

## **Bound love 1581**

Chapter 1581:

Brook wielded power publicly, while Jayden pulled strings from the shadows. Neither man would bow to her wishes—she had burned those bridges long ago.

No matter which influential clan member she had seduced, none could sway Brook's marriage decision.

Yet denial clouded Corrie's judgment. She convinced herself that finding someone with greater authority than Brook would secure her place in the Owen family.

Unknown to her, the family's power structure had shifted irreversibly.

Bitterness consumed Corrie. Her elevated position in her own family had earned her many enemies, protected only by her tenuous connection to the Owens.

If Brook ended things with her, those vengeful relatives would pounce, eager to witness her downfall.

After a moment's calculation, Corrie steeled her resolve. Marriage to Brook was essential, regardless of his feelings. She would make it happen!

Brook remained oblivious to her desperate schemes, having grown weary of their circular arguments.

"Stop disrupting our conversation," he commanded. "Go attend to your affairs."

Without a backward glance, Brook strode into the lounge.

Betrayal and hatred churned in Corrie's chest. Her thoughts spiraled darkly. If he had claimed her long ago, she would never have sought comfort elsewhere. She was only human, with human desires. Now he condemned her actions, but wasn't his rejection the root cause?

Corrie's eyes blazed as she glared at the lounge. "So Camille's caught your eye?" she muttered venomously. "Dream of marrying her, do you? Well, I'll ensure that never happens!"

A sinister smile played across her lips as she departed.

Inside the lounge, Camille brightened at Brook's return.

"Darling, you're back at last," she cooed, reaching for him. "I missed you terribly."

Brook gathered her close. "I'm fine," he assured her. "Don't fuss so much—people will tease me."

Camille noticed Jayden and Elyse's bewildered expressions and flushed. "Don't misunderstand," she hastened to explain. "Brook's usually very capable. I'm just overly dependent."

Elyse and Jayden exchanged meaningful glances, words failing them.

Brook checked his watch. "Let's chat a while longer before dinner," he suggested. "It's rare to have everyone together—enjoy yourselves freely."

"I feel like having a drink," Elyse said mischievously.

Jayden turned to study her face.

Brook chuckled, ignoring Jayden's disapproving look. "Drink your fill—it's my treat."

"I want some too!" Camille tugged at Brook's sleeve imploringly.

All eyes turned to gauge Brook's reaction.

He smiled indulgently, pinching her cheek. "Alright, little glutton. Just a taste."

Chapter 1582:

Elyse averted her gaze, rubbing her arms as discomfort prickled her skin.

“Did you resolve things with Corrie?” Jayden questioned, eyebrow raised.

Brook stroked Camille’s hair affectionately. “Naturally. But even if I hadn’t, would it matter? Could anything change how I feel about her?”

He gazed tenderly at Camille. “I’m no fool. I recognize what’s truly precious.”

Elyse stepped out of the lounge to use the restroom. As she reached the door, she found Corrie already waiting for her.

Elyse didn’t spare her a glance. She simply dried her hands, turned on her heel, and made to leave.

But Corrie’s voice, dripping with malice, stopped her in her tracks. “Are you proud of yourself?”

Elyse paused, her expression turning cold as she met Corrie’s gaze. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Corrie’s lips curled into a wicked smile, her face brimming with ill intent.

“You must be so pleased,” she sneered. “A child’s death, and suddenly, you’ve secured your place in Jayden’s and Brook’s hearts. I really envy you. That move was brilliant. Why don’t I have a mind as cunning as yours?”

Elyse froze, her breath catching. For a moment, she struggled to process Corrie’s words. Then, the weight of them sank in.

Rage surged through her as memories flooded back—the cold sterility of the operating room, the searing pain, the helplessness of feeling life slip away from her body.

Corrie, seeing Elyse momentarily lost in thought, pressed on. “Everyone calls you beautiful and kind-hearted. But wasn’t that poor child just a stepping stone for you to climb higher?”

Without hesitation, Elyse strode forward and struck her across the face. The slap was sharp and decisive, leaving Corrie momentarily stunned.

Elyse's eyes were ice-cold. "Who do you think you are to speak to me like that?"

