

## **Bound love 1681**

Chapter 1681:

The sound of Shaun's hand connecting with her cheek was jarring enough that Leon and Lucille both fell silent.

Jayden was the first to react, bursting into gleeful laughter.

This compounded Dolores's embarrassment. Her face turned red, even redder than the mark Shaun had left on her cheek.

Leon roared, pointing a finger at Shaun. "How dare you hit my daughter!"

Shaun glanced over and raised an eyebrow at him. "I suggest you call the police. Tell them I slept with your daughter and all the other nonsense you've been spewing. Let them handle this."

Jayden checked his watch. This drama had gone on long enough. He needed to get back to the car and check on Elyse.

"All right, that's enough," he said impatiently. "This is just the same old song and dance. I've taken the liberty of calling the police myself. They'll be here any minute now. You can tell them whatever you like."

Leon's jaw dropped. "What? You called the police? Why?"

Jayden blinked innocently at him. "Well, why wouldn't I? You've been saying that your daughter was wronged—in sordid detail, too, might I add. Whether Shaun did it or not, she deserves justice, don't you think? Oh, you don't have to thank me, if that's what you're worried about. I'm always happy to help."

Leon found himself in a dilemma.

He wrung his hands, exclaiming in dismay, "Oh my god! Why would you involve the police? This is going to escalate quickly!"

Jayden responded with a solemn nod. "Precisely. An issue this serious needs to be escalated. How else will you find justice? Once the police arrive, ensure your daughter recounts every detail of the incident."

Dolores turned pale at these words, her legs nearly giving way beneath her.

Lucille wrapped her arms around her, her voice filled with concern. "Sweetheart, are you okay?"

Jayden looked around, puzzled. "What's with the reactions? Isn't this what you want, for the police to assist in securing justice?"

Leon, mouth agape, scrambled for a rebuttal before settling on a defense.

He pleaded, "Understand this, Shaun indeed erred, but he's now amnesiac. Our families have been close for years; we prefer to resolve this quietly. Involving the police could lead to chaos."

Jayden sighed deeply. "That's a bad approach. As her parents, you must protect her. How can you even consider showing mercy to her assailant?"

Feeling Shaun's intense stare, Jayden continued unabated.

Lucille panicked as Dolores's eyes shut and she slumped into her embrace. "Leon, please, stop this! Dolores has fainted! She's barely out of the hospital; she can't endure more stress!"

Leon slapped his forehead in realization. "It must be the shock. Quick, we need to get her to a hospital!"

Chapter 1682:

He and Lucille swiftly departed, supporting Dolores between them. Shaun sneered, "They're fleeing? And here I thought they might actually proceed with the police."

Jayden explained, “Without Lowell’s assistance, Leon’s efforts are futile. Any fabricated evidence they muster will crumble; they wouldn’t risk involving the police.”

Shaun turned a questioning gaze to Jayden. “Next time, spare yourself the effort. Their petty schemes don’t concern me.”

Jayden grinned. “Don’t get me wrong. I was merely here for the spectacle. Now that I’ve witnessed their tactics, I can nearly guess their next move.”

“Oh?” Shaun was intrigued. “What’s your prediction?”

Jayden’s voice held a trace of amusement as he said, “Rather than dredging up weak tales from the past, they’ll likely stage a scenario where you end up with Dolores in a compromising situation and then leak it.”

Jayden smirked slightly. “Looks like you’re the center of their universe now.”

Shaun’s lips curled slightly, a mix of irritation and amusement flickering across his face. “I’m the one under fire here, yet you seem unusually pleased. Are you actually enjoying this?”

Jayden gave a firm nod. “No doubt about it. Elyse told me that you hurt the one she cared for, and she believed karma would catch up to you eventually. Well, looks like today is that day.”

Shaun paused, reflecting, then said, “I can’t deny her accuracy. I’d do anything to turn back time. From Tracy’s faked death... no, even from our wedding day... no, even further, right back to the start. I wish I could have cherished her properly from the beginning, shed my ego, and showered her with the love she always deserved. Yet, here I am, lost in fantasies that merely soften the blows of reality.”

Jayden commented, “Witnessing your regrets reminds me to be thankful that, despite my own follies, I haven’t completely alienated Elyse. She hasn’t given up on me just yet.”

Shaun gave Jayden a deep, probing look. “You’re lucky. Men like us seem fated to fumble with love, forever grasping at something just out of reach. Our inability to hold onto it—that’s our burden.”

