

Bound love 1371

Chapter 1371:

Peering into Elyse's conflicted expression, Jayden pressed gently, "Is it hard to imagine that Tracy could be plotting something so dark?"

Elyse's words were caught in her throat. As she met Jayden's steady gaze, her inner conflict deepened. Noticing her slouched shoulders, Jayden tenderly held her face.

"If it were just Shaun's accident, I might suspect a business rival. But then Dolores's incident occurred right after Tracy appeared... It's hard not to be suspicious of her."

Elyse turned her head away, avoiding his gaze and remaining silent. It was clear she was closing off.

Jayden sighed. "Okay, I won't push you to talk if you're not ready. But one thing is clear now. Tracy isn't dead. She's very much alive."

Elyse whispered faintly, almost to herself, "It's a relief she's alive. At least... at least I don't have to grieve."

"What will you do when she comes looking for you?" Jayden asked softly.

Elyse shrugged. "I'll just go along with whatever she wants to discuss. I won't say more than necessary."

Jayden raised an eyebrow, taken aback. "Are you planning on just ignoring the whole situation?"

Elyse shot him a look, her eyes flashing with irritation. "I just can't believe she would do such a thing. When she returns, she's still my best friend!"

Jayden attempted to calm her. "Fine. Maybe you're right, Tracy wouldn't harm anyone. I'll be there with you when you meet her, alright?"

Elyse snorted and turned her back, dismissing him.

Jayden touched his nose and, unable to hold back, voiced the question that truly bothered him. “So, should I maybe look into where she is?”

Elyse’s response was explosive. “Absolutely not! Don’t you dare! Just stick to your own tasks!”

“Yes, ma’am,” Jayden replied, reluctantly dropping the topic about Tracy.

At the hospital, Velma sat on the bed, exhaling deeply.

The state of Shaun left her feeling completely helpless.

Hanley, sitting next to her with a somber expression, said gently after a pause, “The doctor said familiar surroundings might help his memory. We should consider moving Shaun back to Liverton. It’s home, after all.”

Velma nodded in agreement. “That sounds like a good plan. Maybe being back will trigger something. Perhaps his memory will start to return.”

“I’ll go talk to Shaun and get him ready. We don’t want him getting agitated and resistant,” Hanley said as he stood up and made his way to Shaun’s room.

Shaun was at the sink, freshening up for the night when Hanley entered.

Shaun scrutinized Hanley from head to toe, his tone devoid of emotion. “What are you doing here?”

Chapter 1372:

Hanley disregarded his coldness. “Your mother and I have decided to move you back to Liverton. The doctor believes it could help restore your memory. We’re planning the transfer in the next few days.”

Shaun's eyebrows knitted together. "I never agreed to any transfer. Who gave you the right to make decisions about my life?"

Hanley's frustration was palpable. "We're doing this for your benefit, Shaun! We just want you to recover!"

"I am content with my life now! I eat well and sleep well. You two are just disturbing my peaceful life."

Hanley's voice escalated. "So, you're okay with living like this forever? With amnesia, not knowing your own identity, and oblivious to your responsibilities?"

Shaun responded sharply, "Are those responsibilities really mine, or are you just imposing them on me?"

Hanley lost his temper. "How dare you speak to me like that!"

He clenched his fist, ready to punch Shaun.

Shaun, equally enraged, swung at him.

To Shaun, Hanley was nothing short of a dictator. He couldn't accept that this man was his father. This man had to be fake. Shaun refused to believe a word he said.

The bodyguard, just back from the restroom, stopped dead in his tracks at the doorway, stunned by the scene unfolding.

The father and son were embroiled in a heated fight.

He dashed forward to break it up, but both Shaun and Hanley were too caught up in their fury, paying no heed. The bodyguard ended up catching a few unintentional hits in the attempt.

Eventually, he managed to pull them apart and immediately dialed Jayden.

When Jayden and Elyse reached the hospital and saw the...

When they saw the bruises on Shaun's and Hanley's faces, they were taken aback.

Elyse was dumbfounded. "Couldn't you have resolved this like adults instead of resorting to violence?"

She addressed Shaun, still visibly angry. "You know your body better than anyone else! Yet you still got into a fight? The bodyguard said it was nearly impossible to separate you two!"

Shaun retorted, "He was trying to force me away! I have every right to defend myself."

