

Bound love 1541

Chapter 1541:

“Oh gosh, I haven’t really thought about that question. I need to ponder it for a bit.” Louise was momentarily taken aback, her mind whirling as she contemplated deeply.

Elyse waited patiently, sipping her milk and nibbling on her sandwich. However, even after her plate was clean, Louise still hadn’t responded. Elyse, feeling lost, ventured, “Does this question really require so much thought?”

Louise flashed an awkward smile. “I don’t really have a favorite type, it seems.”

“What about Edward? Didn’t you always speak highly of him?” Elyse asked, her brow furrowed in confusion.

Louise chuckled. “That was merely me resigning to the fate of an arranged marriage, as is the custom in my royal bloodline. I had to warm up to the idea of spending a lifetime with someone chosen for me.”

Elyse, caught off guard by the response, paused for a moment before saying, “So, you probably won’t have much say in your future spouse either, huh?”

Louise propped her chin on one hand, took a thoughtful sip of coffee, and murmured, “Even though I hold a position of power, my authority is borrowed from the will of my people. Protecting them is my sacred duty, so personal desires, like who I marry or whether I bear heirs, take a backseat.”

Elyse, impressed by Louise’s mature perspective, remarked, “I guess I underestimated you. You’re stronger than I realized.”

Louise winked at Elyse. “I owe that strength to you. Without your guidance, I’d probably still just be a princess, not a future ruler.”

Elyse smiled warmly. “But you’re the one who made it a reality. I merely pointed you in the right direction.”

Their shared understanding sparked a silent smile between them as they reached out to hold each other's hands.

Louise suddenly remembered something and said, "By the way, I heard from my security detail that you visited the police station yesterday to inquire about Fiona. Are you planning to see her?"

Elyse, startled by the mention, nodded and explained, "Yes, a male friend of mine is entangled in some unfinished business with her. It's time they cleared the air."

She knew all too well the shadows of the past that haunted Nick. That was why she wanted him to confront Fiona, to resolve his lingering turmoil.

Louise assured her, "That's easily arranged. Where is your friend? Have him come to us."

With that, Elyse promptly called Nick.

Nick, who was practicing the violin, rushed over in haste, thinking Elyse was in trouble. Upon arrival, and seeing no immediate danger, he exclaimed irritably, "You said it was urgent! Where's the crisis?"

Elyse blinked innocently. "Would you have come this quickly if I hadn't made it sound serious?"

Nick, leaning on the table and taking a deep breath, asked, "So, what's this all about?"

Elyse revealed, "My friend can get us into the prison."

"What? Prison? Why on earth would we go there?" Nick stepped back, putting distance between them. Elyse replied, "To meet the woman who sabotaged you. Don't you want to confront her yourself?"

Chapter 1542:

“The woman who sabotaged me... Fiona Evans!” Nick’s voice trembled with unresolved anger. “Why should I face her? She’s already caused enough damage. She cost me my chance at the Swan Cup and an early exit from the competition. I have no desire to see her!” His emotions surged like a storm.

Elyse responded firmly, “You want to continue with your music, right? You need to face this head-on, confront your past pain.”

Nick, his voice weak, protested, “But I haven’t abandoned the violin.”

“It’s not enough. You’re merely pretending to move on.” Elyse’s insight cut through the facade, touching the core of his agony.

Persuaded by her understanding, Nick asked, “Do you really have a way for me to meet her?”

Elyse nodded. “It’s not me. It’s her.” She gestured to Louise. “The Princess of Manfek, the future heiress to the throne. She’s the key to your closure.”

Nick, visibly shaken, managed to stammer, “She-she’s a princess?”

Elyse affirmed, “I have no reason to lie.”

Louise, enjoying Nick’s astonishment, stood with regal poise. “Let’s go. Time is of the essence.”

Elyse followed Louise out.

Nick was still in a fog, struggling to wrap his head around the reality as the security team ushered him into the car.

As Louise, Nick, and Elyse pulled up to the prison, they stepped out of the car.

Nick stood frozen at the entrance, his eyes fixed on the looming walls crowned with sharp barbed wire. He gulped, his voice shaky as he muttered, “So, Fiona Evans really ended up here.”

Elyse gave a quiet nod, her gaze distant as she reflected. “She’s done her fair share of damage. Not only did she sabotage your chance, but she also caused an accident that left a contestant in rehab. Her sentence had to be tough.”

