

Bound love 1481

Chapter 1481:

Gavin's mouth twitched, his disbelief plain as day. Her shift in tone was faster than he could track.

Elyse opened her mouth to object, but before she could get a word out, Jayden slid an arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. His voice was low, a mixture of teasing and warning. "Let them have their moment."

Elyse's face was a storm of emotions. "Gavin might actually hit her!" she whispered fiercely, her eyes flicking toward Gavin's clenched fists.

Jayden smirked, shaking his head. "He's a gentleman. He wouldn't do that."

But when he caught sight of Gavin's white-knuckled hands, he added with a chuckle, "Unless, of course, she pushes him too far."

Despite his clear frustration, Gavin managed to restrain himself. His voice was clipped as he spoke. "Let go."

Freda buried herself deeper into his chest, her tone playfully defiant. "No. I don't want to. I just want to hold you." Her stubborn insistence only added to the awkward tension in the room.

Elyse's face creased with worry. "She's drunk. We should really just take her home."

Before she could say more, Jayden pressed a hand gently over her mouth and tugged her closer.

Gavin raised an eyebrow, his gaze cold and calculating. "So, this is her drunken state?"

Without waiting for an answer, he bent down and scooped Freda up into his arms. His movements were firm but careful, as though she were a package he didn't particularly want but couldn't avoid handling. Elyse stared at them, her jaw slack with disbelief. What was happening right now?

Gavin cast a quick glance over his shoulder, his voice steady and unreadable. “You two carry on. Freda and I need to have a private conversation.”

Elyse’s face tightened with worry, her voice trembling. “Freda won’t actually get beaten by Gavin, will she?”

Jayden leaned back, keeping a firm hold on her arm to stop her from rushing off. His tone was calm, almost teasing. “And if she did, what exactly would you do about it? She’s a grown woman. She didn’t let go, right? That means she’s okay being taken away by him.”

Elyse frowned, but before she could respond, Jayden softened his voice, trying to reassure her. “Honey, don’t get worked up over other people’s problems. Let’s focus on us for a change.”

Her head snapped toward him, eyes narrowing with suspicion. “What do you mean by that? What exactly do I need to focus on? And stop holding me—I just want to go back to my room and rest.”

Jayden grinned, sliding an arm around her waist as if to keep her from slipping away. His smile had a mischievous edge. “You know, I just realized something. We’ve had fun in a lot of places, but not the basement. Maybe we should renovate it, turn it into our pleasure haven. What do you think?”

Elyse stared at him, her cheeks heating with a mix of frustration and disbelief. For a moment, she held back, biting her tongue. Then, unable to contain herself, she snapped, “Can’t you think about anything besides sex for five minutes?”

Gavin carried Freda out of the villa and stepped into his car. After placing her onto the back seat, he didn’t start the engine. Instead, he opened the door, allowing the icy wind to sweep through the interior.

Chapter 1482:

“How long are you going to keep up this act?” he asked, his tone free of warmth. “I’m not taking you home.”

Freda remained still, her body slack as if she were genuinely drunk. Gavin scoffed, a bitter smile tugging at the corner of his lips. “You’re not fooling me. You can handle your liquor better than this. A few glasses wouldn’t knock you out. Get up.”

But Freda stayed limp, her breathing slow and even.

He leaned closer, his voice dropping lower. “Keep pretending, and you won’t get my contact information.”

Before he could pull away, she yawned dramatically, stretched her arms overhead, and slowly sat upright.

“Oh, I’m drunk,” she said with mock sincerity, flashing him a cheeky grin. “Did you carry me out? That’s so sweet of you. Thanks!”

Her antics drew a short laugh from Gavin, though his expression quickly hardened. “Do you think this is funny?” he asked, narrowing his eyes at her.

Freda nodded without hesitation. “Yep.”

His gaze bore into hers, unyielding and sharp. “What do you really want? I don’t have it.”