The force of the blow left a burning imprint on Corrie's cheek. Her shock quickly turned to fury.

"How dare you hit me, you disrespectful wretch!"

She lunged, ready to strike back, but Elyse saw it coming. With the same unflinching resolve, she delivered another slap, just as fierce as the first.

Corrie staggered, her face now burning on both sides.

Elyse's voice was calm but razor-sharp. "Disrespectful? Take a good look at yourself. Why should I respect you? Do you really think Brook will marry you? Camille is way better than you."

That struck a nerve.

Corrie had come here hoping to taunt Elyse, to see her crumble in pain and fury. But the tables had turned.

Elyse wasn't breaking. She was fighting back.

With a slow, mocking smile, she continued, "Do you really believe you can marry into the Owen family? You're delusional. Brook would never choose you. If I were you, I'd have left long ago, instead of clinging to a fantasy and humiliating myself."

Chapter 1583:

Corrie's face flushed red. She clenched her teeth so hard they ached.

"Elyse, you think Jayden is some perfect man? You're just another fool. He doesn't truly love anyone. You're nothing but a plaything. Your life is a joke."

Elyse met her glare with unwavering confidence. “The only joke here is you.” Her voice was steady, unshaken. “Jayden’s indifference toward you has nothing to do with me. He never cared about you. He never even saw you. But me? We love each other. He’s never treated me poorly. That must be hard for you to accept, isn’t it?”

Corrie stiffened. It hit her then—the truth in Elyse’s words.

Jayden had never loved her. Brook had never loved her. Not one man from the Owen family had ever looked at her the way she wanted.

The realization was like a slap to the face—far worse than Elyse’s.

She, accomplished and admired since young, was completely unwanted now.

Someone had to love her. Someone, somewhere.

But when she searched her mind, she found no one.

She stood frozen, not even noticing when Elyse walked away.

The corridor felt empty.

Suddenly, an eerie sense of fear settled in her chest.

Could it be? In her perfectly crafted life, was there truly no one who loved her?

No! That wasn’t possible. She still had her parents. They surely loved her.

But soon, she realized that this was only her assumption.

She believed her parents loved her because, in this world, all parents loved their children.

But it seemed that wasn’t the case for her.

Her parents only noticed her when she succeeded, when she proved useful.

They had always been this way, from childhood until now.

Even now, she clung desperately to the idea of marrying Brook—not out of love, but out of fear.

If she failed, her parents would be disappointed. And they might abandon her completely.

Her chest tightened. Her hands trembled.

She reached for the wall, steadying herself as she made her way back to her office, her mind spiraling.

“No! I absolutely cannot be jilted. I must marry Brook. Only then will my parents always love me!”

Her eyes darkened, filled with madness. If she couldn’t have what she wanted, then she would destroy everything in her way.

Elyse stormed into the lounge, her frustration evident in every movement.

Jayden noticed her distress immediately and gestured to the empty seat beside him. “What’s troubling you? Share it with me.”

Sinking into the sofa, Elyse answered bitterly, “What else could it possibly be? I encountered Corrie.”

Chapter 1584:

“What did she say to provoke such anger?” Jayden probed, his eyebrow lifting with concern.

Fury blazed in Elyse’s eyes as she spat out the words. “She accused me of using my deceased child as leverage to strengthen my position.”

Before Jayden could respond, Brook erupted from his seat. In a sudden burst of rage, he smashed his foot into the table, sending shards of glass scattering across the floor.

The violent outburst sent shockwaves through the room, leaving Elyse, Jayden, and Camille frozen in shock.

Brook stood there, chest heaving, the veins in his neck pulsing visibly beneath his skin.

Confusion clouded Elyse's thoughts as she observed Brook's reaction. Why did Brook seem angrier than she was?

"Easy now," Jayden cautioned, noting Camille's frightened expression. "You're alarming your girlfriend."

Brook's anger dissipated as he turned to find Camille quaking. "Don't be frightened," he soothed. "I would never direct such behavior toward you."

Jayden shifted his attention back to Elyse. "Rest assured, Corrie won't escape consequences. She'll answer for her cruelty."

"I'll believe that when I witness it," Elyse scoffed.