Nick’s emotions swirled inside him. He hadn’t fully grasped the depth of Fiona’s wrongdoings, only that she had ruined his shot at continuing the competition. But hearing about the accident made everything feel more tangled and difficult to process.

With Louise taking the lead, Elyse and Nick followed into the prison. They were told only one visitor could enter at a time, so Elyse went in alone first.

She was led down a narrow hallway by a guard until they reached a small room. Cameras perched in every corner, their lenses unblinking and watchful. Elyse settled into the chair at the center of the room, her eyes fixed on the glass partition in front of her. A narrow slot at the bottom of the glass served as the only bridge for their conversation.

After a ten-minute wait, she heard the door creak open.

A guard stepped in, guiding a woman clad in a loose-fitting prison uniform into sight.

It was Fiona, someone Elyse hadn’t laid eyes on in what felt like an eternity. Fiona appeared noticeably thinner, her prison uniform draping over her frail frame. Yet, her steps were steady, a sign that she hadn’t endured harsh treatment during her time inside.

Chapter 1543:

As Fiona was seated, her eyes slowly rose to meet Elyse’s gaze.

Fiona’s eyes widened with disbelief, surprise flickering across her face — she clearly hadn’t anticipated a visit from Elyse.

Elyse, trying to keep things light, offered a small smile. “It’s been a while. You’re looking better than I imagined.”

Fiona sneered, her tone bitter, “Came to rub salt in the wound, did you? I knew you’d show up, pretending to be all righteous. You might fool others, but I can see right through you.”

Elyse's smile faltered but didn't disappear. "Still stuck on the same old issues, even behind bars? You're focused on all the wrong things."

Fiona's eyes sparked with fury. "Why should I change? You're the reason I'm here! You should be the one rotting in this prison, not me!"

Elyse sighed and shook her head. "You really think I'm the one who should be behind bars? I didn't ruin an innocent person's chance or cause an accident. That was all you."

"You pushed me to do it!" Fiona's voice shot back, louder and more desperate.

"Nobody twisted your arm, Fiona!" Elyse snapped, her tone sharp as a blade. "You chose this path. You're the one with ulterior motives—trying to skip the hard work and get ahead in the competition. Blaming me? That's just your convenient little scapegoat, isn't it? And let's not forget Jayden!"

After drawing in a steadying breath, Elyse continued, her gaze unwavering. "Tell me, Fiona, did you really care for Jayden? Or was it the allure of his bank account that made you dream of playing the rich man's wife?"

Fiona's expression turned stormy. "Don't insult me! That was never my intention. He saved me, and I simply wanted to repay his kindness."

"Repay him?" Elyse scoffed, her words slicing through the air like a whip. "You're just hiding behind that excuse, plain and simple. Let's face it—if Jayden were unattached, sure, some might have rooted for you. But he was married, and I was his wife. That was what got under your skin, wasn't it?"

Fiona's lips pressed into a thin line, her voice trembling with frustration. "Don't paint me as someone I'm not. I would never stoop so low. Stop jumping to wild conclusions!"

"Wild conclusions?" Elyse arched an eyebrow, her tone dripping with sarcasm. "Isn't it glaringly obvious? This has nothing to do with me and everything to do with the fact that Jayden said no to you—and chose me instead."

Fiona's retort was as bitter as bile. "If you hadn't come along first, he would never have chosen you."

Elyse smirked, her confidence as unshakable as a mountain. "Oh, even if you had been the first, Jayden still wouldn't have given you the time of day."

She recalled how guarded and mistrustful Jayden had been in the past, his demeanor as cold as a winter frost.

In those days, Jayden's heart had been a fortress, sealed off from sentimentality. He likely wouldn't have spared Fiona a second glance, let alone extended a hand to help her in her time of need.

Fiona never truly grasped the enigma that was Jayden.

Chapter 1544:

Her jaw clenched as she hissed, "So this is why you came all the way here? Just to rub this in my face?"

Elyse stood up with a sly smile dancing at the corners of her lips. "Oh, it's not just me. Someone else is eager to pay you a visit too. Looks like you're in high demand."

Fiona's mind raced, trying to piece together Elyse's intentions, but something about the situation didn't sit right. Her gut told her this was far from innocent.

In a flash, Fiona was on her feet, her voice sharp with resolve. "I have nothing to say to any of you. Let me go! I won't accept any more visits."

Elyse caught the flicker of panic in Fiona's eyes, and a quiet laugh escaped her lips. "What's wrong? Are you frightened? Are you nervous about who's coming next?"