“You do,” she retorted, her smile vanishing. Without warning, she sat up straight, grabbed his shoulders, and kissed him with fierce determination.

Gavin froze, stunned by the suddenness of her actions. When she pulled back, her voice was firm and unwavering. “You’re what I want most.”

He gently pushed her hands away, his expression unreadable. “Are you so infatuated with me?”

“Yes,” Freda said, her cheeks flushed with both passion and defiance. “I fell in love with you the moment I saw you. I want to be your girlfriend.”

Gavin’s eyes swept over her, lingering on her determined face. He said nothing as he turned to slide back into the driver’s seat.

Freda grabbed his arm in a panic. “Wait! Are you mad because I kissed you? If you’re upset, you can kiss me back!”

Gavin turned his head slightly, his expression softening just a touch. “Do you really think I’m mad?”

Freda’s chest tightened as an ache spread through her. Her eyes glistened with unshed tears. “You’re always so distant,” she murmured, her voice trembling. “I can’t tell if you care about me at all.”

Gavin tilted his head, his expression unreadable. “What would it take to convince you I don’t dislike you?”

Without thinking, Freda blurted, “Kiss me!”

Gavin’s brows shot up in surprise, his usual composure faltering. He exhaled deeply, brushing a hand over her head with surprising tenderness. “I can’t say I like you, but... I don’t dislike you either.”

Freda’s entire demeanor shifted as hope lit up her face. “So, does that mean I can keep trying? You’re not saying no!”

Gavin studied her for a moment before speaking. “Are you sure you want to do this?”

Freda nodded with conviction. “I’ve never been more certain. I don’t want anyone else—I just want you.”

Chapter 1483:

His gaze lingered on her, searching for something unspoken. “Fine,” he said finally. “But let’s see if you can win my heart.”

Freda stood frozen, her mind racing as Gavin turned and got into the car.

The sound of the horn snapped her out of her thoughts, and she bounced forward, climbing into the passenger seat with a wide grin. As soon as she settled, she leaned toward him eagerly. “You have to give me your number. I’m calling you tonight!”

Gavin frowned, his confusion evident. "I said I'd give you a chance, not that we'd speak on the phone tonight."

Freda shook her head, her tone turning resolute. "I don't care! I need to keep an eye on you. What if some other woman tries to steal you away? I'd cry my eyes out!"

Gavin let out a short laugh, more amused than annoyed. "You're overthinking. I'm not some playboy surrounded by women, you know."

"I don't care!" Freda said, crossing her arms like a stubborn child. "You're answering my calls, no excuses!" Her relentless determination left Gavin momentarily speechless.

With a reluctant sigh, he finally muttered, "Fine."

Freda beamed triumphantly, practically glowing with happiness as the car sped down the road. Her joy was palpable, a radiant contrast to the world rushing by outside the windows.

Meanwhile, in the dimly lit basement, Elyse found herself sitting on the sofa, Jayden leaning over her, his intensity unmistakable. Elyse moaned softly, a sound of pure contentment, and Jayden, sensing her restraint, moved with even greater fervor. She tried to suppress her emotions, but the closeness between them made her breaths shallow and uneven, her body betraying her attempts at composure.

"Why are you holding back? There's no one else here. You don't have to be so quiet," Jayden murmured, his voice low and insistent.

Elyse frowned, biting her lip. "You always push so hard," she muttered, her voice tinged with irritation. "It's exhausting sometimes."

For a moment, Jayden seemed surprised by her candid response. Elyse rarely voiced such complaints, and her words lingered in the air, heavy with unspoken tension. He responded by thrusting into her more intensely, his movements deliberate, until her voice grew louder, breaking through her earlier restraint.

Elyse clenched her fists, trying to remain composed, but the intensity of the moment overwhelmed her. She exhaled sharply, her voice rising despite her earlier resolve to stay quiet. The sound was raw, unfiltered, and filled with emotion.