They shared a prolonged silence before Shaun finally said, “You can leave now. You can’t change anything here.”

Jayden then brought up a new topic. “I’ve uncovered some details about Tracy. Interested?”

“Yes,” Shaun answered quickly. “I need to know if she’s actually with Lowell.”

Jayden paused briefly before asking, “And what if she is?”

“I’ll do what needs to be done,” Shaun replied, his voice firm.

After another brief silence, Jayden responded, “Understood.”

Jayden returned to his car, where Elyse was still sleeping soundly. He couldn’t help but pull her close, embracing her gently.

Chapter 1683:

Elyse murmured in her sleep, “Leave me alone.”

Jayden whispered softly into her hair, “I just want to give you a kiss. Go back to sleep.”

Five days later, Jayden’s people finally cornered Tracy, intercepting her on a street.

With nowhere to run, Tracy’s pulse hammered in her ears. Her voice wavered between fear and defiance as she demanded, “Who sent you?”

One of the bodyguards held up his hands in a placating gesture. “Bernard, please don’t be alarmed. We’re working for Mr. Jayden Owen. He’s sent us and will be here shortly. Please wait.”

The mention of Jayden’s name sent ice through Tracy’s veins. She knew exactly why he was doing this, and the last thing she wanted was a confrontation.

“Move!” she burst out, her voice rising in pitch. “I’m going home! You have no right to stop me like this!”

“I’m following Mr. Owen’s instructions,” the bodyguard repeated with practiced calm. “Please wait. He’ll be here soon.”

Tracy’s fury erupted. She seized the bag of tangerines she’d just purchased and threw them at the bodyguards, juice splattering across their pristine suits and faces.

“Get away from me!” she shrieked. “I don’t want to see any of you!”

At that moment, Jayden’s car pulled up. He observed her outburst, his brow creasing slightly as he approached.

“Seeing me frightens you this much?” he asked. “Or are you worried I’ll bring Elyse with me? Are you not ready to face her yet?”

Tracy’s eyebrows arched in manufactured confusion. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she snapped. “I don’t understand a word of it. Tracy? Elyse? Who are these people? All I know is you’re preventing me from going home! Now move!”

Jayden’s demeanor grew eerily calm. “I can,” he said, “but first, tell me why you’re with Lowell.”

Tracy regarded him with undisguised suspicion. “That’s none of your business.”

Jayden hesitated for a beat before arching an eyebrow. “Does Lowell have any clue that you’re his girlfriend?”

Tracy’s eyes constricted to dangerous slits. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I just can’t believe Lowell, of all people, would choose to be with the woman he almost killed. And, from what I’ve seen, he treats you well. So either he’s got amnesia, or he’s completely unaware of who you really are.”

Tracy let out a short, mirthless laugh. “Jayden, aren’t you supposed to be the sharp one? Connect the dots yourself. Why drag me into it?”

Jayden smirked. “Why waste time guessing when I can pull the curtain back with a snap of my fingers?”

He paused for effect. “So, should I summon Elyse? Or perhaps Lowell?”

Tracy’s face lost all color. “No!” she blurted out, shaking her head furiously. “Don’t call them! I can’t— I won’t face them!”

Chapter 1684:

Jayden tilted his head. “So, you’re turning your back on both Elyse and Lowell?”

Tracy nodded with conviction.

“Then,” Jayden said smoothly, “that leaves a third path. The only one you’ve got.”

Tracy blinked, suspicion creeping into her voice. “What third option?”

Jayden fixed her with a knowing look. “Shaun.”

Her temper flared like a struck match. “Why drag him into this? He lost his memory!”

“He did,” Jayden conceded, “but not anymore. It’s all come back. And he remembers you.”

Tracy recoiled as if struck. “That’s absurd!” She shot back. “It’s better this way—better if he’s forgotten me! I want to bury the past just as much as he should. We’re even. We should stay out of each other’s lives.”

Jayden arched a brow. “That might be your take on it, but Shaun? He doesn’t see it that way.”

Tracy exhaled sharply, exhaustion creeping into her voice. “I don’t care how he sees it. I don’t want to see him!”

Jayden’s lips curled into a half-smile. “Well,” he murmured, “that ship has already sailed. Because he’s walking toward you right now.”

“What?” Tracy’s heart leaped as she spun around, her breath catching at the possibility of Shaun’s presence.

Before she could complete her turn, strong arms enveloped her in a desperate embrace.

