse me. I need to take care of something."

Felicia tilted her head curiously. "What are you up to, sweetheart?"

Pearce, aware of the evening's schedule, leaned closer and whispered, "Grandma, just wait a little longer. You'll see."

Felicia muttered a few words under her breath but refrained from pressing further.

Moments later, the lights in the venue dimmed, leaving only a soft ambient glow. A murmur of curiosity rippled through the hall as guests exchanged puzzled glances. Then, a spotlight cut through the dimness, illuminating a single figure—Elyse, poised gracefully with a violin in hand.

Chloe's clear voice echoed through the microphone. "Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us at Elyse Lloyd's welcome banquet. To express her gratitude, she will now perform a special piece for you."

Elyse closed her eyes briefly, letting the world fade away, and drew her bow across the strings.

The melody began, tender and heartfelt, each note weaving a tapestry of emotion that captivated the audience.

Chapter 1295:

Felicia's gaze remained fixed on Elyse, a storm of feelings swirling within her. In the soft glow of the spotlight, Elyse's silhouette, poised with her violin, blurred in Felicia's mind, merging with bittersweet memories of Rickey. For a fleeting moment, it was as though her son stood before her again, his talent shining through the years.

Felicia's thoughts drifted back to the countless accolades Rickey had received, his extraordinary skill and profound understanding of music earning him admiration from all who heard him. If Rickey had pursued the violin, his brilliance would undoubtedly have eclipsed even Celeste's greatest accomplishments.

But fate—and her own choices—had robbed him of that future. The violin, once a symbol of Rickey's brilliance, now lay silent, its voice forever stilled. The world would never again hear his music.

A lump formed in her throat as Felicia whispered under her breath, her voice heavy with guilt and longing, "He can't play anymore, so Elyse has taken up where he left off."

The audience erupted in thunderous applause as Elyse concluded her performance. She acknowledged their appreciation with a graceful bow, while Chloe, beaming with pride, captured the moment on her phone, certain the footage would create a stir online.

As the celebration wound down past ten, guests began filtering out, allowing Elyse to release a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. Jayden, who had maintained a watchful presence nearby, approached her, a newfound insight reflected in his eyes.

"You're far stronger than I ever realized," he said thoughtfully.

Elyse met his gaze with questioning eyes, uncertain of his meaning. "What do you mean?"

"I've been watching you tonight," he explained, his voice carrying a note of discovery.

"And what did you see?" Elyse asked, curiosity lacing her tone.

"I saw someone who thrives independently—in social circles, in challenging situations. Whether faced with hostility or kindness, you navigate it all with remarkable grace. You're perfectly capable without me by your side."



His words left Elyse speechless, their weight settling heavily in the space between them. She stared at him, her emotions shifting like waves beneath the surface.

“I never imagined you were observing me so carefully,” she finally said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Jayden watched, startled, as tears began to trail down her cheeks. “Why are you crying? I—I didn’t say anything to upset you, did I?” he stammered, clearly caught off guard by her response.

“I’ll cry if I want to,” Elyse shot back, hastily wiping her tears. “It’s none of your concern.”

Pearce, returning from bidding farewell to the last guest, noticed Elyse’s tears and immediately assumed the worst. His protective instincts flared as he stormed toward Jayden, seizing him by the collar.

“Again? How many tears must she shed before you’re satisfied? Why do you constantly hurt her?”

Chapter 1296:

Jayden, uncharacteristically silent, finally offered a quiet defense. “I genuinely don’t know why she’s crying this time.”

“You must have done something!” Pearce’s voice rose sharply. He turned to Elyse for confirmation, but she merely dabbed her eyes and retreated toward the garden. Frowning at her silence, Pearce released Jayden and moved to follow.

When Jayden attempted to do the same, Pearce whirled around with a fierce warning. “Stay back, you heartless bastard!”

Despite his frustration, Jayden held his ground, knowing better than to challenge Pearce when it came to Elyse.

Pearce found Elyse standing motionless beside the fountain, her reflection rippling in the water below. “What happened?” he asked gently. “Did he upset you?”

Elyse wrapped her arms around herself, her gaze fixed on the flowing water. “It’s not his fault, Pearce. Don’t blame him.”

“Already defending him?” Pearce asked, his tone tinged with disbelief.

“It’s the truth,” she insisted softly. “He’s not to blame this time.”