Jayden leaned closer, his voice soft yet commanding. “That’s right, the louder you moan, the more love I can show you.” His words were a promise, a declaration of the passion that bound them together in that moment.

Elyse was drained, her energy sapped as she rested in Jayden’s arms. With a bitter edge in her voice, she muttered, “We are not legally married yet. I don’t want your love.”

Jayden’s expression darkened, his voice laced with frustration. “Do I need a piece of paper to give me the right to love you? Or do YOU want to be loved by another man?”

Chapter 1484:

Before Elyse could answer, the shrill ring of her phone sliced through the tension. Lying on the nearby table, the screen lit up, drawing both of their gazes.

“Can you hand me my phone?” Elyse asked, nudging Jayden gently. Jayden reached over, snagging the phone, but his eyes narrowed as he read the name flashing on the screen.

“Victor Hayes? Why’s he calling you?” he demanded, his tone turning frosty.

Before Elyse could even react, Jayden had jabbed the decline button.

“What did you do that for?” Elyse snapped, glaring at him.

Jayden folded his arms, his face set in a scowl. “Why is he calling you at this hour? What kind of relationship do you have with this guy? Are you hiding something from me?”

Elyse rolled her eyes, exasperation creeping into her voice. “Don’t be ridiculous. He’s just a friend of my cousin. He’s always been there to lend a hand when I needed help.”

Jayden didn’t look convinced, his irritation simmering just below the surface. “Then why does he think it’s okay to call you so late? I’m right here, aren’t I? Do you need his help with something right now?”

“If you were so curious, you shouldn’t have hung up,” Elyse shot back, her tone pointed.

“I had to. A guy like him has no business reaching you, especially not at night,” Jayden retorted stubbornly.

Realization dawned on Elyse, and a mischievous smile curled her lips.

“Wait a second, are you jealous?”

Jayden scoffed, his ego prickling. “Jealous? Me? Don’t be absurd.”

Feigning indifference, Elyse shrugged nonchalantly. “Oh, so you’re not jealous? That’s too bad. I was going to pamper you, calm you down, and maybe even let you make love to me again just to cheer you up.”

In an instant, Jayden’s bravado melted away. “Alright, fine. I’m jealous,” he admitted hastily.

Elyse shook her head, her tone teasing. “No, you’re not. You just said so yourself—how could you be jealous?”

Jayden gently cupped her face, his thumb brushing over her cheek. Without breaking eye contact, he guided her back onto the sofa, his movements deliberate and commanding. His hands traced down her sides, parting her legs with confidence. As he leaned in closer, their bodies fused in a moment charged with passion.

Elyse let out a soft gasp, surprise flickering in her eyes. She tensed momentarily, her breath hitching as if to protest. But as Jayden’s touch grew more intense, the tension in her body began to melt away.

“You dare to tease me, huh? Alright then. I’ll make sure you remember who’s in charge tonight.” He then pulled her into his arms, his lips capturing hers in a searing kiss. With a fiery passion, he claimed her completely, their connection igniting in a moment of raw, unbridled intimacy.

Meanwhile, at the Twilight Bar, Victor sat with his phone in hand, his fingers idly tracing the edges of the screen as he stared at it with mild curiosity. He had called Elyse only to have his call declined

almost immediately. A faint frown tugged at his lips. What could she possibly be up to that she'd ignore me?

Chapter 1485:

Stumped and out of ideas, Victor shifted his focus to Pearce, who sat quietly beside him.

Victor tucked his phone back into his pocket, irritation still simmering beneath his calm facade. Without warning, he swung his leg and playfully kicked Pearce.

Pearce was nursing a drink when the sudden kick caught him off guard. Fuming, he shot back, "What the hell, why are you kicking me?"

With a calm demeanor, Victor asked, "So, how's Elyse been doing lately? Is she alright?"

The guys in the private room turned their attention to Victor's question, curiosity lighting up their faces. "Yeah, Pearce, how's she doing? You never talk about her anymore," one of them asked.