Shaun clutched her close, his features twisted with anguish.

Tracy stood frozen, every muscle tensed like a statue. Time seemed to stop as her mind struggled to process the sudden intimacy.

Shaun buried his face in the hollow of her neck, his ragged breathing scorching her skin, as if he were trying to memorize her very essence.

A heavy silence blanketed them both. Something wet trickled down her shoulder, and she felt her rigid posture beginning to soften despite herself.

“Let me go,” she commanded, her voice as brittle as winter frost. Shaun only shook his head, his arms tightening like iron bands around her.

“If you don’t let me go,” Tracy warned, steel threading through her words, “you can forget about my forgiveness.” Only then did his grip finally loosen.

He scrubbed at his tear-stained face with trembling hands, trying to maintain composure, even as naked fear haunted his eyes. “What do I have to do to earn your forgiveness?” he pleaded, his voice cracking.

A sharp, humorless laugh escaped Tracy’s lips as she brushed at her clothes, as if trying to erase his touch. “Why should I forgive you? You think performing a few token gestures will make everything right? Do you really believe that’s possible?”

“I know earning your forgiveness won’t be easy,” Shaun persisted, “but I want us back. Please, just give me one chance.”

Chapter 1685:

“No,” Tracy’s response cut through the air like a blade.

Jayden, watching their emotional dance with mounting frustration, finally broke in. “Tracy, we came here for the truth about you and Lowell.”

Tracy’s eyebrow arched elegantly. “Who I choose to be with isn’t your concern. Is it somehow criminal for me to be with him?”

“Not criminal,” Jayden countered, “but I sense you’re heading down that path.”

He paused meaningfully before continuing, “How did you convince Lowell to be with you? You two have bad blood between you—both of you know that.”

Tracy toyed with a strand of hair, her voice dripping with false casualness. “A single woman dating a single man. What’s so extraordinary about that? It’s not like you’ve never seen a couple before.”

As she played with her hair, Shaun’s gaze caught the telltale marks adorning her neck.

His sharp intake of breath preceded his sudden movement. He seized her wrist, tilting her head to examine the evidence more closely.

The marks told their own story—some fresh, some fading.

Shaun’s eyes flooded with crimson rage. His fingers tightened around her wrist as he growled, “Are those from Lowell?”

Tracy met his gaze unflinchingly. “Of course. Who else would they be from?”



“How could you let him touch you?” Shaun’s words thundered through the space between them.

Tracy’s laugh was like shattered glass. “He’s my boyfriend. His touch is nothing less than natural.”

“Snap out of it!” Shaun’s bloodshot eyes blazed with desperate fury, tears threatening to spill over. “A man like him doesn’t deserve to lay a finger on you!”

“He doesn’t deserve to?” Tracy retorted. “Then who does? You?”

The words hit Shaun like a physical blow, his face crumpling. “You still bear resentment against me,” he whispered, agony threading through each word.

Tracy wrenched her hand free, massaging her tender wrist. “I’m merely stating facts,” she replied, her voice as level as a frozen lake. “If you interpret that as resentment, that’s your choice.”

All the fight seemed to drain from Shaun at once, his shoulders sagging as if under an invisible weight.

Jayden observed their emotional warfare with growing frustration, feeling utterly powerless to intervene.

Their personal drama wasn’t his concern; he needed to understand Tracy’s true motives.

It was clear Shaun was too emotionally compromised to ask the right questions.

Meeting Tracy’s gaze with unwavering focus, Jayden pressed, “You’re with Lowell for a reason, aren’t you? What is it? His life? Or his family fortune? Level with me, and I’ll help you.”

Tracy recognized Jayden’s attempt at manipulation. Her eyebrow arched delicately as she offered a smile sweet enough to rot teeth. “There’s no hidden agenda here. I simply want a happy life with my boyfriend. Expect a wedding invitation and do make sure to attend.”

The word “wedding” shattered what remained of Shaun’s composure. “We were meant to be together!” he exploded, raw anguish contorting his features. “The invitations were already sent! We chose your wedding gown together! We almost got married...”

## Chapter 1686:

Tracy let out a bitter laugh. “Do I really need to remind you? We had a wedding, but we were never truly husband and wife.”

Shaun’s tone sharpened. “I wanted to marry you! I did! So why did you—”

“Because I couldn’t commit to a man who, just moments before our wedding, was more concerned with another woman than with his own bride.”