Elyse's mocking laugh rang through the air like a cruel, sharp blade, slicing through Fiona's composure and leaving her feeling humiliated.

Fiona, on the edge of losing it completely, shot back, her voice thick with emotion, “Elyse, you’re the one with all the bad vibes! Is making my life miserable the only thing that gives you purpose?”

Elyse couldn’t help but burst into laughter again, her disbelief almost comical.

“Me? Hurt you? Are you for real? When have I ever done that? You’re the one who’s always hurting others!” With a final, exasperated huff, Elyse turned on her heel and stormed out, not sparing Fiona another glance.

Fiona, wanting to flee the scene herself, found herself shoved back into her seat by a prison guard.

She shot back, her voice rising in frustration, “Why are you holding me here? I have every right to refuse visitors! Let me go!”

The guard, unmoved by her protest, responded coldly, “You’re not leaving until the visit is over.”

Meanwhile, Elyse returned to the other room, still fuming.

“I’m done. It’s your turn now.”

Louise glanced up, sensing Elyse’s agitation. “What’s with you? You look like you’re about to explode,” she asked.

Elyse shrugged, her frustration bubbling over. “It’s nothing. Fiona is just as annoying as ever. She hasn’t changed one bit.”

Nick stood, ready to step in. “Since you’re done, it’s my turn,” he said calmly.

Elyse gave a quick nod, still irritated. “Go ahead, but just so you know, Fiona’s as stubborn as a mule. She won’t listen to a word of reason.”

Nick was taken aback. He remembered Fiona as a delicate, almost shy girl. He hadn’t expected her to be a stubborn one.

He followed the guard into the small, dimly lit room. As soon as he stepped inside, he spotted Fiona. She looked frail, but there was no mistaking it—it was her. Nick still remembered Fiona, but she didn't have the faintest recollection of him now.

Fiona stared at Nick, searching her memory, but nothing came to mind. Nick sat down, a sudden silence stretching between them. He opened his mouth, then hesitated, unsure of how to break the stillness. After a beat, he finally asked, "Do you remember who I am?"

Fiona crossed her arms, her gaze still blank.

Chapter 1545:

Her arms crossed, giving him a dismissive look. "Who are you? Elyse's sidekick? Come here to rub salt in my wounds?"

Nick's brow furrowed instinctively. Something about her words made him feel like the tables had turned — like he was the one in the wrong. His voice softened as he explained, "I was in the Swan Cup, during the preliminaries. Someone locked a few contestants' rooms, causing them to be disqualified. Does that ring a bell?"

Fiona's eyes widened in surprise, recognition flickering in her gaze.

As Nick spoke, Fiona's memory slowly started to piece things together. He did look familiar now, even if she couldn't place him exactly. Nick chuckled bitterly at the blank stare Fiona gave him. "I was one of the contestants you sabotaged."

Fiona's stomach dropped as the truth hit her. She realized why he was here — to settle old scores. Instead of engaging, she decided to stay silent, letting him air his grievances while she held her tongue.

Nick continued, his voice heavy with frustration, "I had it worse than the rest of the competitors. When I was bawling my eyes out in the hallway, you showed up. You told me it was all Elyse's fault, that she was the reason I got disqualified and couldn't even compete." A realization slowly hit Fiona like a ton of bricks.

So it was him. Back then, she had just gone along with it, pinning the blame on Elyse without a second thought. She hadn't expected this guy to cross paths with Elyse later on.

Fiona couldn't help but sneer. "So, what are you trying to say? You think I ruined your chance to compete? Well, guess what? I'm already behind bars. What does your little accusation change now?"

Nick sat there, stunned by Fiona's audacity. No wonder Elyse was furious.

After a pause, he finally spoke up, his voice laced with disbelief. "You've cost so many people their shot at their dreams. Don't you feel any remorse? Have you ever taken a moment to reflect on your actions?"

Fiona let out a cold laugh, shrugging as though she couldn't care less. "Reflect? That's something only the weak do. I didn't do anything wrong. And if I hadn't knocked out a bunch of contenders, how could Elyse have claimed first place so easily? She should be thanking me for clearing the path!"

Nick was frozen, his mouth agape at Fiona's lack of shame. He was quiet for a long time, before he asked, his voice low, "You play the violin too. If you're not willing to put in the work, why go around sabotaging others who are trying to follow their dreams?"

Fiona scoffed, her laughter dripping with scorn. "Dreams? Please. Do you really think Elyse won first place on her own merits? Let me fill you in—Cody Tucker was the one pulling the strings behind the scenes! He's the real reason Elyse ended up on top!"