After consoling Elyse further, Jayden suggested, "The dinner hour approaches. Shall we head to the restaurant?"

Brook wrapped Camille protectively in his embrace. "Indeed. We'll take my car directly from the garage."

Their path to the elevator revealed Corrie waiting there, her demeanor transforming instantly.

She addressed Elyse with exaggerated deference, clearly treading carefully.

Though Elyse had glimpsed Corrie's true nature and longed to dismiss her entirely, Brook's strategy required restraint.

Corrie bristled at Elyse's cold shoulder but maintained her facade. "You're all dining together? Such precious moments are rare. Please, let me host everyone."

Her words hung in the air, met with pointed silence.

Camille's gaze flitted around the group before she chirped sweetly, "Why not include her? It would be rather pitiful to leave her behind."

Initially, Corrie interpreted this as consideration, until Camille's words took a barbed turn. Her expression darkened as she recognized the deliberate slight.

Camille pressed on, her voice dripping with false concern. "But Corrie, your face is so flushed. Shouldn't you attend to that? People might assume we struck you if you join us."

"Because she did strike me!" Corrie accused, pointing at Elyse.

"Oh, don't say such things," Camille chided. "Elyse is wonderful. We're practically family already. Once Brook and I marry, Elyse and I will be even closer. Don't malign my dear friend!"

Corrie seethed internally. This presumptuous woman wasn't even bothering to conceal her intentions anymore!

Chapter 1585:

She cast a desperate glance at Brook, forcing out through clenched teeth, "Camille certainly has a clever tongue. How amusing."

Brook barely acknowledged Corrie before lavishing praise on Camille. "You're absolutely delightful. Perfect, as always. I told you no one could resist your charm."

Camille nestled closer to Brook, affecting shyness. "Oh, darling, save such praise for our private moments. You're making me blush!"

Brook's hand strayed to Camille's bottom as he leaned in, his tone thick with suggestion. "Very well. I'll save my appreciation for tonight."



Though Corrie's expression soured, she feigned obliviousness. Nothing would prevent her from joining this dinner—she refused to let Brook slip away, especially today!

Brook swept into the office with Camille in his arms, their entrance commanding attention like actors taking center stage.

The office buzzed with whispers about Brook's new flame, leaving Corrie feeling like a withered flower cast aside—nothing more than yesterday's news.

Each pointed stare and hushed whisper throughout the day had pierced Corrie's dignity like daggers, leaving fresh wounds with every passing hour.

Her heart raced at the sight of Jayden and Elyse arriving together. The implications were crystal clear—if anyone witnessed Camille leaving with them, rumors would spread like wildfire, painting Camille as Brook's future wife while Corrie would fade into obscurity.

Pride wounded but survival instincts kicking in, Corrie knew she had no choice but to stick close to them.

It was her only lifeline to salvage what little dignity remained, a shield against the growing tide of whispers and scorn.

At the garage, Brook paused, fixing Corrie with a look that could freeze hell itself.

"We weren't planning on taking you. There's no room."

"There's plenty of room in the back," Corrie countered, her voice tight with barely contained indignation as she gestured toward the car.

Brook's lips curled into a sneer. "And you think Elyse wants to sit next to you?"

Corrie's eyes darted to Elyse, who responded with an eye roll dramatic enough for the stage before sliding into the car without uttering a word.

Jayden followed, the car door closing with a thud that spoke volumes.

“Honestly, your audacity amazes me,” Brook let out a laugh that dripped with venom. “Don’t you get it? Jayden and Elyse despise you. If I were you, I’d be too mortified to face them.”

“Corrie, what you did was cold-blooded,” Camille interjected, her voice honeyed with mock sympathy. “How could you hurt an innocent baby? Just because no man wants to have a baby with you? I’m sorry you can’t have your own, but you can’t just... kill someone else’s baby out of jealousy. It’s truly despicable.”

Camille punctuated her criticism by curling against Brook like a satisfied cat before sliding into the passenger seat.

Brook played the perfect gentleman for Camille, closing her door with flourish while pretending Corrie was nothing more than a shadow on the pavement.

Chapter 1586:

Though rage burned through her veins like liquid fire, Corrie maintained her composure by a thread as she got into her own car and followed.