“Then why the tears?” he pressed, his voice a mixture of concern and confusion.

After a prolonged silence, Elyse whispered, “Today, he finally saw me—the real me.”

“What?” Pearce’s confusion was evident.

“He recognized my ability to handle relationships, to navigate social situations,” she explained, her voice steady but tinged with emotion. “He realized I’m not the delicate flower he imagined—that I’m capable of standing on my own.”

Pearce rubbed his chin thoughtfully, surprised that the self-centered Jayden had actually taken such an observation to heart.

Elyse continued to stare at the dancing water, her voice heavy with realization. “After all this time, he truly saw me. I never knew how desperately I wanted his recognition, his acknowledgment, until this moment.”

“Now that he sees you clearly,” Pearce said softly, his tone gentle yet encouraging, “perhaps your wish wasn’t as impossible as you thought.”

Elyse gathered her composure before returning to the banquet hall, where Jayden remained, unmoved from his earlier position.

“Despite the tears I caused, you’ll still return with me, won’t you?” Jayden’s voice carried a hint of uncertainty.

After a moment's contemplation, Elyse gave a subtle nod. Pearce, witnessing the scene as he approached, felt his heart shatter.

"Know your station," he snapped, closing the distance between them. "What gives you the right to whisk Elyse away?"

"My station is clear—I'm Elyse's boyfriend," Jayden declared firmly.

A cold smile spread across Pearce's lips. "That's not for you to decide. Don't even entertain the thought."

Jayden drew Elyse closer, his protective stance unmistakable. "Your opinion holds no weight in this matter."

"Is that so? And what if I withhold my blessing?" Felicia's voice cut through the tension as she steadied herself on her cane, fixing Jayden with a penetrating stare.

Chapter 1297:

Pearce's earlier accounts of Jayden echoed in Felicia's mind. Though he had been neither cruel nor kind as Elyse's husband, her granddaughter had endured countless silent struggles during their marriage.

By the time Felicia learned of the details, the divorce was already final, leaving her powerless to intervene. Now, witnessing Jayden's persistence in pursuing Elyse despite their divorce, anger flared within her. Elyse had suffered through a troubled marriage without protection once before—this time would be different. Felicia resolved to stand guard.

"Mrs. Benson," Jayden addressed her with calculated respect, "misunderstandings cloud my relationship with Elyse. I ask only for a chance to mend what's broken between us."

"Nonsense!" Felicia lifted her chin defiantly. "The Owen family may command influence, but the Bensons stand their ground. If you truly desire Elyse's hand, prove your worth!"

Pearce shifted uncomfortably between them, attempting to diffuse the rising tension. "Please, this should be Elyse's choice. If she wishes to give Jayden another chance, we must respect that."

“Absolutely not!” Felicia bristled. “Do you suggest I don’t have Elyse’s best interests at heart?” Her voice grew more impassioned. “She’s my granddaughter, and I won’t watch her happiness crumble twice!” She pointed at Jayden. “You are not the one to bring her joy!”

Discomfort lined Elyse’s features as she carefully considered her response. “My happiness isn’t yours to determine,” she stated, her tone measured and calm.

Turning to Felicia, she continued with gentle firmness, “Grandma, I’ve always charted my own course. I take full responsibility for my choices—including my marriage.” Elyse offered a graceful bow and a composed smile. “It’s growing late, and work awaits tomorrow. Please rest early.”

With that, she gathered her dress and departed alongside Chloe. Jayden bid Felicia farewell before hastening after them.

Felicia remained frozen, her thoughts swirling as the reality slowly dawned on her. “Have I angered Elyse?” she asked softly.

Pearce exhaled heavily, his expression reflective as silence settled between them.

“Grandma, marriage is deeply personal. Your recent connection to Elyse doesn’t grant you authority over her choices.”

Hurt flickered across Felicia’s features as she defended herself. “I only want to protect her. The Owen family’s power brings complications. Most would jump at such a connection, but at what cost?”

She released a heavy sigh. “Elyse had no one watching over her marriage, no one to shield her. She fell prey to the wrong man. Now that she’s free, should mere sentiment drive her back?”

Felicia clutched her chest in remorse, silently cursing her delayed presence in Elyse’s life, unable to spare her from Jayden’s influence.

Recognizing Felicia’s stubborn concern, Pearce spoke gently. “Elyse learns and grows from her choices. Her independent spirit impresses me—like a wildflower, she blooms most brilliantly when free.”

