

## Bound love 411

Chapter 411:

Realizing the underlying meaning of Jayden's candid remarks, Elyse pinched him under the table as a silent signal to be more cautious.

Jayden quickly grasped her hand, urging her to stop. Amid this quiet exchange, Elyse noticed Tracy's distracted demeanor.

"Tracy, are you still thinking about Shaun? Did he come to see you today?" Elyse asked, concerned.

Startled by the question, Tracy snapped back to reality. After a pause, she responded, "It's hard not to think about him. Driscoll told me Shaun showed up again today, though he didn't cause a scene this time. He just stood at the gate for half an hour before leaving."

With a heavy sigh, Tracy continued, "I don't understand his persistence. When will he finally give this up?"

Elyse, observing the distress on Tracy's face, felt a wave of sympathy. After a moment's thought, she suggested, "Staying home all the time isn't helping. Why don't you come with me tomorrow? I'm heading to the studio. It might do you good to get out for a bit."

"I appreciate the offer, but you have a competition coming up. I don't want to be a distraction. I'll stay home," Tracy shook her head, her tone firm.

Despite Elyse's attempts to convince her otherwise, Tracy remained resolute. Reluctantly, Elyse gave up and turned her attention back to her meal.

After dinner, Elyse found herself too weary to practice the violin. She washed up, planning to take a shower before bed. At that moment, Jayden entered the room, a hint of desire in his gaze.

“What do you want?” Elyse asked cautiously, wrapping her arms around herself.

“Tracy thinks she can offer everything I can, but obviously, that’s impossible,” Jayden responded with a smirk.

“We just did it yesterday. Why again so soon?” Elyse blushed deeply upon realizing his intentions.

She then stepped back, signaling her refusal. “Not now, okay? I’m exhausted.”

“You don’t want to?” Jayden, undeterred, raised his eyebrows in question.

“You were rough last time. I’m still recovering,” Elyse looked at him with exasperation.

“Honey, I promise to be gentle,” Jayden softened his tone, attempting to coax her. “It won’t be like last time.”

Despite her repeated refusals, Elyse found herself unable to resist his persistent charm. Eventually, she yielded, and they made love with passionate intensity. Afterwards, she fell asleep instantly.

Satisfied, Jayden lay beside her, holding her in his arms as he drifted off to sleep.

In the morning, Elyse woke up in a daze. After breakfast, she hurried to the studio.

Arriving first, she was soon joined by Fiona and Gavin.

“The competition is tomorrow morning. I’ll let you both leave early tonight so you can get some good sleep,” Gavin said.

Elyse nodded, then turned to Fiona, who had yawned repeatedly.

“Fiona, what did you do yesterday? You seem really tired,” Elyse asked curiously.

“I had to go to the police station,” Fiona responded with yet another yawn.

“Why? What happened?” Elyse asked, shocked.

Gavin also looked at Fiona with concern.

Fiona shared the entire ordeal, which visibly upset Gavin. He regretted keeping Fiona late the previous night. How would he have forgiven himself if something had happened to her on her way home?

“But I was fine; someone saved me!” Fiona reassured them with a smile to ease the tension.

“That’s a relief,” Gavin said. “Start practicing now. I’ll go buy some snacks for you guys. I forgot yesterday.” Playing the violin could be draining, so it was important to have something to eat.

After Gavin left, Fiona paused her playing. She observed Elyse practicing intently before letting out a loud sigh.

“Are you okay? You seem down,” Elyse asked, looking worried.

“I think I’ve fallen for someone,” Fiona shook her head, her voice tinged with disappointment.

“Really? Who is it?” Elyse asked, surprised.

“It’s unbelievable. I’ve fallen for a man whose face I haven’t even seen,” Fiona responded with a bitter smile. “I just saw his back and thought he was handsome.”

“But Fiona, you like him without seeing his face? What if you’re disappointed?” Elyse said with a hint of concern.

“I don’t know. It’s ridiculous, isn’t it?” Fiona forced a smile. “After leaving the police station last night, I couldn’t stop thinking about him, and it kept me up all night.”

## Chapter 412:

Elyse, feeling powerless, asked, “Do you happen to know that man’s name? If you’re interested in him, I can help you pursue him.”

Fiona let out a sigh and replied, “I asked him, but he refused to disclose his name. He said he just saved me for no reason.”

Pausing for a moment, she added admiringly, “He was undeniably awesome.”

Elyse’s lips twitched, unsure of how to respond.

Fiona admitted with frustration, “I should’ve been more assertive yesterday. Now I don’t even know his name. Finding him again might prove difficult.”

