

Bound love 1381

Chapter 1381:

Celeste slammed her hand on the table, a cold smile spreading across her face.

“Do you need evidence before you’ll face reality?”

A ripple of whispers swept through the room, quickly escalating into a dramatic scene. The host, beads of sweat on his brow, stood on stage, clearly at a loss for how to handle the mounting chaos.

Elyse nodded and responded, “Then speak the truth. I’m eager to know. What evidence do you have that I rigged my way to the top?”

The air crackled with tension as Elyse and Celeste locked eyes. In the corner, Krista shrank deeper into her chair, her head lowered, too apprehensive to look up.

Suddenly, a distinct voice cut through the silence.

“I am the evidence.”

Nick walked onto the stage, seemingly indifferent to the multitude of stares fixed on him. His calm, clear voice rang out, filling the hall.

“Your cheating ended my competition prematurely. What compensation could you possibly offer for my loss?”

Elyse looked at him, confusion clouding her features. Nick in the Swan Cup? She searched her memory but couldn’t place him.

Noticing her puzzled look, Nick pressed on.

“Why the silence? Feeling guilty?”

Elyse took a moment to measure her words.

“I didn’t know you competed in the Swan Cup. I’ve never seen you there.”

A sneer curled on Nick’s lips.

“No surprise there. A despicable woman like you wouldn’t care whose chances were ruined by your actions.”

Elyse pressed her lips together, opting to remain silent.

At that moment, the production team sprang into action, rushing onto the stage. Nick allowed the crew to guide him offstage, preparing for the remainder of the show. Unmoved, Celeste announced her refusal to score, declaring she would not grant points to a contestant who lacked integrity.

Although Elyse lost Celeste’s score, it mattered little in the end. Captivated by her performance, the audience and other judges awarded her high marks, ensuring her victory.

However, Elyse knew the broadcast would thrust her into intense public scrutiny. The thought of the upcoming online storm gave her a headache. She decided to immerse herself in work for the next few days before finally returning home to unwind.

She asked Jayden to investigate Nick, and he informed her that it would take some time. Elyse braced herself for the wait.

While Elyse was practicing her violin, her phone rang. It was Pearce.

“Could you join us for dinner tonight? Grandma has been asking about you constantly.” Pearce’s voice carried a note of exhaustion. Elyse paused, her feelings about Felicia still mixed.

Chapter 1382:

The inheritance was tempting—shares, money, and houses—but part of her hesitated.

Sensing her uncertainty, Pearce softened his tone.

“It’s okay if you’d rather not come. I’ll just tell her you were busy.”

Elyse bit her lip and then made up her mind.

“Alright, I’ll come for dinner. But I need to leave immediately afterward.”

“Great,” Pearce responded.

“I’ll let her know. No rush getting ready.”

After hanging up, Elyse quickly texted Jayden, changed her outfit, and left her apartment.

As she descended the stairs, Driscoll asked, “Will you be dining in tonight?”

“Nah. I’m going to see Pearce,” Elyse replied.

“Understood,” Driscoll said with a nod.

“The car will be ready shortly.”

Arriving at the Benson residence, Felicia was already outside, her face lighting up with joy.

“Elyse, my dear! It’s wonderful to see you! I’ve missed you so much!”

Felicia approached quickly, linking arms with Elyse.

Elyse tensed momentarily, then relaxed, offering a smile.

“It’s nice to see you too. How have you been?”

"I'm managing, dear. But I miss you. I hardly see you anymore, only on TV," Felicia said, ushering Elyse inside and chatting the entire time. Once settled in the living room, Elyse and Felicia talked about various matters until the conversation inevitably turned to Celeste.

At the mention of Celeste, Felicia's demeanor shifted, her voice laced with irritation.

"If Celeste causes you any problems, just let me know. I'll take care of it."

Elyse quickly tried to ease her grandmother's concern.

"Please, Grandma, there's no need. Celeste and I just have some misunderstandings. I can handle it."

Felicia squeezed Elyse's hand gently.

"I haven't been much help to you. You've always had to fend for yourself, and that pains me. That's why I want to look out for you now, more than anything."

Elyse expressed, "I get your point, Grandma, but I'm no longer the little girl who needed constant care. I've grown into someone independent."

Felicia responded, her voice tinged with sadness, "Yet, in my heart, you will always be a child."

Elyse countered, "But I'm already 25 now. I'm an adult who can stand on her own."