“You call it freedom,” Felicia murmured, her voice laced with regret. “But I see a child left to weather storms alone.”

Chapter 1298:

Pearce’s lips curved into a knowing smile. “Perhaps, but Elyse has flourished regardless. She possesses strong convictions and embraces accountability for her path. Her strength commands my respect. Since you care for her, try to appreciate this remarkable quality in her.”

Before stepping into Jayden’s car, Elyse carefully confirmed her work schedule with Chloe, her demeanor calm and deliberate. Only after everything was finalized did she turn and enter the vehicle. Jayden followed closely, his presence a shadow tethered to hers.

The car doors closed with a faint thud, and as the engine hummed to life, Elyse turned her gaze toward the passing cityscape. After a moment of silence, her voice broke the stillness.

“I didn’t expect you to say all that to my grandma. Were you being sincere?”

Jayden turned slightly, his expression measured. “She deserves my respect.”

Elyse shifted her gaze to meet his, her face calm but unreadable. “But she’s made it very clear she’s dissatisfied with you and doesn’t want me to marry you.”

A long pause settled between them, as though Jayden were carefully choosing his words. Finally, he spoke, his voice deliberate. “When you left to go abroad, and I found myself pursuing you, I had a deep conversation with Peyton. He said something that has stuck with me—something I’ve been reflecting on ever since. He told me that from the very beginning, you and I were destined to be husband and wife, but neither of us was ready for the weight of that bond. We weren’t equipped to face the challenges of marriage, especially since our relationship lacked the solid foundation that other couples often take for granted.”

Elyse’s lips parted slightly in surprise, the candor in his words catching her off guard. Peyton’s insight seemed to cast a light on the flaws she hadn’t fully understood. Back then, the anxiety of marrying Jayden without truly knowing him, without the time to nurture their relationship, had plagued her. When the inevitable conflicts arose, she felt overwhelmed, unprepared for the gravity of what lay ahead.

Elyse felt unarmed and unprepared to handle the challenges that had come with their marriage. More than that, she had barely known him. Their divorce had been a painful but necessary decision. Continuing the relationship had felt like steering a sinking ship—it was better to abandon it than to go down with it.

After a pause, Elyse's voice, tinged with fragility, broke the silence. "And then?"

Jayden began, his tone steady. "Peyton suggested something that made sense. He said that if the divorce was inevitable, I should start over. Court you, like a normal couple would. Build something real and strong—day by day, step by step. He advised me to work through problems as they come, and only once the relationship is on solid ground, bring our families into the equation."

Jayden's voice softened, carrying a vulnerability Elyse wasn't accustomed to hearing. "Right now, Felicia is your most important family member. Even if she disapproves of me, I need to win her over. No woman dreams of marrying without her family's blessing."

As his words settled in the air, Elyse felt an unexpected warmth seep into her heart. A part of her, long encased in skepticism, softened at the earnestness he displayed. Perhaps, just perhaps, Jayden was indeed changing. Slowly, yes, but the shift was unmistakable.

Her eyes glistened, and a faint smile tugged at her lips. "I never thought you'd be so serious."

Jayden chuckled, his tone tinged with self-deprecation. "Peyton warned me—if I mess this up, I'll face the consequences."

Chapter 1299:

Elyse laughed softly, teasing, "You really hang on to his every word, don't you?"

Jayden shrugged, a boyish grin forming. "Peyton's more grounded than I am. If I follow his lead, I might just get it right. On my own? I'd surely make a mess."

Elyse shook her head, her voice carrying a quiet conviction.

“You’re not as flawed as you think. The differences between us are born of experience, not anything inherently wrong with either of us. All we need is time to untangle those knots.”

Jayden’s eyes lit up with a mischievous glint. “Then let’s start untangling tonight. Will you work through things with me?”

Elyse playfully swatted his arm, her voice firm but amused. “Separate rooms tonight!”

His face darkened in mock indignation. She had just preached about working through issues, yet when he presented one, she dismissed it outright! No, he wasn’t going to let her off so easily.

Elyse, oblivious to his resolve, was still wrapped in the warmth of the quiet moment. The hum of the car filled the silence, now peaceful rather than tense.

When they arrived home, Driscoll greeted them at the door, his expression lined with unease.

Jayden’s brow furrowed. “What’s wrong? Is there an issue at home?”