Another chuckled, "Pearce is always so protective of her. For the longest time, he wouldn't even think about introducing her to us."

"Pearce, seriously, why the wall? Some of us are still single, you know. Don't you care about sharing a bit of her with us?" another added with a teasing grin.

Pearce couldn't hold it in any longer. "Back off. Don't even think about getting close to her."

He paused, then added, "And by the way, she's divorced, and her ex is still around. So, don't bother, you're wasting your time."

One of the guys raised an eyebrow. "Her ex is still hanging around after the divorce? She must be something special. Now I really want to meet her," he said, intrigued.

Pearce snapped back, "Dream on!"

Victor, never missing a beat, chimed in, “Why not give Elyse a call? Tell her you’re throwing a party and we can all meet her.”

The others added, “Yeah, she’s been back for ages, and you still haven’t introduced us to her. Come on, Pearce.”

At his limit, Pearce growled, “Victor, you’ve been talking too much today.”

Victor grinned, leaning back. “Pearce. I’m serious. Think about it—Elyse is your cousin, but she doesn’t know your crowd, doesn’t know us. What does that say about how you see her?”

Pearce, tipsy and struggling to latch onto the thread of the conversation, parroted the question. “What does it say?”

“It says,” Victor continued, his tone pointed, “you don’t fully accept her. You keep her at arm’s length, don’t let her into the fold. You’re not treating her like family, not really.”

Pearce stiffened, his face flushed. “You’re right,” he declared with a dramatic wave of his arm. “I need all of you to look out for her!” Without another word, he fumbled for his phone and dialed Elyse’s number.

The room quieted as everyone leaned in, their curiosity palpable.

After a few rings, Elyse’s voice finally floated through the line. Victor’s expression shifted into something inscrutable as she answered the call.

“Is everything okay?” Elyse asked.

“Not at all!” Pearce said, a little too loudly. “Just thought I’d check in. Been a while since we talked. Wanted to see how you’re holding up.”

Chapter 1486:

“I’m fine,” Elyse replied.

“Well, I’ve been thinking,” Pearce continued, his words slightly slurred but earnest, “I should introduce you to my friends. They’re good people, well-connected. It’d be good for you to expand your network. If I’m not always around, they can have your back.”

There was a pause before Elyse responded, her voice soft but steady, “Okay... I get it.”

Pearce was just about to end the call when Victor’s voice cut in, sharp and unexpected. “Why didn’t you pick up when I called earlier?” The entire room froze, turning to Victor with wide-eyed disbelief. Pearce stared at him, his expression a mix of shock and betrayal.

“It wasn’t a good time,” Elyse said, her tone careful. “I didn’t mean to ignore you.”

Victor’s tense posture relaxed, though his expression remained guarded.

“Why were you calling me, Victor?” Elyse asked.

Victor cleared his throat, buying time. “Just like what Pearce said.”

“Oh, I see.” Elyse’s voice held a trace of understanding. “Pearce, text the details of the meeting then. I’m free all week.”

“Great!” Pearce said, still rattled. “I’ll book a place and send you the details.”

The call ended, and Pearce turned to Victor, his face a storm of suspicion. “That whole bit about introducing her to everyone—that was off the cuff, wasn’t it? Spill it. What were you really calling her about?”

Victor smirked, arching a brow. “Why don’t you take a wild guess?”

“Guess my ass, Victor!” Pearce snapped, his frustration boiling over. “You better not be getting any bright ideas about her.” He lunged toward Victor, but Victor sidestepped him with ease, his smirk never wavering.

Victor chuckled, leaning back in his chair. “Oh, come on. You know me better than that, don’t you?”

Pearce rolled his eyes, his tone tinged with warning. “Listen, don’t even think about it. Elyse isn’t some starry-eyed young woman you can charm your way past. She’s sharp and doesn’t fall for games.”