Tracy gave a bitter chuckle. “Eventually, I understood. You never really loved me. That’s why letting go—even on our wedding day—was so easy for you.”

A flicker of panic crossed Shaun’s face. He shook his head, his voice filled with urgency. “No, that’s not true! It wasn’t like that! I had just taken over the family business—I needed the Ruiz family’s backing. My hesitation wasn’t about you. I was securing my place in the company!”

Tracy remained silent for a moment before a hollow laugh escaped her. “You just proved my point. Love was never your priority. And so, I was the one left behind, dealing with the fallout.”

Shaun’s eyes brimmed with tears. His voice wavered, thick with regret. “I was wrong. I was young and reckless. I thought money and power meant everything.”

Tracy’s smile faded, her gaze turning cold. “And now that you have it all—power, wealth—why aren’t you satisfied? Why are you here, looking for me?”

Tears spilled down Shaun’s face. He pressed his lips together, struggling for words.

Tracy didn’t wait. “I’ll tell you why. Because none of it was ever enough. No matter how much you gain, there’s always something missing. And that void, Shaun, isn’t filled with power or money. It’s filled with love.”

His lips quivered, his grief nearly swallowing him. “You understand?”

Tracy let out a bitter chuckle. “I loved you once, Shaun. Four years in college, and another year after we graduated. I watched you push yourself—taking over the company, chasing deal after deal. Not for wealth or status, but for your parents’ approval. Because the only time you ever felt their love was in those rare moments of success.” She met his stunned gaze. “Even now, looking back, can you honestly call that love? They cherished your achievements, not you. When you succeeded, they praised you. When you stumbled, they tore you down. You spent your life chasing an impossible standard, pretending to be flawless—because to them, any sign of weakness made you unworthy. Shaun, wasn’t it exhausting carrying that weight?”

Shaun froze, caught off guard. He had never imagined she could see through the mask he had worn for so long—into the cracks beneath, to the fragile, uncertain part of him he tried so hard to hide.

His voice wavered as he asked, “If you understood all of that... if you knew who I really was... why did you choose to be with me?”

Tracy’s face remained unreadable, her voice steady. “I loved you. Even after seeing you for who you really were, I still loved you. It hurt—watching you chase approval that never truly came, pushing yourself to exhaustion for achievements that felt hollow. I saw you sacrifice yourself, and it broke me. All I wanted was to be there—to take care of you, to love you—hoping that, somehow, it would bring you even a little happiness.”

Shaun’s entire body trembled. “You... loved me?”

“Yes,” Tracy replied, her tone devoid of warmth. “I loved you. Past tense.” A bitter laugh escaped her lips. “But then, I nearly died. And love? That became the least of my concerns.”

Shaun’s face twisted with anguish. “Did Lowell push you off that cliff?”

Chapter 1687:

Tracy let out a sharp, hollow laugh. “It was Dolores who pushed me.” She met Shaun’s stunned gaze, her voice eerily steady. “Lowell had other plans—he was going to send me out of the country, quietly. But then I ran into Dolores. She’s completely unhinged. She wanted me dead. So when she shoved me, I grabbed her. If I was going down, she was coming with me.” A bitter smile flickered across her lips. “But Lowell stepped in. Tore us apart. And I was the only one who fell.”

Shaun’s lips parted, but no words came. His hands clenched at his sides.

It was the Ruiz siblings' doing.

Elyse had been certain, filled with anger, urging him to look into them. Yet, what had he done? Nothing. He never bothered to investigate, never even questioned them.

Shaun's hands balled into fists as realization hit him hard. He could no longer avoid the truth—it was time to confront it.

He had treated Tracy horribly. She had given him her complete trust, poured herself into him, and in return, he hadn't even given her half of what Elyse had.

The devastation on Shaun's face didn't go unnoticed. Tracy sighed in exasperation, turning to Jayden. "I've had my say," she said coldly. "I'm leaving. Don't try to stop me."

Tracy's eyes darted to her watch, her patience wearing thin. She knew that if she lingered any longer, Lowell's call would be inevitable.

The last thing she needed was to take his call with these two thorns in her side—Jayden and Shaun. She had to shake them off, and fast.

After carefully weighing his words, Jayden cut through the tension like a knife. "This devotion to Lowell isn't born of love, is it? You're orchestrating his demise, aren't you?"

His words hit Shaun like a physical blow, sending the room spinning as his eyes searched Tracy's face, desperate for any sign of denial.