Upon reaching the restaurant, Corrie pulled into a spot just in time to watch Elyse and the others vanish through the entrance, not sparing her so much as a backward glance.

White-hot anger surged through her as she silently cursed them all, but she swallowed her fury and quickened her pace to catch up.

Stepping into the private dining room, Corrie donned a smile bright enough to rival stage lights, playing the role of gracious hostess as she guided them to their seats.

“Elyse, order whatever you like,” she offered, her voice steady despite the tension. “I’ve wronged you in the past, and I want this meal to be my apology.”

Elyse’s expression turned to ice.

“Corrie,” Camille pounced like a cat toying with its prey, “how can you be so clueless? You’re the reason Elyse lost her baby, and you think one meal can wash away that pain?”

Brook’s features hardened into granite. “Enough, Corrie! Haven’t you humiliated yourself enough? Just stop. You’re making a complete fool of yourself, and frankly, it’s embarrassing us all.”

“I know I did wrong!” Corrie bristled like a cornered animal. “I’m trying to apologize. What’s so wrong with that?”

Brook snapped back, “Is that how you apologize? You’re just twisting the knife in Elyse’s heart!”

Elyse, who had been as still as a statue, finally spoke. Her voice cut through the air like a frozen blade.

“Corrie Bates, you seem to be misunderstanding something. There will never be any reconciliation between us. The only reason I haven’t thrown you out is that I’m trying to maintain some semblance of civility. Otherwise...”

Her voice trailed off into the void, her expression as unyielding as marble.

Jayden sat beside Elyse like a silent guardian, but when Corrie dared to part her lips, his gaze struck her with the force of a physical blow—venomous and threatening.

Camille floated above the tension like a butterfly dancing through a thunderstorm, her saccharine voice cutting through the heavy atmosphere.

“Oh, Corrie, stop making such a fuss. You should feel lucky you’re even allowed at this table with us. Don’t push it. Why can’t you learn to be demure and proper—like myself?”

She melted into Brook’s waiting arms. He cradled her close, fingers threading through her hair with deliberate tenderness.

“You’re absolutely right, sweetie. You’re the epitome of grace.”

“Shut up, bitch! Just who in heaven’s name do you think you are to dictate my behavior?”

The words ripped from her throat as she fixed Camille with a look that could melt steel.

Being belittled by the others was one thing, but Camille? The sheer audacity made her blood boil.

Chapter 1587:

Corrie unleashed her fury upon Camille, her words razor-sharp daggers that left visible wounds on Camille's composure.

Tears glistening in her eyes, Camille turned to Brook with a trembling voice. "Am I really as awful as Corrie says?"

Her voice cracking with emotion, she shifted her gaze to Elyse. "Elyse, am I really that terrible? Did I steal someone who wasn't meant to be mine?"

Elyse's response came with gentle reassurance. "No, sweetie, you're lovely. I like you very much."

"Elyse's right," Brook interjected, a warm smile playing across his face. "I love who you are. Besides..."

His expression hardened as he glanced at Corrie with unveiled contempt. "She's the ungrateful, arrogant one. You have no idea what she's capable of. Nobody likes her. She's just getting what she deserves."

Camille dabbed at her tears, her curiosity peeking through the vulnerability. "Corrie, did you really do all those terrible things? Why act so self-righteous? Can't you see how nasty you're being?"

Elyse couldn't suppress her amusement. She wondered with genuine curiosity where Brook had discovered Camille. The girl was sharp as a blade, yet maintained an air of innocent naiveté that perfectly masked her calculated strikes.

Storm clouds gathered on Corrie's face, but she couldn't unleash her thunder. In this moment, she stood alone—no allies, no supporters. All she could do was clench her jaw and swallow her pride.

Throughout the remainder of the meal, Corrie retreated into silence. She ate in isolation, removed from the conversation, like a ghost at her own table.

Camille, however, wasn't content to let sleeping dogs lie.

With honey dripping from her words, she turned to Corrie. "Corrie, Elyse and I would love some liquor. Would you mind?"

Elyse, catching Camille's drift, offered a soft "Mm-hmm" in agreement.