Elyse stared at Hanley in disbelief. "Are you planning to force him to leave?"

Surprised by her reaction, Hanley quickly explained, "Nothing like that. I thought it might be good to bring him back to Liverton. He grew up there. His doctor suggested that a familiar setting could aid in regaining his memory."

Elyse sighed in relief and replied, "That explains it."

Shaun scoffed. "I don't recall anything about Liverton, yet he wants to drag me to this unfamiliar place without considering my feelings."

Chapter 1373:

Watching Shaun's defiant attitude, Elyse realized that his memory loss made him feel vulnerable to everything unfamiliar. The hospital and this ward had become his sanctuaries. This was the reason behind his reluctance to leave.

Elyse looked away and suggested, "Mr. Kennedy, let's have a word outside."

Once Elyse and Hanley had left, Jayden walked over to Shaun with his arms crossed and asked calmly, "Did you pick a fight in a hospital?"

Defensively, Shaun replied, "I was merely defending myself, ensuring my safety."

"Even from your own father?" Jayden asked.

Shaun's expression darkened. "Everyone says he's my father, but to me, he's a stranger. I feel no connection to him."

After a brief pause, Jayden added, "Did you know they admitted a friend of yours to the hospital today?"

Confused, Shaun scratched his head. "A friend of mine? What happened?"

Jayden studied Shaun closely, then said, "She's a friend from your childhood. You've known each other since you were kids. Unfortunately, she was involved in a car crash today."

Shaun's bewilderment grew. After a moment of reflection, he inquired, "How severe are her injuries?"

Taking a moment before responding, Jayden expressed a sense of defeat, then said, "She's just been moved from the emergency room to the ICU."

"That seems pretty severe," Shaun replied, lapsing back into silence.

Observing Shaun's reaction, Jayden sighed and responded, "You've really lost all your memories, haven't you?"

"Maybe. I can't seem to recall anything," Shaun said.

Jayden then suggested, "How about we visit your friend together?"

Shaun paused and then asked, "Is she actually my friend? Do I need to go?"

Jayden insisted firmly, "You should go. She's your friend, and she's hurt badly. It's important for you to be there."

Unable to convince Jayden otherwise, Shaun ended up going with him.

They found Dolores in the ICU, visible only through a viewing window.

Pointing to Dolores, Jayden asked, “This is your friend. Does looking at her bring back any memories?”

Shaun stared at Dolores, his expression one of mild irritation. “I don’t know if I remember her, but something about seeing her just bothers me.”

Jayden, taken aback, questioned, “Bothered? You’re actually annoyed by seeing Dolores?”

Shaun expressed his frustration. “Why? Is it so wrong to feel annoyed?”

Jayden, still surprised, explained, “I’m just surprised because she was far more significant to you than your ex-girlfriend. You even chose her over your ex at a critical moment.”

Chapter 1374:

“No way! I wouldn’t have done such a disgraceful thing,” Shaun raised his voice in protest, then added, “And if I was making such a mistake, why didn’t you, as my good friend, stop me?”

Caught off guard by the confrontation, even Jayden, normally composed, was rattled.

He responded with increasing irritation, “I didn’t know you then. How could I have intervened? You’re responsible for your own actions. Don’t try to shift the blame onto others!”

Biting his lip in frustration, Shaun struggled to respond. The more he dwelled on it, the more victimized he felt. “I made a foolish mistake, and no one was there to guide me. It seems I’m doomed to be alone.”

Jayden light-heartedly said, “At least you’re aware of it now.”

Shaun’s sorrow deepened.

Upon her return, Elyse found Shaun on the brink of tears and asked, “Why are you crying this time?”

“I’m going to die alone,” Shaun replied, tears now freely flowing.

Elyse, unwilling to engage with Shaun’s irrational demeanor, averted her eyes and spotted Dolores on the hospital bed, her heart pounding. Quickly turning back, she acted as though she was oblivious and said, “Let’s return to your ward. I’ve talked with your dad. He’s not pressing you to go back to Liverton just yet.”

After Shaun returned to his ward, Jayden and Elyse didn’t linger long at the hospital and soon headed out.

In the car, Jayden glanced at Elyse, who seemed lost in her thoughts. “What’s eating you?” he asked casually. “Worried about Dolores’ fate, or is it Tracy that’s got you tied up in knots?”

Elyse sighed heavily, as if she had been expecting the question. “Honestly? Both.”