A ghost of a smile played on Tracy's lips. "Being Lowell's wife comes with its own rewards. Why would I jeopardize that by plotting his death?"

"Marry me instead!" Shaun's voice cracked with desperation. "The company's reins are firmly in my hands now—the family stands united behind me. Return to me, and every share I own becomes yours!"

"I'm afraid that ship has sailed," Tracy replied, her voice as cold as winter frost. "I'm heading home. Cross my path again, and you won't like the consequences."

Shaun crumbled, his arms encircling her as broken sobs wracked his body. "Don't walk away. I can't bear to lose you again. Please... just please stay."

Tracy's palm struck his cheek with a sharp crack. Yet he only clung tighter, like a drowning man to a lifeline.

A harsh laugh escaped her throat. "Where's your dignity? You've always worn that mask of cool indifference. What's this pitiful display? These tears? Have you no pride left?"

"None of it matters," he choked out between sobs, refusing to let go. "That wasn't the real me. You're the only one who knows my true self. Without you, I'm nothing but an empty shell."

Tracy had changed.

Chapter 1688:

Once, the sight of Shaun breaking down, laying his soul bare, would have shattered her resolve. She would have wrapped him in her arms, whispered sweet nothings until his tears dried.

But death had transformed her.

In that sterile hospital room, broken and alone, her former love felt like a distant dream. Those once-powerful emotions had dissolved like morning mist.

Now, only hatred coursed through her veins.

A blazing fury toward Dolores's cruelty, matched by the slow-burning rage at Lowell's failure to catch her, letting her plummet from that cliff's edge.

Both bore the weight of guilt. Both earned her hatred.

Snapping back to reality, Tracy's gaze fell to Shaun's tear-stained face, her voice steady and sharp as steel. "Push me any further, keep standing in my way, and I won't give you another chance. Understand?"

A flicker of hope ignited in Shaun's tear-filled eyes. "You mean it? You're open to giving me another shot?" His voice trembled with desperate optimism.

Tracy's fingers grazed his cheek, her smile holding a dangerous sweetness. "Why not? Maybe you'll prove me wrong. Perhaps life with you could bring me joy after all. I'd be a fool to dismiss that possibility, wouldn't I?"

Shaun bobbed his head frantically through his tears. "I swear I'll make you happy!"

"Then quit wasting precious time," Tracy's voice carried a razor's edge. "Start planning how you'll make that happen."

Like a man awakening from a spell, Shaun released her reluctantly, his eyes never leaving her form, as if she might vanish into thin air.

Jayden stood with arms crossed, his stance casual but his eyes sharp. "Should Elyse know about today's... events?"

Tracy met his probing gaze, her mouth tightening into a hard line. "If you want to burden her with worry, that's your choice."

"So Elyse means nothing to you now?" Jayden's eyebrow arched in challenge.

Tracy remained silent. She turned on her heel, pausing only to deliver a swift kick to one of the nearby guards—a final outlet for her frustration.

This time, Jayden held his tongue. He'd learned the hard way not to push her limits.

After Tracy's departure, Jayden turned his attention to Shaun.

He called out several times before Shaun's glazed eyes finally focused. "What is it?"

Jayden exhaled heavily. “I just realized Tracy has quite the talent for taming animals.”

Confusion clouded Shaun’s features. “You want her working with lions and tigers? Have you lost your mind? That’s incredibly dangerous!”

A wry smile played at Jayden’s lips. “I meant you’re her star pupil. Look at yourself—she treats you with indifference, even raises a hand to you, yet here you are, following her around like a...”

“Love-sick puppy.”

Color flooded Shaun’s face as he glowered. “She only acted that way because I upset her! When has she ever treated me like some common dog?”

Chapter 1689:

Jayden could only shake his head, words failing him at his friend’s blind devotion.

Tracy hadn’t even been home for ten minutes when she received Lowell’s call.

She eagerly answered her phone, speaking in a soft, sweet voice, “Is your meeting over already?”

“Yeah,” Lowell replied, sounding tired. “I’m going to be late tonight. Make sure you eat dinner, okay?”

Tracy feigned distress. “Ugh! I’ve been packing on the pounds ever since I started dating you!”

Lowell chuckled. “Really? Which part? I might have to check when I get home.”

“You’re so naughty! I’ll wait up for you then.” Tracy spent the next couple of minutes flirting with him some more before they finally hung up.

On the other side, Lowell stared at his phone, lost in thought. It took him a moment to gather his bearings and return to his work.