“There could be an opportunity in the future. Perhaps he works nearby,” Elyse reassured her.

Fiona nodded. “You’re right.”

Then Elyse resumed playing the violin and urged, “Fiona, let’s keep practicing. If Gavin comes back and sees we’ve been slacking off, he’ll make us practice for a longer time.”

Fiona nodded. “Let’s begin. We can’t afford to be caught in the wrong.”

Theo sat in his office, attentively listening to the manager’s report. Suddenly, his assistant, Jaime Cruz, rushed in and whispered something urgently into his ear.

Furrowing his brow, Theo raised his hand, interrupting the manager mid-sentence. “Alright, proceed as discussed. You may leave first.”

The manager nodded and exited the room.

Turning to Jaime, Theo asked, “Is it true that Elyse will be participating in that competition tomorrow?”

Jaime replied, “Yes, I’ve looked into it. She will be competing, and I’ve made arrangements for someone to secure front-row tickets. We’ll have them.”

Theo nodded thoughtfully before expressing his confusion, “Then why did you appear so concerned when you entered? Isn’t acquiring front-row tickets a positive development?”

Jaime’s expression turned bitter. “Well, just as I entered, I received word that your mother wants you to accompany Miss Jimenez. Apparently, she’s been in a foul mood lately.”

Theo scoffed, “Asking me to coax Freda? Hasn’t she given up yet? Why force a connection with the Jimenez family through marriage?”

Jaime sighed helplessly, “I wish I knew. But your mother insisted that you must comply, or else she’ll have you transferred abroad, only allowing you to return after five years.”

Theo sneered once more, his eyes brimming with disdain. Since Theo was Zandra’s only son, it was out of the question for her to hand the company over to anyone else. However, she didn’t want him to pursue Elyse, so she decided to transfer him abroad.

Theo acknowledged that it was a clever strategy. At least it would force him to take matters seriously.

After a moment of quick thinking, he instructed, “Go ahead and secure the tickets for tomorrow.”

Jaime was taken aback. “Mr. Ward, do you intend to take Miss Jimenez to watch Ms. Lloyd’s performance?”

Theo replied casually, “Freda seems to be in a sour mood, doesn’t she? Perhaps inviting her to enjoy music will lift her spirits.”

Though Jaime wanted to point out the potential cruelty of the gesture towards Freda, he decided to remain silent.

Despite feeling sorry for Freda, Jaime had no choice but to obediently purchase the tickets, knowing full well that Theo was deeply in love with Elyse.

Jaime nodded promptly. “Understood, Mr. Ward. I’ll ensure the task is completed.”

Two hours later, Freda, enjoying a facial with her friend in the beauty salon, received Theo’s message. Delighted, she exclaimed, “See? Theo invited me to enjoy some music. He must have feelings for me.”

Freda’s friend, Alena Walsh, glanced at the message and remarked, “Enjoy music? Could it be his ex-girlfriend’s performance?”

Chapter 413:

Freda’s bestie, Alena Walsh, continued, “Don’t forget Theo’s ex-girlfriend is a violinist. If he’s inviting you to enjoy music, maybe it’s to see her.”

Freda hesitated and responded uncertainly, “No way. Theo wouldn’t do that, would he?”

Alena snorted. “Who knows? That’s how men are. I don’t think you need to bother making any special preparations. Maybe he really is taking you to see his ex-girlfriend. What will you do then?”

Anger flared in Freda as she clenched her teeth. She realized Alena might be correct. The upcoming date could end in disappointment. Yet, she believed in Theo’s affection for her and trusted he wouldn’t intentionally hurt her.

“No, I don’t think so. I trust Theo isn’t the type to hurt me intentionally. Even if he’s not into me, he wouldn’t harm me,” Freda insisted.

Theo sat in his office, attentively listening to the manager’s report. Suddenly, his assistant, Jaime Cruz, rushed in and whispered something urgently into his ear.

Furrowing his brow, Theo raised his hand, interrupting the manager mid-sentence. "Alright, proceed as discussed. You may leave first."

The manager nodded and exited the room.

Turning to Jaime, Theo asked, "Is it true that Elyse will be participating in that competition tomorrow?"

Jaime replied, "Yes, I've looked into it. She will be competing, and I've made arrangements for someone to secure front-row tickets. We'll have them."

Theo nodded thoughtfully before expressing his confusion, "Then why did you appear so concerned when you entered? Isn't acquiring front-row tickets a positive development?"

Jaime's expression turned bitter. "Well, just as I entered, I received word that your mother wants you to accompany Miss Jimenez. Apparently, she's been in a foul mood lately."