Jayden let out a knowing chuckle. “Let me guess—you’re afraid if Dolores dies, the cops will start sniffing around Tracy and land her in deep water?”

Elyse shot him a sharp look, her annoyance flashing like lightning. “Didn’t I tell you to stay out of this?”

But Jayden just laughed, throwing an arm around her shoulders and pulling her close in a teasing hug. “I can’t help it—I love seeing you all worked up like this.”

Annoyed and a little embarrassed, Elyse swatted at him with a few half-hearted punches before deciding he wasn’t worth the energy.

The next day, when Elyse arrived at the TV station, she made her way backstage to get her makeup done. That was when she bumped into Celeste.

Celeste’s disdain was impossible to miss—it was written all over her face. With a sneer, she remarked, “So, your rival this time isn’t Stuart. Planning to pull a few strings?”

Elyse stood her ground, shaking her head firmly. “Why would I need to? I’ve got what it takes to win fair and square.”

Celeste didn’t even bother hiding her disbelief and let out a derisive snort.

Chapter 1375:

To her, Elyse’s past rumored antics made it clear as day that talent wasn’t part of the equation.

Without another word, Celeste turned on her heel and stalked off. She didn’t feel the need to waste more breath on someone she was sure would crumble under the pressure. In Celeste’s eyes, Elyse was no match for the genuine talent this competition had drawn. Any one of the contestants could easily expose Elyse’s so-called “skills” for the sham they were.

All she had to do now was sit back and wait for the results to roll in.

Elyse watched Celeste’s haughty retreat and let out a quiet sigh. Celeste’s hostility ran deep, and it was clear she wasn’t planning to cut her any slack. Elyse couldn’t shake the feeling that the battle ahead was going to be tougher than she thought.

Elyse couldn’t shake the feeling that Celeste might have a few tricks up her sleeve to make her life difficult in the days to come.

Chloe arrived with a steaming coffee in hand and noticed Elyse staring off into space. “Hey, don’t just stand there like a statue,” she chided lightly. “Go get your makeup done; the recording’s about to start.”

Snapping out of her thoughts, Elyse gave a small nod and headed into the dressing room, settling into the chair as the makeup artist got to work.

After running through the schedule, Chloe leaned closer and said in a quieter tone, “Your opponent this time is no pushover. Think you can handle the pressure?”

Elyse met her gaze with confidence. “I can handle it. I’m aiming for first place—nothing less. Trust me.”

Chloe offered an encouraging smile. “Your last performance was a hit, and your popularity’s skyrocketing. Keep building that fan base; the national tour is just around the corner.”

Elyse’s mood brightened, and she grinned. “The national tour is just the start. After that, I’m going global. I want the whole world to hear my music.”

Chloe remarked, her admiration evident, “Now that’ll be a moment to remember.”

Elyse nodded, already picturing the thrill of performing on an international stage.

“Humph! Someone like you talking about a national tour? What a joke.” Just then, an icy voice cut through her daydream.

Elyse turned her head to see a woman in a shimmering sequined dress standing nearby, her expression full of disdain.

Chloe frowned and stepped forward. “And who exactly are you to be so rude?”

The woman smirked, clearly unfazed. “Elyse, I’m Krista Ramsey—your next opponent. Nice to meet you,” she said mockingly, extending a hand toward Elyse.

Elyse’s face remained calm, but her eyes flashed with irritation. She brushed Krista’s hand aside, replying coolly, “If you don’t respect me, why fake pleasantries? Must be exhausting pretending all the time.”

Krista let out a derisive snort. “Respect? From someone who cheats her way to first place? You should be thanking me for even offering a handshake.”

Before Elyse could respond, Chloe, her temper flaring, stepped in. “Say that again, I dare you!” she snapped, glaring at Krista. No way was she going to let this arrogant woman insult Elyse without a fight.

Krista glanced at Chloe with a sly smirk, her voice dripping with mockery. “What’s this? Elyse can’t hold her own in a verbal spar, so her lackey has to jump in?”

Chapter 1376:

Chloe’s face turned crimson with fury. How dare someone be so blatantly disrespectful!

Before Chloe could retaliate, Elyse placed a steady hand on her arm, gently holding her back. Rising from her chair, Elyse fixed Krista with a calm yet piercing gaze.

“I’ll be waiting for you to bring your challenge to the stage today,” Elyse said, her tone serious and unwavering.