Chapter 1383:

Felicia felt her heart ache with a sorrow she couldn't quite explain as she heard those words. She said with a heavy heart, "My dear, you've faced so many hardships on your own all these years. It must have been so hard for you."

Elyse remained silent, for what Felicia said was true—she had been navigating life alone for a long time.

During her college years, she had crossed paths with Theo. Even though he had betrayed her, she couldn't deny that he had been kind in certain ways.

When Glenda and Lanny had deliberately made her struggle with paying her tuition fees, Theo had stepped in and offered financial help, resolving the crisis she had been in.

In that phase of life, she also met Tracy, who became a source of emotional support. Tracy filled the void in her heart, offering encouragement, respect, guidance, and understanding whenever she faced challenges in connecting with others.

Then there was Jayden. He wasn't without flaws, but the depth of his love had initially mended the wounds of abandonment and insecurity Elyse carried.

As Elyse reflected on those times, she froze in thought. If she had once embraced Jayden's possessive and overbearing love, why had she grown unable to accept it later on?

Felicia noticed Elyse drifting off in thought and assumed her words had stirred up painful memories. She tried to console her, saying, "It's alright, darling. I will always be here as your safe haven."

Elyse pulled herself out of her reverie and smiled softly.

"Thank you." After saying that, her gaze landed on Thea, who was peeking from the corner, eavesdropping on their conversation. Elyse turned her eyes away without a word, pretending not to notice, and continued her conversation with Felicia.

A short while later, Elyse excused herself, saying she needed to use the restroom, but her true intention was to meet Thea. Startled by Elyse's sudden presence, Thea tried to stay calm but ended up crouching under the window in a panic. She stammered, "Why did you come to find me? Shouldn't you be talking with Grandma?" Her tone was sharp as she tried to appear fearless.

Elyse, uninterested in engaging with Thea's defiance, questioned, "You've been listening for quite a while. Why not just join us in the conversation?"

That struck a nerve with Thea, who immediately retorted, “Oh, so now you pity me? You feel sorry for me because Grandma doesn’t accept me, because I’m not really part of the family, and I don’t deserve a place at the dining table?”

Elyse’s brow furrowed slightly. “That’s not what I meant. I noticed you standing here for so long, so I figured you wanted to talk. Why not come along?”

“I don’t want to! I’m not one of you Bensons. You’re just trying to use me to make yourself look good, aren’t you?” Thea lost her temper and shouted at Elyse.

Elyse calmly responded, “You’re overthinking it. I’ve never said that.”

“You didn’t say it outright, but that’s exactly what you believe. I don’t need your fake concern!” Thea suddenly shoved Elyse and shot her an intense glare.

Chapter 1384:

Elyse opened her mouth to speak, but Thea cut her off, saying, “Grandma told you she’d always be your support, didn’t she? That’s nothing but an illusion.”

Elyse looked at her, confused. “What are you trying to say?”

“She won’t truly be there for you. You’re being misled, just like I was, foolishly believing in her promises.” A flicker of loneliness crossed Thea’s eyes as she turned and walked away.

Elyse watched her retreating figure and exhaled quietly, mixed feelings settling in her chest.

When she returned to the living room, she chose not to mention anything about Thea. Instead, she continued chatting casually with Felicia. Their conversation lasted until after five when Pearce came back from work.

He handed a shopping bag to Elyse, saying, “Here, take this. I asked my assistant to pick it up for you. Let me know if it suits your taste.”

Elyse opened the bag to reveal a designer handbag, a limited-edition release for the season.

She recognized the brand immediately. Owning one of their bags required being a top-tier VIP. Regular customers couldn't even place an order; they had to endure a long waiting list.

She stared in disbelief.

"This bag is incredibly difficult to get. How on earth did you manage it?"

Pearce ruffled her hair with a warm smile.

"I bought it, of course. Don't you have faith in what I can do?"

Elyse clicked her tongue in mild surprise. She truly hadn't realized how resourceful Pearce was and had always assumed only Jayden had that level of influence.

After Pearce headed upstairs to change and Felicia excused herself to the restroom, Elyse finally found a moment to reflect on the thoughts swirling in her mind.

At the start, she had been able to embrace Jayden and all he brought to the table. So why had that changed later on? Who had changed in the relationship—was it Jayden, or was it her?

She tightened her hands into fists, a wave of bitter frustration welling up inside her. The complexities of her emotions felt like an unsolvable puzzle.

Pearce descended the stairs and immediately spotted Elyse perched on the bottom step, lost in her thoughts, a storm cloud seemingly hanging over her.