Nick looked at Fiona with a gaze filled with disbelief, almost as if he thought she had lost her mind.

"You actually believe what you're saying?" he said, his voice tinged with doubt. "Weren't you a student of Cody's as well? How can you speak so poorly of him? Your words are unreasonable."

"Unreasonable, me?" Fiona replied, her eyebrow arched in defiance as a sneer formed on her lips. "You're the naive one here! Elyse doesn't have the chops to take the top prize. Cody must have fixed the contest in her favor."

Chapter 1546:

Nick interrupted her quickly. "Cody didn't rig anything, and Elyse is much more talented than you seem to think. The only distressing person here is you. You've sabotaged not only me but several other contestants too. You're venomous and unskilled, so you cast your failures onto others to soothe your own shortcomings."

His expression was cold. "Discovering the truth initially shattered me. I couldn't understand such injustice befalling me, to be disqualified so unjustly. Now it's clear. The fault wasn't mine; it was yours. You'll spend your life regretting your actions."

The bitterness that once consumed him started to fade. Only a trace of frustration lingered; the overwhelming pain had subsided.

Standing up, he gazed down at Fiona with disdain, as one might look at a bothersome bug.

She was merely an unappreciative nuisance. His presence here had been a waste.

Fiona's facade cracked under his scornful look. "Come back!" she cried out desperately. "Listen to me! It's not as you think! I'm the real victim here!"

Nick kept walking without missing a step. Fiona didn't even deserve a second glance, much less a second thought. He had his own life to live, his own dreams to pursue. There was so much more he could achieve.

Fiona was simply a pointless distraction.

Nick exited the oppressive room.

"I've just seen Fiona Evans," he mentioned in a flat tone. "She's even worse than I had envisioned."

Elyse stood, handing him a bottle of water. "Toxic people will always attempt to pull you down to their level. Don't let her do that. Rise above it. Don't compromise your future for someone like her."

A faint smile briefly played across Nick's lips as he said confidently, "I've figured everything out now. There's no need for concern."

Elyse saw something different in his eyes this time. Previously, even though he was physically present, his gaze had seemed far away, reflecting the deep despair that had crushed his dreams and left him wandering without direction. Yet now, a glimmer of resolute determination had sparked to life in his eyes. He had rediscovered his path.

Watching Elyse quietly laugh, Nick felt compelled to ask the lingering question on his mind. “Shouldn’t I be your rival? Then why help me? Wouldn’t it be better for you if I failed?”

Taken aback by his directness, Elyse chuckled softly. “True, we compete against each other,” she said. “But outside the competition, isn’t there room for friendship? Even if we aren’t close friends, shouldn’t mutual respect prevail?”

Nick’s response came with a playful grin. “Then prepare yourself. I intend to claim that first-place trophy you hold.”

Elyse simply shrugged. “Bring it on whenever you’re ready.”

Interrupting their light-hearted exchange, Louise cleared her throat. “It’s time to leave,” she announced.

Both Nick and Elyse acknowledged Louise and started to follow.

After bidding farewell to Nick, Louise accompanied Elyse on a shopping trip. They bought a few items and, with time still on their hands, opted for an early lunch. While the waitress served their drinks, Louise initiated a conversation.

Chapter 1547:

“You’re headed to rehearsal later today, correct?”

Elyse confirmed with a nod. “Will you be there too?”

Louise grimaced slightly. “I won’t, but Edward will be there, watching from the sidelines.”

Puzzled, Elyse asked, “Edward is attending?”

Louise rested her chin on her hand, her expression contemplative. “Edward can no longer perform. From here on out, he’s merely a spectator.”

Elyse felt a wave of sympathy for Edward, who loved playing the violin. The idea of him never being able to perform on stage again was deeply heartbreaking.

Perceiving Elyse’s sadness, Louise extended her hand across the table, offering a reassuring squeeze. “Don’t worry about him. Edward is more resilient than he appears. He’ll navigate this challenge.”

Elyse took a moment, then nodded in agreement. “You’re right. I ought to have more faith in him.”

Elyse arrived at the rehearsal venue, having taken the bus that had been arranged for her. After completing her part, she quietly settled in a corner to catch her breath.

As she sat there, Nick passed by and noticed the exhaustion in her posture. With a playful tone, he asked, “Feeling worn out?”