Already a volcano of suppressed rage, Corrie felt fresh magma surge through her veins. But catching the calculated glint in Camille's eyes, she forced herself to swallow her pride.

Through gritted teeth and a smile that wouldn't fool anyone, she managed, "Order whatever you want. I said it's on me. Go ahead."

Camille tilted her head, a musical laugh escaping her lips.

"Elyse, see? I told you Corrie wasn't entirely without merit. She's at least willing to pay for some decent wine."

Elyse rested her chin on her hand, her eyes drinking in Corrie's barely-contained fury with unveiled amusement. A derisive snort escaped her. "Indeed. She's not completely without merit."

Corrie's jaw clenched so tight the muscles danced beneath her skin.

Brook caught Corrie's expression and shot her a look of pure revulsion. "Watch your face. Don't be rude to my guests."

"Are you kidding me?" Corrie exploded, incredulous. "They're both dripping with sarcasm and practically insulting me to my face! I can't even react?"

Chapter 1588:

“Of course you can react,” Brook replied, his voice sharp as winter frost. “But we can also ask you to leave. I’m serious, Corrie. If you don’t want to be here, just go. No one’s forcing you to stay.”

Corrie’s face transformed into a battlefield of emotions before she finally managed to wrestle them into submission.

Elyse, feeding off Corrie’s barely-contained rage like a shark scenting blood, felt her own satisfaction rise.

She caught Camille’s eye as the latter studied the wine list, deliberately pointing to the priciest bottles. “Let’s get these.”

Camille’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Four bottles? Are you sure? That’s a lot of wine.”

Elyse waved off the concern with a dismissive laugh that cut through the air. “Oh, please. Four bottles is nothing.”

Camille, realizing Corrie would be the one hemorrhaging money for their expensive taste, saw no reason to object and placed the order with barely concealed glee.

The wine arrived moments later.

Corrie’s eyes widened as recognition struck—these weren’t just any bottles, but the crown jewels of the restaurant’s collection, each worth a small fortune.

A shadow fell across her features, dark thunder gathering behind her eyes.

The volcano of her rage threatened to erupt, but the echo of her own grand proclamation—her insisted generosity—froze the explosion in her throat.

Like bitter medicine, she swallowed her mounting fury.

Camille, savoring Corrie’s distress like a fine vintage, poured Elyse’s glass with theatrical grace.

Their crystal glasses met in a musical chime, a toast to their small victory as they sipped their liquid gold.

The evening blossomed into success—for most.

While others melted into their chairs, wrapped in the warm blanket of satisfaction and easy conversation, Corrie sat apart from their contentment.

The jovial atmosphere pressed against her like a physical weight, each burst of laughter another stone on her chest.

Their genuine warmth and camaraderie twisted in her gut like a knife, their happiness a mockery of her isolation.

At last, the pressure became unbearable.

Corrie shot to her feet, her chair scraping against the floor like a discordant note.

“Brook,” she managed through clenched teeth, “I need to speak with you. Outside.”

Elyse cast a wary glance at Corrie, uncertain what mischief the latter might concoct next.

Meanwhile, Camille, her distress plain as day, interjected, “Corrie, can’t you just leave Brook in peace? Must his discomfort be the price of your happiness?”

“Silence, you bitch!” Corrie roared, her fury breaking through her fragile restraint.

Chapter 1589:

All day long, she had bottled up her frustration because of Camille, but now her patience had snapped like an overstretched string.

Who did this woman think she was, using her allure to climb the ranks, and yet daring to challenge her authority?

Corrie's eyes lingered on Camille's youthful features, her gaze brimming with envy. Camille was younger, sure—but so what? Once upon a time, she herself had been far more radiant than Camille.

Brook, rising from his seat, broke the tense silence. "It's alright. Let her say what's on her mind."

Corrie snorted in derision before storming out of the room, her heels echoing like a gavel striking judgment.

Elyse frowned. "Do you think she'll try to hurt you?"

Brook chuckled softly. "She wouldn't dare. She'll just let off steam and hurl complaints my way."

Jayden, his chin cradled in his hand, spoke with a calm detachment. "Don't underestimate her. She's teetering on the edge. When people reach their breaking point, they often show their true colors."