Victor pressed a hand to his chest, feigning offense with dramatic flair. “Harsh, man. I’d never try to pull a fast one on Elyse. I actually care about her, believe it or not. You just don’t get me.” He took a leisurely sip of his drink, letting the moment hang in the air.

Pearce, unwilling to beat a dead horse, let the conversation fizzle out. Meanwhile, Elyse ended her call and turned to Jayden with a sheepish grin.

Jayden pushed himself off the floor, his arousal still unmistakable, an undeniable presence between them. “You’ve got guts now, huh?” he said. “Kicking me off like that.”

Elyse’s fingers brushed her cheek as she shuffled back against the sofa cushions. “It wasn’t on purpose,” she murmured, her tone soft and defensive. “I just... wanted to answer Pearce’s call, and you wouldn’t let me.”

Jayden clenched his jaw, his frustration spilling over. “We were in the middle of sex! Couldn’t you just focus on us for once? You just had to take Pearce’s call, didn’t you? And for what? So he could try setting you up with some other guy? Unbelievable! Both of you!”

Chapter 1487:

He turned Elyse over with force and gave her a few smacks. “What’s all this whining about? I’m the one who almost lost my focus, not you.”

Elyse let out a soft whimper, her voice trembling. “Can we not do this? I... I just can’t...”

Jayden pressed his arousal against her, causing her to flinch as she instinctively attempted to pull away. However, Jayden pulled her back, his hold firm. “Are you suddenly going to be choosy? Do you think you have any say in this? Get your ass up. I’m going to show you the truth of where you truly belong, or else you may never understand your place!”

Feeling deeply wronged, Elyse complied, raising her hips as he took charge, his movements firm and assertive.

Jayden had been doting on Elyse a lot lately, indulging her every whim, but it had been a while since he'd taken her like this. Tonight, though, he couldn't hold back. Her moans alone could light a fire under him.

The next morning, Cody stepped off the plane and immediately spotted Gavin waiting near the exit. Flashing a warm smile, he strolled over. "Did I keep you waiting too long?"

"I wouldn't miss the chance to pick you up," Gavin replied with a grin. After a few lighthearted pleasantries, they headed out, walking shoulder to shoulder.

Once settled in the car, Gavin shot Cody a curious look. "So, is he still gallivanting across the globe?"

"Yep. He's moved on to yet another city," Cody replied, recalling Irving's relentless wanderlust from their last chat.

"Good for him. A little globetrotting can do wonders," Gavin said with a knowing nod.

Cody agreed, then shifted the conversation. "By the way, I heard Elyse bumped into Celeste Griffin recently. Is that true?"

Gavin's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "You're already in the loop about that?"

"Even when I'm abroad, my connections keep me informed. The music world's a small pond, after all," Cody quipped, a chuckle escaping his lips.

"Yeah, they crossed paths, but Elyse hasn't mentioned a word about it. Since she's been mum, I figured it wasn't my place to pry," Gavin explained. "I trust Elyse to handle things her way."

Cody gave a thoughtful nod. "Trust is great, but Celeste isn't exactly an easy nut to crack. Elyse might have her work cut out for her."

Gavin ventured cautiously, “So, are you planning to see Celeste? After all, it’s been years, and with the history you two share…”

Cody sighed, a wistful look crossing his face. “I know what you mean, but life’s too short to cling to old grudges. It’s time to move on.”

“I get that, but she might not feel the same,” Gavin said, voicing his concern.

Cody replied, “I’m not the man I was—I’ve let go of so much. I can only hope she’s done the same.”

Gavin nodded slowly. “Understood. If she’s reluctant, I’ll do what I can to nudge things along.”

Chapter 1488:

“Appreciate it,” Cody said with a grateful smile.

Though Gavin agreed, he couldn’t help feeling a pang of doubt. Convincing Celeste was bound to be an uphill climb. Her reputation for being prickly wasn’t exactly unfounded.

As Gavin mulled over the thought, a sense of discouragement slowly began to settle over him.