Theo scoffed, "Asking me to coax Freda? Hasn't she given up yet? Why force a connection with the Jimenez family through marriage?"

Jaime sighed helplessly, "I wish I knew. But your mother insisted that you must comply, or else she'll have you transferred abroad, only allowing you to return after five years."

Theo sneered once more, his eyes brimming with disdain. Since Theo was Zandra's only son, it was out of the question for her to hand the company over to anyone else. However, she didn't want him to pursue Elyse, so she decided to transfer him abroad.

Theo acknowledged that it was a clever strategy. At least it would force him to take matters seriously.

After a moment of quick thinking, he instructed, "Go ahead and secure the tickets for tomorrow."

Jaime was taken aback. “Mr. Ward, do you intend to take Miss Jimenez to watch Ms. Lloyd’s performance?”

Theo replied casually, “Freda seems to be in a sour mood, doesn’t she? Perhaps inviting her to enjoy music will lift her spirits.”

Though Jaime wanted to point out the potential cruelty of the gesture towards Freda, he decided to remain silent.

Despite feeling sorry for Freda, Jaime had no choice but to obediently purchase the tickets, knowing full well that Theo was deeply in love with Elyse.

Jaime nodded promptly. “Understood, Mr. Ward. I’ll ensure the task is completed.”

Alena, perceptive as ever, realized how deeply Freda had fallen for Theo. She placed a hand on Freda’s shoulder and offered, “Call me anytime tomorrow. I’ll come and get you if you need.”

Freda shrugged off her hand irritably. “I’ve already said Theo isn’t like that.”

Freda looked forward to the date with Theo the next day.

Yet, when Freda arrived at the music hall the following day and saw the massive poster of Elyse, she was stunned.

She stood motionless, her face a mask of disbelief.

Did Theo really bring her to see Elyse’s performance? Why was he being so heartless? He knew perfectly well that she had feelings for him!

A lump formed in Freda’s throat, tears threatening to spill. Her feet felt as though they were glued to the floor, preventing her from stepping back.

She was determined to confront Theo and find out whether it was all just an accident. She resolved not to leave until she had her answer.



The backstage area of the music hall was bustling.

Dressed in a purple gown with her hair up in a bun, Elyse leaned against the wall next to Irving.

Irving glanced repeatedly at his watch. “Don’t worry, it’s still early. Even with traffic, Gavin will get Fiona here on time.”

Noticing his anxious demeanor, Elyse teased him, “I thought you said you never get nervous at competitions, yet here you are, all jittery about this one.”

Irving shot her a look. “Yeah, because I’m concerned about you and Fiona. I don’t want the two of you to embarrass Mr. Tucker and me.”

Elyse remarked with a frown, “Irving, we’re not going to lose. Take back those words, or you’ll really make me mad.”

With a playful smirk, Irving responded, “I’d like to see you angry.”

Elyse threw a punch, her brows knitted in frustration, but Irving easily dodged it.

Still not satisfied, Elyse was determined to teach him a lesson for his consistently sarcastic words.

While she was joking around with Irving, a sudden breeze caught her attention as someone walked past.

“Rebekah...” Elyse murmured, her gaze fixed in a trance.

Dressed in a black gown, Rebekah exuded an air of arrogance. Elyse remembered that Rebekah had topped the rankings in her group in the first round.

Rumors had circulated that Rebekah had secured her top spot by unfair means.

When Rebekah heard her name, she turned to face Elyse and said with a slight nod, “What a coincidence seeing you here, Elyse.”

Chapter 414:

With a disdainful glance, Rebekah spun around and marched straight toward Elyse, her steps brimming with confidence. Standing face-to-face with Elyse, she cast a sarcastic smile in Irving’s direction and quipped, “Wow, another new beau already? Seems like leaving the Celestial Sounds Symphony gave you the freedom to drop the innocent facade.”

Elyse bristled at Rebekah’s arrogance. “Cut the sarcasm, Rebekah. I haven’t forgotten your little scheme with Mabel to frame me.”

Rebekah scoffed, feigning innocence. “Are you kidding? Didn’t I get fired from the orchestra? Can’t you just let it go?”

Elyse blinked, surprised by Rebekah’s audacity. “You were fired for breaking the rules. What does that have to do with me?”

Rebekah rolled her eyes, her arms crossed dismissively. “Fired or not, I’m miserable, and you still want to hold a grudge? Why not just finish me off?”

Elyse snorted. “You have a lot of nerve, Rebekah. Still think you did nothing wrong?”