He paused briefly, then added with emphasis, "Remember our plan. We can't afford for her to see through it."

Brook's smile carried a quiet confidence. "Don't worry. I'm not about to fumble this. If she does reveal her intentions, it'll be exactly what I've been waiting for."

With that, he strode out of the room, his steps measured and composed.

The moment the door clicked shut, Elyse let out an exasperated sigh. "This dinner felt so tense."

Jayden, ever composed, reassured her, "It'll all be over soon."

Then, turning his attention to Camille, he asked pointedly, "What about you? When do you plan to end this arrangement with Brook?"

The question caught Camille off guard. Her face betrayed a mix of flustered surprise and uncertainty.



Elyse, noticing her reaction, leaned forward with curiosity. “Wait a second—didn’t Brook tell you we’re on the same side?”

Camille froze, her eyes darting between Elyse and Jayden, as if trying to determine whether this was a trap.

Jayden offered a calm explanation. “I asked Brook to find someone who could convincingly play the role of his girlfriend. You’ve done an incredible job; we honestly believed it at first.”

Camille hesitated, skepticism written all over her face. “Is that really true?”

Elyse, clearly amused by Camille’s caution, chuckled lightly. “Do you know how we realized you and Brook were faking it?”

Camille, her nerves beginning to fray, asked, “What mistake did I make?”

Shaking her head with a knowing smile, Elyse replied, “It was a tiny detail—you poured Brook a drink he doesn’t like. He didn’t touch it, and you didn’t even notice. That one mismatch was all it took for us to catch on.”

Camille glanced over at Brook’s untouched glass on the table, her shoulders sinking with a sigh.

Chapter 1590:

She tapped her temple and muttered in frustration, “Do you think Corrie noticed?”

Elyse waved the thought away with a dismissive gesture. “Not a chance. She was far too consumed by her own anger to notice anything so subtle.”

Propping her chin in her hands, Elyse studied Camille with a mischievous smile. “Are you sure you’re not a professional actress? You were so convincing, we genuinely thought you two were a real couple at first.”

Blushing at the compliment, Camille fidgeted with her fingers. “Actually, no. I’m not an actress. I work at a bar, serving drinks. Last night was my first shift, and that’s when Brook noticed me and offered me this job.”

Elyse raised an eyebrow, intrigued. “And what exactly did you do to catch his attention?”

Camille hesitated, her cheeks tinged pink. “I kind of stole a customer’s focus away from another girl. That customer ended up buying ten cases of beer from me. When the other girl got upset and cursed me out, I played the innocent victim. Brook said he needed someone with my knack for subtle manipulation to provoke a horrible woman.”

Elyse burst into laughter, unable to contain herself.

As it turned out, Camille’s eccentric personality wasn’t an act—it was simply who she was.

Shaking her head in amusement, Elyse remarked, “Brook really lucked out with you. You’re just what he needs to handle his big problem.”

Elyse’s eyes sparkled with mischief as she teased, “Surely spending time with Brook beats slinging drinks behind the bar, doesn’t it?”

Camille nodded, enthusiasm radiating from her face. “Brook promised that once everything falls into place, he’ll provide me with an apartment and support my return to education.”

Elyse’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Return to education? Just how young are you?”

A hint of shyness crept into Camille’s voice as she replied, “I’m just a month shy of legal adulthood. Brook suggested taking a gap year to focus on college entrance preparation.”

Astonishment colored Elyse’s features. “Well, that’s unexpected. He has certainly grown generous, supporting your educational pursuits.”

Camille’s fingers nervously threaded through her hair. “Truth is, I’m no academic prodigy. Even with a year of preparation, top universities might remain out of reach.”

Elyse paused thoughtfully before suggesting, “Have you considered pursuing acting? You could dedicate the year to preparing for both auditions and entrance exams.”

Hope illuminated Camille’s features as she leaned forward eagerly. “Do you honestly believe I could succeed in the entertainment industry?”

A knowing smile spread across Elyse’s face. “Your recent performance was quite convincing. Had you not confessed, we’d still be none the wiser.”

A rosy blush colored Camille’s cheeks as she responded softly, “Perhaps I’ll explore that path then.”