“Challenge you? I’m afraid my strength might shatter that delicate ego of yours,” Krista burst into laughter, her arrogance on full display.

Elyse didn’t flinch. Her reply came swift and sure. “No, I hope you bring your absolute best. That way, when I prove my worth, there’ll be no room for doubt.”

Krista gave Elyse the middle finger, a mischievous smirk spreading across her lips. “You’re the champ of the Swan Cup, but so what? I can’t wait to beat you.”

Elyse met her challenge with a steady gaze. “Try to beat me first, then we’ll talk.”

With a dismissive laugh, Krista quipped, “I adore how some folks are all swagger and zero skill. Walking over you is going to be a breeze.”

She spun on her heel and strutted off.

Once Elyse’s silence spell on Chloe lifted, Chloe exploded. “This mess is all Celeste’s doing! She’s been bad-mouthing you since the competition, claiming your victory was just luck. Now, everyone thinks they’ve got a shot at the title.”

Elyse just shrugged it off. “Let them come. If they actually beat me, I might think highly of them.”

Chloe's head bobbed eagerly. "Right? You need to smash their hopes and show them who you really are!"

As the recording light blinked on, Elyse stepped onto the stage, where the host was already warming up the crowd. This round promised a new twist: competitors would face off twice, with their fates hanging on a combined score from judges and the audience.

Krista sauntered to the heart of the stage with a swagger. "I challenge Elyse," she declared boldly.

The host blinked, taken aback, and double-checked. "You sure about this?"

Her gaze slicing through the air towards Elyse, Krista nodded. "Absolutely."

Turning to Elyse, the host inquired, "What do you say? Do you accept her challenge?"

With a calm nod, Elyse affirmed, "I accept."

With both contenders in agreement, the stage was set, and the battle lines drawn.

Off to the side, Elyse caught Nick's eye.

Krista, clutching her violin, sidled up to Elyse. "Just so you know, coming up with excuses after you lose is just sad."

Elyse shot back with a cool smirk. "I'd have preferred a showdown with Nick, honestly, but since you're so keen on making a spectacle of yourself..."

Krista's face flushed with indignation. "Excuse me? You think you're too good for me?"

With a slight shake of her head and an easy smile, Elyse replied, "Not at all. It's just that you haven't really crossed my mind until now."

Krista was practically seething with fury.

Elyse gave her shoulder a gentle pat. “Try not to disappoint.”

Frustration creased Krista’s features as she bit her lip hard. The audacity of Elyse, with her own shady past, to play the high ground! With a sharp stomp of her foot, Krista exploded. “Damn it! I’ll beat you!”

Chapter 1377:

Elyse dismissed the tirade with a shrug and walked onto the stage to select her music. She pressed the button, and after a brief pause, Vivaldi’s “Winter” flashed on the screen.

“Vivaldi’s Winter,” the host declared. “Contestants, please prepare. Let the competition begin!”

Violin in hand, Elyse turned to Krista. “Would you like to lead, or should I?”

Krista’s eyes sparkled defiantly. “I’ll start, obviously.” With a nod, Elyse stepped aside, her gaze following Krista as she took her position on stage.

Vivaldi’s “Winter”, while a masterpiece, is a devilishly tricky piece. Its complexity is often underestimated until a performance stumbles, revealing all the performer’s technical deficiencies.

As Krista tackled the piece, her discomfort was palpable. The music seemed to weigh heavily on her, her movements stiff and mechanical, like a student laboring through a particularly tough exam.

This piece demanded flawless technique and nimble fingers.

Unfortunately, Krista’s rendition laid bare her struggles with the piece, highlighting shaky fingering and a general lack of fluidity.

The judges, ever diplomatic, handed out middling scores that spared her any overt embarrassment.

The audience wasn’t as forgiving. Their brutally honest scores mirrored their less-than-impressed reception. Krista finished with a score that was decidedly average.

Though she hadn't snagged the high marks she had envisioned, the result wasn't entirely unexpected. Considering her apprehension about the piece, a middling score seemed fair.

Stepping off the stage, Krista couldn't resist taking a jab, her voice dripping with feigned confidence. "That wasn't my best, but it was good enough for a decent score. Let's see if you can do better."

Elyse returned the challenge with a smile, smooth and unruffled. "I plan to. I don't have any 'bad' pieces."