Elyse nodded, wiping away the sweat from her brow. “The waiting feels endless, and there are so many performers. It’s a bit much to take in all at once.”

Nick scanned the room, noting the chaos before responding, “Well, it’s not my turn yet. You should rest while you can. I’ve got to get ready for my own rehearsal.”

Elyse waved him off with a faint smile. “Go ahead. I’ll be right here, waiting for the next instructions.”

About half an hour later, an announcement echoed through the room, signaling that it was time for her to prepare again.

After running through her performance a few more times, the day had already turned into evening.

Elyse glanced at the clock, then at the stage. Once this current group finished, she'd finally be able to head back to the hotel for some much-needed rest.

Leaning against the railing, her hands gripping it tightly, she felt drained—hungry, thirsty, and exhausted. She was running on pure willpower now.

A familiar voice broke through her thoughts. “You don’t seem to be doing too well. Can I help you?”

Elyse lifted her head and saw Edward approaching, a reassuring smile on his face.

Seeing him, she felt a sense of warmth seep into her. “I heard from Louise this morning that you’d be here this afternoon, but I didn’t run into you.”

Edward chuckled, his smile as easygoing as ever. “I was here, but caught up in a meeting. Now that it’s over, I finally have time to catch up with you.”

Propping his chin in his hand, he gave her a playful wink. “How about we grab dinner after your rehearsal? I’d love the honor of your company.”

Elyse laughed softly. “Sure, but honestly, after all this, I think only a burger and fries could satisfy my soul.”

Chapter 1548:

Edward grinned. “Perfect. I haven’t had a burger in ages. Let’s throw in a cold cola too—I’ve been craving one.”

Elyse nodded and then pulled out her phone, typing a quick message.

Edward raised an eyebrow. “What are you doing?”

“Just letting Jayden know. If I don’t, he’ll be livid,” Elyse said, scrunching up her nose in a way that made her seem unexpectedly adorable.

Edward watched her with a soft smile, his eyes lingering on her profile. “You and Jayden seem to be getting along better than I expected.”

Elyse nodded thoughtfully. “I don’t really know why, but it’s like everything just clicked into place. It wasn’t always this way. We used to have a hard time even talking to each other.”

Edward muttered to himself, “Yeah, but why was that?”

Once she finished sending the message, she tucked her phone away and refocused on chatting with Edward.

Meanwhile, on the other side, Jayden—though annoyed—knew that Elyse wouldn’t make any rash decisions. He grudgingly accepted her dinner plans.

An hour later, when the rehearsal finally concluded, Elyse skipped the bus ride and joined Edward at a nearby burger joint.

At the restaurant, Edward surprised her by ordering a meal for four. Elyse raised an eyebrow. “So much food? Are we going to finish all this?”

Edward, without missing a beat, responded, “Why not? I’m absolutely starving. I could eat a horse right now!”

Elyse paused, finding the phrase oddly familiar, as though she’d heard it before somewhere.

She took a long sip of the free lemonade and said, “Edward, Louise mentioned that you won’t be performing on stage anymore. Do you regret it?”

Edward stopped, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. After a moment of contemplation, he spoke slowly. “I’m not sure. I’ve always been aware of my responsibilities since I was young, so when the time came to take them on, I didn’t really have any strong feelings about it.” He continued, his eyes drifting toward her. “But seeing you play the violin on stage today made me think... maybe it would’ve been nice if I could be up there too.”

Elyse tilted her head slightly, feeling a pang of melancholy.

She remembered the days when she and Edward used to compete on stage. Though they were rivals, they had always shared a mutual respect for one another.

Edward noticed the concern flicker across her face and quickly added, “Don’t read too much into it. Sure, I feel a little envious, but tomorrow I’ll be sitting front row. And trust me, that’s not a seat just anyone gets.”

Elyse pressed her lips together, nodding, understanding his point.

Edward smiled, as if trying to lighten the mood. “I figured out long ago that life can’t be too perfect. I’ve tasted success and wealth, so I know I’m not meant to have everything else.”

He paused for a moment, his gaze steady. “That’s why I don’t waste time chasing after those things that are just beyond my reach.” He looked directly into her eyes as he spoke.

Chapter 1549:

She, however, didn’t fully grasp the meaning behind his words.

Edward, for his part, saw this as his own flaw.

The one person he loved would never know how deeply he cared for her.

They would always remain friends.

Edward had no desire to force Elyse to understand his feelings. He simply wanted to cherish every moment in her presence.

His face brightened with a warm smile. “Do you and Jayden plan to get married?”