He slid down beside her, his voice light but concerned.

"Why the long face? You've been wearing that gloomy expression every day. Keep it up."

Elyse lifted her eyes, her tone flat as she asked, "Pearce, do you have a crush on someone?"

With exaggerated confidence, Pearce puffed out his chest.

Chapter 1385:

“Of course not!” he declared as if the idea were beneath him.

Elyse’s interest in the conversation evaporated on the spot. Discussing love matters with him seemed pointless.

Sensing the sudden shift in her mood, Pearce scrambled to recover.

“But, hey, I’m not against the idea,” he added quickly.

“Who doesn’t dream of falling in love someday?”

Elyse let out a soft sigh, her voice tinged with bitterness.

“Love isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. Sure, there are beautiful moments, but it’s also full of shadows and sorrows.”

Pearce nodded thoughtfully.

“You’re right, but isn’t that what makes love so irresistible? Nothing in life is perfect—not love, not anything.”

Elyse’s doubtful gaze lingered on him, her skepticism evident.

Pearce leaned in slightly, cupping her face with a tenderness that surprised her. His smile was warm, but his tone was serious.

“Nobody’s flawless, Elyse. That’s just how we’re wired. And the magic of love? It’s about embracing the messy, imperfect parts too.”

Elyse’s thoughts whirled like a storm, breaking apart the foundations of what she once believed and piecing together a new understanding from the fragments.

She parted her lips, her voice quiet but resolute.

“To truly appreciate love’s beauty, you have to come to terms with its darkness too.”

Pearce beamed, coaxing her like one might soothe a restless child. “Exactly! That’s the whole package. Even the happiest couples have to tweak things here and there to keep the wheels turning.”

Elyse, ever perceptive and sharp, locked her gaze on Pearce. With heartfelt sincerity, she said, “Thank you, Pearce.”

Pearce’s brow furrowed in confusion.

“Thank me? For what?”

Elyse smiled faintly and replied, “For solving the puzzles in my heart.” With that, she rose, slung her bag over her shoulder, and made to leave.

Before she could take a step, Pearce grabbed her arm in haste.

“Whoa, hold up! Where do you think you’re going? Stay for dinner. Afterward, I’ll give you a lift home.”

Elyse hesitated, suppressing the growing temptation to talk to Jayden. Finally, she relented with a small nod.

“Alright. Dinner first, then.”

As she set her bag down, a shadow loomed from behind. Startled, she spun around to find a stranger—a strikingly handsome man, no less—grinning at her.

Chapter 1386:

“Good evening,” Victor Hayes greeted, his enthusiasm lighting up the room.

“You’re Miss Elyse Lloyd, right? I’ve seen you perform on TV. Your violin playing is nothing short of magical.”

Caught off guard, Elyse gave him a polite but awkward handshake. Her eyes darted to Pearce, silently calling for rescue.

Pearce’s expression darkened as he stepped protectively in front of Elyse.

“What are you doing here? I didn’t invite you over for dinner,” he growled.

Victor, undeterred, flashed a wide grin.

“Didn’t you know? Your grandma invited me. She said she wanted to play matchmaker for me.”

Pearce’s instincts flared like warning sirens.

“Play matchmaker? You and Elyse? Are you sure you heard her right?”

Victor nodded confidently.

“Absolutely. I wouldn’t have come otherwise.”

He turned his dazzling smile on Elyse.

“After dinner, let me show you around. I know all the hidden gems in town.”

“Hey! Keep your distance from her!” Pearce snapped, covering Victor’s eyes with his hand as if to shield Elyse from his gaze.

Elyse tugged at Pearce’s sleeve, her curiosity piqued.

“Who is this guy?”

Pearce, his face stormy with displeasure, muttered, “This is Victor Hayes. We grew up together, though he’s more like a fly buzzing in my ear. Same age as me, but let’s just say brains aren’t his strong suit. Don’t waste your energy on him—his silliness might rub off on you.”

Unfazed, Victor burst into laughter.

“Oh, come on, Elyse. Don’t let this blockhead fool you. I’ve known about you for ages, but Pearce here guards you like a dragon hoarding treasure. He dodges me like the plague and never wants to make introductions!”

Elyse tilted her head, puzzled.

“I don’t think Pearce has ever mentioned you before.”

“That’s because it’s not worth mentioning,” Pearce cut in, rolling his eyes.