Just then, Irving’s phone buzzed with a message from Gavin. “Alright, that’s our cue. Gavin’s here.”

Elyse nodded and followed Irving without a backward glance at Rebekah.

Rebekah watched them go, a flicker of resentment simmering in her eyes. Elyse’s presence in the competition added another layer of uncertainty to her success.

A sly smile played on Rebekah's lips as she muttered to herself, "But who says the competition has to be fair? With the right means, anyone can win."

She put on a smile, the satisfaction of her past victory a twisted comfort.

She was determined to see this through to the end.

On the other side of the backstage, Elyse and Irving's eyes lit up at the sight of Fiona in a breathtaking white dress. "Fiona, you look stunning," Elyse complimented.

Fiona blushed, her fingers fluttering to her face. "It's hard to stay calm," she admitted shyly. "Don't let me get carried away."

Gavin joined them, a sigh escaping his lips. "Just focus on the performance and don't overthink it. As Mr. Tucker's apprentices, you'll shine just as brightly as anyone else."

Irving, ever the charmer, crossed his arms with a playful smile. "Sounds like you're the one putting the pressure on them, Gavin."

Gavin chuckled good-naturedly. "Not my intention."

Elyse pursed her lips, her lingering resentment catching Gavin's eye. He flicked her forehead playfully.

"Alright, let's move," he said, ushering them forward.

Elyse rubbed her forehead and linked Fiona's arm, leading her into the preparation area.

The sound of a heated argument reached their ears as they entered.

Elyse spotted Rebekah locked in a fierce debate with a stranger.

“Mariana, I told you fair and square—you simply weren’t good enough. Now you’re spreading rumors about me cheating? Prove it, then!” Rebekah boomed, hands on her hips.

Mariana Oury, clearly riled by Rebekah’s shameless claims, trembled with anger, her finger pointed accusingly but unable to form a coherent response.

Rebekah, reveling in her dominance, pressed on. “What’s wrong, Mariana? Lost your tongue all of a sudden? Where’d all that arrogance go?”

Mariana’s eyes welled up with tears out of anger.

Bystanders, fearing an outburst, rushed to intervene and separate them.

With a triumphant smirk, Rebekah scanned the room until her gaze landed on Elyse.

She raised an eyebrow in a blatant challenge, daring Elyse to retaliate.

Even if her victory was tainted, what could Elyse possibly do?

Fueled by this newfound arrogance, Rebekah turned and sauntered back into the throng of people.

Fiona, noticing Elyse’s tense posture, leaned in and whispered, “Do you know her?”

Elyse simply nodded. “Yes, I do.”

Fiona’s voice dropped to a low murmur. “She seems like trouble. Best to stay away.”

Elyse squeezed Fiona’s hand reassuringly. “Don’t worry, I know what I’m doing.” Taking a deep breath, she headed toward the backstage lineup. Her number was nearing, and she couldn’t miss her call.

A peek at the stage revealed a sea of expectant faces. A thrill of anticipation coursed through her.

This was the dawn of a new chapter in her musical dream.

Chapter 415:

A chill nipped at Freda as she spotted Theo through the glass doors of the music hall. Theo, clad in a brown overcoat and sporting gold-rimmed glasses, stood before Freda amidst the brisk morning air.

It was a new look for Theo, catching Freda off guard momentarily, softening the edge of her resentment. Mustering a facade of composure, she asked, her voice deliberately cool, "Did you drag me here just to see Elyse? That's just offensive."

Theo glanced at Freda and said indifferently, "If you don't want to see her, you can leave."

His tone stung. Freda hadn't expected such a dismissal.

"Theo," she pleaded, "even if you don't feel the same, there's no need to treat me like this. You know how I feel about you. Why can't you be decent?"

She'd swallowed her pride for him. Why couldn't he see her worth? She was certain Theo knew of her feelings.

Theo picked up his phone and snapped a photo of Elyse's poster. With an air of indifference, he uttered, "You know who I like. Why can't you just give up on me?"

Freda's face turned pale, and she found herself at a loss for words.

Theo's sneer deepened as he tossed a ticket at her. "Here. Up to you if you join me or not. Just don't complain to my mom later."

Freda's anger simmered. "So, this whole charade is just for your mother?"

“What else would it be? A date?” Theo’s voice held a mocking edge.

Freda found herself utterly speechless.

Theo didn’t spare her another look. He entered the music hall, ticket in hand.

Freda stood there, the ticket crumpled tightly in her grasp, her nails digging into her palm.

She should rip it up, walk away with her head held high, and thoroughly end things with Theo.