“Why are you echoing Louise’s question?” Elyse responded, caught off guard.

“So, will you have a wedding?” Edward persisted.

Elyse fidgeted uncertainly. “I don’t know. It’s up to Jayden, really. We haven’t discussed it yet.”

“Why not ask him now?”

“Can’t. He’s mid-flight and won’t land until tomorrow afternoon,” Elyse explained, shaking her head.

Edward rubbed his nose thoughtfully. “He’ll be here tomorrow, right? Then I’ll ask him myself if he’s planning a wedding.”

“Why are you so invested in us having a wedding?” Elyse asked, intrigued.

Edward drummed the table with infectious enthusiasm. “Because I want to play the violin at your wedding!”

“What?” Elyse leaned in, not quite catching his words.

“I want to perform at your wedding! With enough passion, any venue can transform into a stage!” Edward’s eyes sparkled with excitement. “Just give me advance notice, or I might not be able to clear my schedule.”

Elyse sat there stunned, words failing her. The waiter’s timely arrival with their burgers provided a welcome distraction.

“Enough wedding talk. Let’s eat. I’m famished.”

Edward’s eyes lit up at the sight of their meal. His stomach had been growling too.

They dove into their burgers, falling into a comfortable silence broken only by appreciative chewing.

After finishing, they both let out contented sighs.

“What happened to eating a horse?” Elyse teased, eyeing the remaining fries. “There’s still quite a pile here.”

Edward patted his stomach playfully. “Just catching my second wind.”

“Never said I was done.”

Elyse’s knowing smile spoke volumes as she held her peace.

Taking a sip of cola, Edward confessed with a grin, “Truth is, my parents have this thing against burgers and fries.”

“Then why indulge?” Elyse asked, curiosity piqued.

“Precisely because they forbid it. It’s the natural order of rebellion,” Edward declared.

Elyse nodded. “I understand that rebellion because I’ve done it before too.”

Chapter 1550:

Edward rested his chin on his palm, tilting his head to study her face.

Inside, a voice screamed at him, “Take her away. Leave everything behind and start anew! You only need to be with her.”

But his rational mind quieted these desperate thoughts. The other voice said, “She’s found her happiness now, and that man will cherish her as you would have. You can’t rewrite life’s timeline. Your chapter has ended.”

Elyse’s thoughts began to blur as fatigue settled in. She stifled a yawn. “Let’s call it a night. I need to head back to the hotel and rest. Tomorrow’s performance awaits.”

Edward looked at her and asked, "If you met me before Jayden, would you have fallen in love with me?"

Elyse sat in contemplative silence, the weight of his question slowly sinking in.

She'd always known of Edward's feelings, but she'd believed time had dimmed them. Had his heart never truly let go?

Leaning back, she chose her words with careful consideration. "I once tried to make myself fall in love with you."

Edward's breath caught, then released in a bitter smile. "But you failed."

"That's right. My heart wouldn't yield. Even if we'd met first, I don't believe I would have loved you." Elyse spoke with gentle firmness, her honesty unwavering.

She treasured Edward as a friend and refused to toy with his emotions or offer false hope.

Truth might wound, but deception would devastate.

Noting the shadow crossing Edward's features, Elyse's voice softened. "Edward, your happiness matters to me more than you know. I can't be the one to give you what you seek, but someone out there will. They have to."

Elyse arrived at the event venue earlier than anticipated, mentally prepared for her performance.

While preparing to take the stage, she pulled her phone from her pocket to send a message to Jayden; however, a text from Louise diverted her attention.

"Why does Edward seem so upset today?"

After a brief hesitation, Elyse responded, "I've crushed his hope once more."

Louise replied with a burst of casual laughter.

Keeping her phone, Elyse shifted her focus to her imminent performance.

Promptly at 1:00 pm, the performance kicked off. Scheduled fourth, Elyse entered the stage in shiny black heels, her presence commanding. Her eyes scanned the audience, capturing their absorbed attention. Fearlessness radiated from her, replaced by a commanding aura of mastery. As she positioned herself, she initiated her piece.

The music resonated through the hall, energizing the air. Positioned at the orchestra's forefront, Elyse fueled the group's passion with her vigorous lead.

From the audience, Celeste regarded Elyse with an expression of deep admiration and respect.

The music sparked a noticeable excitement among the attendees. The crowd swayed and moved rhythmically, captivated by the melody. In the front row, Louise and Edward were engrossed in Elyse's performance.