“Who’d want to hear about an idiot?” He reached out and pinched Victor’s cheek with exaggerated annoyance, his frustration bubbling to the surface.

Victor, refusing to back down, puffed up his chest.

“Idiot? Excuse me! I’m a catch! Why else would your grandma want me to date Elyse? Admit it—deep down, you know I’m a class act.”

“Class act?” Pearce scoffed, his irritation nearing its peak.

“You mean a clown act. Just shut it already!”

Chapter 1387:

Just then, Felicia strolled in, her presence radiating warmth. The moment her eyes landed on Victor, her face brightened with delight.

“Oh, Victor! Glad you made it!” she exclaimed, her tone brimming with affection.

“Come in, sit down. Let me get you a drink.”

Felicia pulled Victor toward the sofa and looked at Elyse with an eager smile.

“Elyse, honey, why are you just standing there? Come join us!” she said cheerfully.

Elyse, with a strained expression, remained frozen in place.

Noticing her discomfort, Pearce gently took her hand and led her to the sofa, positioning himself between her and Victor.

As soon as Pearce settled in, he turned to Felicia with a hint of frustration.

“Grandma, why did you invite him? This was meant to be a family dinner. Why is there an outsider here?”

Victor playfully jabbed Pearce in the chest.

“Hey, I’m always around. I’m practically family!” he exclaimed with a grin.

Pearce shot him a look of annoyance before addressing Felicia again.

“This is completely unexpected. Did you consider whether Elyse would be comfortable with him here?”

Felicia, caught up in the idea of a perfect family gathering and missing the tension in Pearce’s tone, dismissed his concerns with a wave of her hand.

“What’s the big deal?” she countered.

“Victor’s not an outsider. It’s better for Elyse to meet him sooner rather than later, don’t you think?”

“Grandma, you didn’t tell me he would be here.” Elyse finally spoke up, looking hurt.

“Oh, you silly girl!” Felicia chided gently.

“Victor’s a wonderful man. There’s no harm in getting to know him.”

It was clear that Felicia’s intentions were well-meaning, making it impossible for Elyse to turn her down.

Elyse glanced at Victor, who wore a genial smile and exuded a friendly, well-mannered air. He seemed completely at ease, his demeanor far more approachable than Jayden’s had ever been.

Suddenly, she felt overwhelmed. She pressed a hand to her chest.

“I need some air,” she murmured, standing abruptly and leaving the room before anyone could react.

Ignorant of Elyse’s discomfort, Felicia turned to Victor with a grave expression.

“My granddaughter has been through a lot. I’d appreciate it if you could spend some time with her,” she suggested earnestly.

“Of course.” Victor nodded, his smile warm.

Chapter 1388:

“I think Elyse is wonderful. I’d be happy to.”

A shadow fell over Pearce’s face at this exchange.

Felicia’s eyes sparkled with optimism.

“Wonderful!” she exclaimed.

“Perhaps now she can find some happiness.”

“I’ll be right back,” Victor said, excusing himself to use the restroom.

He then followed the path Elyse had taken earlier.

Pearce turned to Felicia.

“Why did you invite him? Are you trying to set him up with Elyse?” he asked, frustration tightening his voice.

“He’s not right for her. Please, don’t meddle!”

“Meddle? Elyse is single, and I’m concerned about her happiness,” Felicia snapped back, her tone heated.

“She is no longer a child,” Pearce said, his voice weary.

“She’s mature enough to make her own choices. She doesn’t need us playing matchmaker.”

Pearce remembered how, when he first met Elyse, he had considered her naive and easily influenced. Yet, he soon discovered the resilience beneath her gentle facade.

Although she might seem unsure of her direction at times, she was fully capable of navigating her life and its challenges.

That was why he hadn’t initially opposed her marriage to Jayden, despite his misgivings about Jayden.

“Elyse can manage her own relationships,” he continued.

“Please stop worrying about her.”

“Enough!” Felicia slammed her hand on the table angrily.

“I wasn’t there for her before, and that’s how she ended up with Jayden Owen. I’ve lived with that regret. Now that I’m here, I won’t let her make another terrible mistake. I will decide who she marries! And you, stay out of it!”

Pearce stared at her, shocked.

“You can’t just dictate her life!” he exclaimed in protest.

“Why not? I’m her grandmother! With her parents gone, it’s my duty!” Felicia retorted, her stubborn resolve giving Pearce a deep headache. She was determined to control Elyse’s marital decisions and wouldn’t consider alternatives.