This declaration seemed to drain the color from Krista's face. "That's impossible! You must be lying!"

Elyse's calm remained unshaken. "My coach drilled me until all my weaknesses were gone."

Krista's disbelief hung in the air, thick and palpable. "No way I believe that."

"Watch and learn," Elyse replied, her smile unwavering as she gracefully made her way to the stage, ready to prove her point.

The host glanced at Elyse, her poise unshaken, and asked, "Elyse, aren't you nervous?"

Her response was serene. "Nervous about what?"

He pointed to the song title on the big screen and smiled. "The piece you are about to perform is a true test of a musician's mettle."

"I'm aware," Elyse acknowledged with a nod, her voice steady. "I've practiced extensively."

The host leaned in, curiosity piqued. "And what should we expect from your performance today?"

Chapter 1378:

She briefly glanced at the screen, then met his gaze with unflinching confidence. “Perfection.”

Surprise flickered across the host’s face. “Really?”

“I know it seems unlikely, but I’m prepared. You’ll see.” The excitement in the room was palpable as he declared, “Let’s get started then.”

As the host vanished backstage, Elyse found herself standing alone under the spotlight. Her gaze, a cocktail of calm and fierce determination, hinted at an inner fire ready to ignite. Sensing the shift in the room, she dropped her eyes to meet Celeste’s, who sat among the judges with a look of cool disdain.

Celeste’s eyes rolled slightly, her relaxed posture exuding indifference. She clearly underestimated Elyse. For Elyse, appearances meant little. Her true strength lay in the relentless grind of practice and steady growth. With a single pluck of the strings, the room hushed, captivated.

The piece erupted, a storm of rhythm and passion. Its relentless pace challenged even the most skilled, demanding a delicate dance between precision and feeling. Krista’s focus on avoiding errors led to a rigid performance, her expressions contorted in a silent scream of effort.

Celeste, absentmindedly twirling her pen, didn’t shift her scrutinizing gaze from Elyse. The piece was merciless, highlighting Krista’s shortcomings.

As for Elyse, Celeste was skeptical—could Elyse really fuse technical mastery with heartfelt emotion into a flawless performance?

Remarkably, Elyse transcended expectations. Her interpretation of the classic was a revelation. The intensity of the music swept through the audience, capturing their hearts.

The audience’s excitement surged, riding the waves of Elyse’s performance, their anticipation building with each note. Celeste’s skepticism gradually melted into shock. How? How was Elyse delivering such a flawless rendition?

With her eyes gently closed and a faint smile on her lips, Elyse moved her fingers with such fluid grace that they seemed a blur. Yet, her face remained serene, captivating, utterly at peace. Even Celeste had to acknowledge the brilliance of Elyse’s performance.

As the final note lingered in the air, Elyse stood calm and smiling, basking in the wave of applause that washed over her.

The host, beaming with enthusiasm, exclaimed, “Elyse, your performance was incredible!”

Elyse gave a modest nod and a gentle smile. “Thank you.” With a playful chuckle, the host moved the evening along. “Let’s see how the judges scored.”

The panel, captivated by Elyse’s performance, hailed it as a feast for the senses. All but Celeste had their scores ready in a flash.

For Celeste, scoring Elyse was a quandary. She harbored a bias against her, struggling to believe that Elyse’s flawless display wasn’t just a fluke. She briefly entertained the idea of giving a low score but found no grounds for it after such a commanding performance.

Reluctantly, Celeste assigned a middling score, citing minor, almost negligible flaws. Her critique sparked a brief but heated debate among the other judges.

Elyse, ever graceful, accepted the feedback with a nod.

Chapter 1379:

The audience, however, was in full agreement, showering Elyse with high scores. Not a single dissenting voice was heard.

Elyse emerged victorious, though the result was never in doubt.

As she stepped off the stage, she walked over to Krista, raising an eyebrow playfully. “So, are you convinced yet?” Krista’s face flushed with frustration. How could someone, supposedly coasting on deceit, demonstrate such undeniable skill?

With a snap, she retorted, her voice tinged with defiance, “Don’t get too comfortable. There’s another round to go. I can’t see your luck holding up again.”

Elyse simply replied, “We’ll see.”

Preferring to avoid further confrontation, Krista turned and walked away, her pride fragile.

During the break, as other contestants took the stage, Elyse slipped backstage to catch her breath.