That afternoon, Celeste was in the middle of filming for a show at the TV station when her assistant approached her, voice lowered in a conspiratorial tone. “Someone named Gavin Cramer has reached out. He’s hosting a small gathering and hopes you’ll attend.”

“Gavin Cramer?” Celeste paused, her brow furrowing as she dredged up the name. After a beat, recognition dawned. “Ah, Cody Tucker’s first student. What on earth could he want with me now?”

The assistant ventured cautiously, “Could it have something to do with Elyse Lloyd? Didn’t we have a bit of a falling out with her recently due to a misunderstanding?”

Celeste’s sharp glance cut through the air, silencing the assistant instantly.

Celeste let her gaze linger a moment longer before turning away, her tone frosty. “Even if Elyse took first place, do you really think she could’ve done it without Cody pulling the strings?”

She paused, the silence heavy with meaning, before adding, “Let’s not forget—Fiona Evans, that other woman, was one of Cody’s protégés too. It’s not far-fetched to say his students have wrecked Nick’s career.” The assistant bobbed his head in agreement, almost tripping over his words. “Exactly! His student is the reason Nick’s on this downward spiral. The poor guy’s shattered—and who knows how long it’ll take for him to bounce back.”

A flicker of worry crossed Celeste’s otherwise composed face. “True. Nick’s in a bad place. If he doesn’t pull himself together, there’s no telling what he might do.”

The assistant scratched his chin thoughtfully before changing the subject. “Speaking of which... about Gavin’s invitation?”

“Decline it,” Celeste said coolly, not missing a beat. “I’m not one to entertain just any invitation.”

Without further ado, the assistant set off to relay her decision. Meanwhile, Gavin sat at home, staring at his phone, waiting for the assistant’s response.

As expected—another dead end.

Gavin sighed, his frustration mounting. For the first time, he felt truly stuck. Celeste was proving to be more elusive than he’d imagined. But the real kicker? He had promised Cody he’d arrange the meeting.

Running a hand down his face, Gavin groaned, “I’ve bitten off more than I can chew. Celeste isn’t the kind of person you just casually summon for a chat.”

After mulling it over, he decided to call Elyse.

Elyse, meanwhile, was in her garden, the strains of her violin drifting through the crisp air. Chloe lounged nearby, enjoying Elyse’s hospitality while work remained elusive.

Chloe commented with a hint of curiosity, “Is this what it feels like to be treated special?”

Chapter 1489:

Elyse glanced at the array of desserts and drinks on the table and smiled. “You’re a premium member here. Your treatment surpasses that of any other special guest,” she remarked.

Chloe responded with a cheerful laugh, savoring her cake. As Elyse reached to switch the next piece of music for her, Gavin called her.

“Yes, Gavin? What’s up?” she asked, picking up.

“I need to meet Celeste, but she declined my invitation.” Gavin’s voice carried a hint of impatience. “Can you help me arrange a meeting?”

The mention of Celeste’s name left Elyse perplexed. “Why the sudden need to meet her?” she asked. “She’s indifferent towards us and would likely refuse.”

“It’s important,” Gavin insisted with urgency in his tone.

“Alright, I’ll see what I can do.”

After ending the call, Elyse relayed the situation to Chloe, who immediately took out her phone and said, “I’ll try to set something up under the guise of work.”

The invitation was sent, and within half an hour, they received the expected refusal. Celeste had declined.

Chloe took a bite of her cake and sighed deeply. “She even accused us of being a nuisance,” she muttered. “How much must she dislike us to treat us with such disregard?”

Elyse felt the onset of a migraine, puzzled over Gavin’s insistence on meeting Celeste.

“There’s nothing more we can do,” she said with a helpless sigh. “We’ll just have to tell Gavin the truth.”

Gavin received Elyse’s message and found himself grappling with a difficult situation for the first time.