Pearce knew Elyse’s independent spirit well. He feared their grandma’s interference might push her to her breaking point. He rubbed his forehead, sensing the escalating tension.

Meanwhile, Victor, humming a tune, entered the yard, his eyes catching sight of Elyse’s back.

Chapter 1389:

Victor casually walked up to Elyse, touched his nose, and leaned in close with a tilt of his head and a playful wink.

“Elyse, is my company really that intolerable?”

Taken aback by Victor’s sudden closeness, Elyse shifted her gaze uncomfortably.

“No, you’re mistaken.”

Victor responded, “Ah, so it’s Felicia who bothers you. You’re upset because she’s meddling, trying to dictate your marriage.”

Elyse hesitated, then let out a resigned sigh and nodded.

“Yes, that’s exactly it.”

“Yet, in our social circles,” Victor continued smoothly, “it’s quite normal for marriages to align family interests. Besides, I’m on good terms with Pearce. Don’t you think a marriage between our families could be beneficial for both sides?”

Elyse faced him with a look of confusion.

“Are you suggesting... you and I should marry? We hardly know each other!”

Victor quickly explained, “No, no, don’t get me wrong. I’m merely speaking hypothetically. Our families often weigh the benefits heavily. If a marriage seems advantageous, it typically happens.”

Looking down, Elyse spoke in a subdued tone, “Hasn’t your grandma mentioned that I’ve been married before?”

Victor hesitated, then nodded.

“I heard something about that.”

He recalled Pearce mentioning last summer that he had found his long-lost cousin who was already married to an ordinary guy. At that time, he hadn’t thought much of it. After all, she was married, and that was that. Curiosity hadn’t piqued his interest.

However, when Felicia suggested a few days ago that he should meet Pearce’s cousin, Elyse, she became relevant to his considerations again.

Noticing Victor’s puzzled look, Elyse elaborated, “We’re not a good match. I’ve been married, I’ve been pregnant, and I’m still dealing with complexities involving my ex.”

Victor’s mouth fell open.

“You’re quite straightforward.”

Elyse gave a nonchalant shrug.

“It’s the reality. You would have discovered it sooner or later. There’s no point in concealing it. And...” She glanced at him, her voice dropping. “I don’t feel anything for you. I don’t see us together.”

Mirroring her shrug, Victor scowled.

“Don’t be so choosy. I’m quite a catch. Any woman would marry me.”

Her expression hardened.

Chapter 1390:

“Then go and tell my grandma that you have no interest in marrying me. Tell her you’re not attracted to me—just make sure she understands we’re not getting married.”

Victor touched his face, his expression troubled. He considered himself quite attractive and usually well-received by women. Why was Elyse not affected?

She was completely indifferent, a direct hit to his pride.

After a moment of quiet reflection, Victor inquired, “So, if it’s not me, is it your complicated ex you still have feelings for?”

Elyse pursed her lips, choosing not to respond.

The expression on her face confirmed for Victor that he had struck a sensitive chord.

“He really means that much to you?” he asked.

With a weary sigh, Elyse responded, “It’s complex. I can’t just give you a straight answer.”

“You’re unsure of your own feelings?” Victor perceived her response as avoidance.

“Actually, I’ve been reflecting on this quite a bit,” she confessed.

Noticing her indecision, he couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Really? The mere fact you’re struggling so much to define your feelings probably means you love him. You’re just unsure why.”

A look of realization dawned on Elyse’s face, as if clarity had suddenly struck her.

After a thoughtful silence, she murmured, “You might be right. If there were no love, I wouldn’t be this confused.”

Her turmoil was indeed rooted in her love for Jayden, as she grappled with understanding why she would fall for him. With a playful smile, Victor said, “Sounds like you’re quite love-struck. Pearce really should have introduced us earlier.”

Elyse stiffened. His words seemed more pointed than flattering.

“Now that we’ve got that sorted, perhaps you should tell my grandma that you’re not interested in marrying me?”

Victor spread his arms wide, adopting an expression of mock despair.

“I wish I could, but my parents are pushing hard for me to get married. Without their pressure, Felicia wouldn’t have even brought this proposal to my family.”

Elyse was taken aback.

“So, you’re not interested in calling it off? You think we should... try this?”

“Let’s be clear. Just because I’m not ending it doesn’t mean I’m eager to try,” Victor explained.

Elyse’s understanding clicked into place.

“You’re proposing... a partnership?”

Victor nodded affirmatively.