The butler hesitated. “Debora called. She’s landed and will be here in half an hour to see you.”

Elyse froze at the mention of Debora, her voice sharp with confusion. “Why is she coming?”

Jayden had already cut ties with the Owens, so why was Debora coming to see him? Elyse’s concern deepened, her mind racing with questions.

Jayden’s expression turned contemplative. After a moment, he said, “I’ll find out when she gets here. Let her in.”

Elyse searched his face, her concern palpable as the air around them grew heavier.

“Are the Owens in trouble? Could she be seeking your help?” Elyse’s voice carried a hint of unease.

Jayden's gaze darkened, shadows flitting across his features. "I don't know. But we'll soon find out." He gently placed a reassuring hand on her back, his voice softening. "You have an early day tomorrow. Go freshen up and rest."

Elyse hesitated for a moment, concern still etched on her face, but she eventually nodded and retreated toward the house. Jayden watched her disappear inside, a long sigh escaping his lips.

Driscoll, still standing nearby, spoke cautiously. "Sir, Debora might not have good intentions."

Jayden loosened his tie, his tone calm yet resolute. "Whatever her motives, let her in. We'll deal with it."

Jayden sat in his study, his attention fixed on the mountain of work before him as time ticked by. Twenty minutes passed before a knock echoed through the door. It was Driscoll, informing him that Debora had arrived. Without lifting his eyes, Jayden's voice remained icy and detached. "Let her wait."

The work on his desk demanded his focus, and Debora's impatience could simmer for as long as necessary.

Chapter 1300:

Another thirty minutes drifted by. Finally, Jayden set the documents aside and made his way out of the study, his movements deliberate and unhurried.

In the living room, Debora sat with a glass of water in her hand, her demeanor far from friendly. The longer Jayden had kept her waiting, the more agitated she had become. His cold indifference only stoked the fire within her.

As soon as she saw him, she slammed the glass down onto the table and snapped, "Jayden, you really have some nerve! Making me wait this long—who do you think you are?"

Jayden laughed softly under his breath at her outburst. "Oh, who do I think I am? I know exactly who I am. But the real question is, who do you think you are?"



Fury flashed across Debora's face. "Don't think you can push me around just because you're older! You, who's so heartless and ungrateful, have no right to judge me!"

Jayden shrugged, his expression calm and unreadable. "Say what you want. It doesn't matter to me."

Debora felt the sting of his dismissal. Unable to contain herself any longer, she burst out, "You don't care? You've already ruined your relationship with Grandpa, and we kept quiet about it. But to actually plot his death? If it weren't for—"

"Corrie, we would have never known! We were completely fooled by you!" Debora's voice rose to a crescendo. "Yes, Grandpa was tough on you, but does that give you the right to kill him? Even if he had a thousand faults, killing him is beyond forgiveness!"

Before Jayden could respond, a sharp, cold voice interrupted from the stairs. "Are you sure it was him who killed your grandfather?"

Elyse, dressed in a purple silk nightgown, her hair cascading loosely over her shoulders, descended the staircase with a glass in hand. Her gaze locked onto Debora, icy and piercing, cutting through the tension like a blade. The unspoken threat in Elyse's eyes made Debora's blood run cold.

Debora was taken aback by the intensity of Elyse's stare. What was this about? She hadn't done anything to warrant such hostility, had she?

"This is between Jayden and me," Debora muttered, her voice laced with disdain. "It's a family matter. You, as an outsider, have no place in it."

Debora had heard from Brook that Elyse and Jayden were divorced, which meant Elyse was no longer part of their family—just an outsider.

Elyse took a deliberate step down the last few stairs. Jayden instinctively moved to steady her, but she brushed him aside with a subtle gesture.

Her descent was unhurried, her presence commanding the room with every step, her eyes never leaving Debora. Authority radiated from her like an unshakable force.

Debora stumbled back, momentarily disoriented. What was happening? Had Elyse always been this formidable? She remembered her as the quiet, delicate woman who always followed Jayden's lead—gentle and unassuming. But this Elyse was entirely different, a woman who exuded strength and control.

Debora stared at Elyse, struggling to reconcile the delicate woman she once knew with the fierce presence before her. There was a power in Elyse now, a commanding energy that seemed to fill the room and weigh heavily on her.

Debora faltered, her voice shaky. "What do you want?"