Just then, his assistant came in with a troubled look on his face. “Sir, your sister is here with your parents. They’re insisting that you stop working and see them immediately.”

Lowell didn’t even bat an eye. “Ignore them. They’re just here to stir up some trouble.”

Instead of leaving, however, his assistant lingered, looking as though he was deliberating whether to speak again.

Lowell set the documents down and looked at him. “Whatever it is, just say it.”

“Your sister guessed out loud that you must be in love,” the assistant said nervously. “She said she’s going to find out who the woman is, and... Well, she called your girlfriend a—a... A hussy. And she claimed that you’ve been neglecting your family because of your girlfriend.”

Lowell let out a bark of laughter. “If she had the nerve to say that, then all the more reason to let her wait.”

“I understand.” The assistant nodded and hurried out of the room.

Lowell dove back into his work, his focus absolute and unwavering. He needed to finish the paperwork as soon as possible so he could go home and embrace his precious girlfriend.

She had mentioned gaining a little weight, and he was genuinely curious to see where. It was his top priority for the day.

Lowell was about to wrap things up when Dolores suddenly burst into his office, flanked by Lucille and Leon on either side.

They had swung the door open with such force that it slammed against the wall. The hapless assistant was shoved inside as they barreled through, ending up flat on his back on the floor.

“Everyone, please calm down!” the assistant cried, even as he scrambled to find his glasses on the floor. They had flown off his head when he fell. “Please don’t disturb Mr. Ruiz. He will see you once he is free.”



Dolores swung her brand-new designer bag and strode over, her heels clacking loudly against the polished floor. Without a word, she stepped directly on the poor assistant's glasses, twisting her foot to ensure they were shattered beyond repair.

The crunching sound of the lenses made the assistant wince. His stomach sank at the thought of yet another trip to the optometrist.

Chapter 1690:

Dolores huffed in satisfaction. How dare a mere employee keep her waiting! And Lowell, too, acting as if he had any authority over her. How ridiculous!

Lowell calmly closed his laptop and glanced at his assistant. "Tell accounting to double your bonus this month. Go get yourself a new pair of glasses, then head home."

The assistant's face lit up. "Thank you, sir! I'll get one of the other assistants to cover the rest of my shift."

After Lowell's assistant scampered off, Dolores walked up to Lowell's desk. She crossed her arms over her chest and sneered. "I must say, you sure have a knack for managing your employees. No wonder those lapdogs are so loyal to you."

"It's called charisma," Lowell replied smoothly. "It's something you wouldn't understand, I'm afraid, though it explains your distinct lack of admirers."

Lucille took offense. "How dare you speak to your sister like that! She's perfectly charming as she is!"

"If that's true," Lowell drawled, his voice laced with sarcasm, "then Shaun would have fallen for her a long time ago. The fact that all three of you barged in here uninvited can only mean that you hit a wall with Shaun. Well? Am I right?"

"It's Dad's fault!" Dolores grumbled. "He was supposed to help me fabricate some evidence, but he bungled the whole thing! Even a dimwit wouldn't believe anything in his pile of so-called evidence!"

She tossed a folder onto his desk, presumably containing all this supposed evidence. Lowell picked it up and briefly skimmed through its contents.

He smirked before saying, "If you can't do it right, then don't bother doing it at all. Our family may not come from old money, but we still have a reputation to maintain. I can't afford this kind of embarrassment."

Dolores' jaw clenched. "Are you calling me an embarrassment? Have you forgotten that I am still your older sister? How dare you!"

Lowell just shrugged. "I'm simply stating facts. If you keep this up, news of your little forgery scheme might just leak into the press. Before you know it, it will be all over the city."

Leon cleared his throat. "I know I fumbled the evidence, but it's tricky business. The thing is, I've figured out a way to get Shaun and Dolores together without faking anything."

"Dad," Dolores whined, "you have to make this work this time. My future happiness depends on it!"

Leon turned to glare at her. "This is all your fault! You have an unhealthy obsession with Shaun! Our family has its pick of eligible partners, and you insist on choosing someone who doesn't even care about you! You're the one making things difficult for me and your mom!"

Lucille heaved a long, exasperated sigh. Her husband had made a great point. In fact, if they had gone with any other prospective son-in-law, they would probably be discussing wedding plans by now.

Dolores sighed dreamily, her eyes glazing over with infatuation. "I just love Shaun. He's so handsome and accomplished. He's everything to me."