Chloe handed her a water bottle just as Nick approached, his hands buried in his pockets and a skeptical look on his face. Elyse eyed him curiously. “Something on your mind?”

Nick’s expression was frosty. “I underestimated you. Even if you pulled some strings to win the Swan Cup, you’ve shown real skill today.”

Elyse’s patience wore thin. “For the last time, I didn’t cheat. Celeste is the one spreading those rumors.”

Nick arched an eyebrow, his sneer deepening. “Rumors, huh? At the Swan Cup, you allegedly sabotaged many hopefuls. And now you’re calling them rumors?”

Elyse couldn’t resist questioning, “Seriously? You think I’m the one? When have I ever sabotaged other contestants’ chances?”

Nick fired back sharply, “Denying it, huh? Just you wait. I’ll make you confess!” He stormed off, his anger hanging heavily in the air.

Nearby, Chloe’s brow furrowed in concern. “Has he lost it? Could the pressure of the competition really be twisting his thoughts this way?”

Taking a calming sip of water, Elyse sighed. “Who knows? Celeste accused me of nepotism, and Nick painted me as a saboteur. They really know how to make up stories.”

Chloe’s voice softened. “Don’t let their words weigh you down. You need to clinch this competition and silence them all.”

Elyse nodded, her resolve firm. “I’m here to win, not to wilt.” After pausing to regroup, Elyse made her way back to the competition stage, ready for another challenge.

This round was different; it allowed the performers to showcase their personal favorites, with the audience also having a say in the scores, alongside the judges.

Krista, bubbling with enthusiasm, chose this moment to shine.

Steering clear of her weaker songs, she picked “Song of the Toreador” for its bold rhythms and demanding techniques. As long as she played to her strengths, she believed, victory was within reach.

Chapter 1380:

Elyse pondered her own choice as she watched Krista’s confident selection. That piece was a complex melody rich with emotional depth and required a masterful control of the violin’s second and fourth positions. But it was incredibly hard to deliver.

Elyse pressed her lips together, pondering her next move. Krista had already set the bar high.

As Krista ascended the stage, confidence radiated from her. She knew the piece inside and out, her performance echoing her deep connection with the music. Her final score soared, a testament to her skill.

When it was Elyse’s moment, the host’s curiosity was palpable. “What’s your choice for today?”

Pausing to gather her thoughts, Elyse responded with quiet confidence, “Henrik Wieniawski’s ‘Légende.’ I hope it touches everyone as it has touched me.”

“Let the music speak,” the host encouraged with a warm smile.

At Elyse’s selection, Celeste perked up in her seat. The piece was notoriously complex, woven with intricate glissandos, piercing vibratos, and challenging harmonics. More than just notes, it was a narrative of love woven into melody.

Taking on such a piece was bold; a single slip could spell disaster.

Celeste watched intently, hands clasped, as if her will could steady Elyse's bow. She'd like to see how far Elyse could push.

Centering herself, Elyse closed her eyes briefly, summoning the essence of this romantic tale. Her bow touched the strings, and the room filled with music.

Completely absorbed, she played through her soul, oblivious to the world. When the last note faded, she looked out and met the audience's gaze for the first time. After a brief exchange with the host, the audience was invited to vote.

Their verdict was swift and favorable, their scores high in praise.

The judges, however, were slower to decide, their murmurs filling the air.

The holdup? Celeste. Her decision hung in the balance, as if the weight of the notes themselves were in her hands.

The other judges, having quickly submitted their scores, rolled their eyes at Celeste's delay. "Come on, Celeste, just put down a number already. You're being overly strict with her."

Celeste's frown deepened. "I prefer to be thorough. Unlike some, I don't just throw numbers around carelessly." Another judge, clearly irked by Celeste's critique, chimed in, "You just can't stand admitting Elyse's talent. You even hinted she once won a competition by pulling strings. With her ability, why would she need to?"

Celeste's retort was cutting. "Oh, please! You're all blind. Elyse's top spot? Smells like backdoor influence to me!" Her accusation cut through the murmurs, loud enough to silence the room.

Elyse, maintaining her calm, addressed Celeste directly.

"Accusations require proof, Celeste. If you believe my position is due to undue influence, I'd like to see your evidence."

Celeste scoffed dismissively. "Proof? The truth doesn't always need evidence."

Unruffled, Elyse replied, “Without proof, your claims remain just that—claims without basis.”