As he sat brooding in his study, Freda appeared unexpectedly. Having become acquainted with Gavin’s household staff, her presence was well-known, and it was clear she was there to see him.

Freda made her way to Gavin’s side without hesitation, wrapping her arms around his shoulders with playful audacity. “Darling, I’m here to see you. Did you miss me?” she asked with a cheeky grin.

“I’m really not up for your antics today. Please, go find something else to do,” Gavin said curtly, pushing her away. His tone was sharp, leaving no room for argument.

“Is something troubling you? Maybe I can help,” Freda pressed further, noticing his sour mood.

“It’s a complicated issue. I don’t think you can help,” Gavin responded, his voice tinged with frustration.

“What if it’s something you can’t handle, but I can?” Freda challenged, placing her hands on her hips, her confidence unwavering.

Gavin crossed his arms and leaned back in his chair, considering her offer. “Alright then. I’m trying to arrange a meeting with Celeste Griffin,” he admitted.

“Celeste Griffin?” Freda’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Why do you need to meet her?”

“That’s none of your concern. Can you make it happen or not?” Gavin asked, his tone firm.

Chapter 1490:

“Of course I can,” Freda replied confidently, pulling out her phone and beginning to make calls.

Gavin looked on, intrigued. “Are you close to her?” he asked.

“In a way, but she’s quite particular and won’t accept just any invitation. I’ll need a compelling reason for her to agree,” Freda explained as she typed out a message.

After sending the text, she turned to Gavin with a playful smirk. “If I secure this meeting, how will you thank me?” she asked.

Gavin didn’t reply, his expression unreadable.

Freda, undeterred by his silence, placed her hand on his thigh, her smile widening. “Stop it!” Gavin said, slightly irked, as he moved her hand away.

Freda laughed, her boldness unshaken as she leaned closer and moved her hand toward his crotch. “I like you, Gavin,” she said, her voice a mix of jest and seriousness. “I want to be a part of your life.”

Gavin was taken aback by her forwardness. “Keep your hands to yourself!” he exclaimed, recoiling.

“But I want to be close to you,” Freda protested, her tone turning insistent.

Gavin’s standoffish demeanor made her feel as if she were being unjustly rebuffed, like a virtuous woman spurned by an unscrupulous suitor. This thought ignited a flare of annoyance within her.

Gavin, despite being a mature adult, seemed to require her to make all the advances. She had been transparent about her feelings from the start, but his obliviousness frustrated her.

“Why are you so resistant?” Freda demanded in exasperation as she pounced on him. “You can’t ignore what I feel for you.”

Freda’s gaze lingered on Gavin’s lips, and almost on instinct, she wet her own. This was it—today, she was determined to kiss him. No matter what.

Gavin couldn’t ignore the odd intensity in her stare. With a furrowed brow, he asked cautiously, “Have you been drinking? You’re kind of... unpredictable.”

Freda scowled, her patience wearing thin. “For crying out loud, I’ve been chasing you forever. Can’t you do something? Maybe hug me, kiss me—do something! Just once, throw caution to the wind!”

Gavin’s eye twitched at her outburst. “You want me to... take advantage of you? That’s not my style. You ought to look after yourself better.”

Freda’s frustration bubbled over. “Oh, for heaven’s sake! If you don’t take the lead, how am I supposed to? This is getting ridiculous—why do I always have to be the one making the bold moves?”

Gavin’s expression hardened. “Could you at least try to act like a lady? Not everything has to be a game of who can push the furthest.”

“I’m done with your over-the-top caution. You know what? Today, I am going to kiss you,” Freda snapped. She shot up from her seat, and before he could react, she climbed onto his lap, her determination blazing like wildfire.

Caught completely off guard, Gavin instinctively went to push her away. But Freda, quick as a fox, wrapped her arms tightly around his waist and, with her chin held high, leaned in boldly to press her lips to his.

Unfortunately for her, Gavin turned his face at the last second, and her kiss landed squarely on his cheek.