But she didn’t even have the courage to rip the ticket up.

After a long, silent struggle, Freda found herself entering the music hall, a spineless puppet on a string.

Finding her seat, Freda noticed Theo already settled.

A flicker of surprise crossed his face but vanished just as quickly. He offered no greeting, his expression as cold as before.

Freda gritted her teeth under his gaze, burning with embarrassment.

She sat rigidly, a storm of emotions churning within her. Confusion gnawed at her. Why was she doing this? She wasn’t starved for attention. Beautiful and wealthy, she had her pick of suitors, yet here she was, groveling at Theo’s feet. Was it love?

Freda gnawed on her nail, unconvinced. She chose to believe this was more about possessiveness, a burning desire to win. Jealousy consumed her—how dare Elyse so easily capture Theo’s attention?

The performance began, but Freda paid no mind to the music. Her mind was solely on Elyse.

She'd like to see what made this woman so captivating, so worthy of Theo's constant fixation.

The announcement of Elyse's turn jolted Freda upright. A flicker of movement caught her eye—Theo had switched his phone to camera mode, aiming it squarely at the stage.

Unaware of the scrutiny from the audience, Elyse glided onto the stage. Her violin cradled in one hand, the other gracefully gathering the hem of her long purple dress.

A nod from the host marked the start of her performance.

The piece wasn't technically demanding, but its simplicity laid bare the performer's musical soul.

Below the stage, Irving watched intently, a murmur escaping his lips. "Her vibrato is superb, smoother than ever. Your guidance paid off."

Gavin, rarely serious, chimed in, "Her foundation needs work, but she's talented. Days of practice show immense progress."

Irving leaned back, a pang of worry tugging at his heart. "Watching Elyse play... it makes me nervous. Fiona's foundation is much stronger."

Chapter 416:

Elyse shut her eyes, completely absorbed in the music, displaying her true potential. She was so engrossed that she couldn't snap out of it, even after playing the last note.

Suddenly, the hall was filled with the sound of a single, enthusiastic applause that broke the silence.

The entire crowd shifted their attention to the origin of the sound, with Elyse also turning to look. Theo was the one who got to his feet and applauded openly, despite the intense scrutiny from the onlookers.

Encouraged by Theo's actions, even those who initially didn't understand began to applaud for Elyse as well.

Elyse was taken aback as the applause transformed from sporadic clapping to a thunderous ovation from the audience. She wasn't the only performer; there shouldn't be this much attention. She was simply a participant.

"Stop standing there looking clueless! Show some appreciation," Irving was overcome with distress at the sight of Elyse standing there looking helpless. He extended his hand and firmly grasped the edge of the stage, his eyes reflecting his deep sense of frustration.

Just then, Elyse quickly regained her composure and graciously bowed to express her gratitude.

The host guided her off the stage as she gracefully followed.

"Haha! Why is she still so oblivious?" Theo couldn't help but smile as he watched Elyse dash away from the stage.

Freda's ears caught his voice.

She chose to remain silent despite the applause from the surrounding people. As she sat with her arms tightly crossed, a wave of jealousy and envy washed over her as she observed Elyse.

When Elyse gracefully drew the bow across the violin strings, her captivating presence filled the room. The haunting melodies stirred such deep emotions in Freda that she found herself in a state of serenity.

Freda found herself irresistibly drawn to Elyse's music. She was captivated by her sheer brilliance, which only made it more difficult for her to come to terms with her feelings.



Elyse was the person competing for her love interest's affection. How could she possibly find it within herself to show any kind of appreciation for someone who was essentially her romantic adversary?

Theo was oblivious to the sudden shift in Freda's emotions next to him. He was completely absorbed in the video that played on his phone, as he had put on his headphones. The other contestants' performances were also enthralling, but he couldn't tear his eyes away from the video of Elyse.

Elyse was the only thing in his line of sight.

After Elyse gracefully descended from the stage, her heart raced as she hurried into Fiona's open arms.

"Fiona, I can't believe my performance is finally over!"

Fiona stumbled backward, momentarily staggered by the impact, but she maintained her grip and burst into laughter. "I saw that! You performed so beautifully; I was completely mesmerized!"

"Oh, stop teasing me!" Elyse believed she didn't have greater abilities than Fiona. Releasing her, she inquired, "Hey, when are you performing?"

"Not yet. I'll be performing in a while." Fiona extended her hands, the perspiration causing her palms to glisten. "The Champions Cup boasts a formidable lineup of competitors. I must admit, I'm starting to feel a twinge of nervousness."

Elyse reached out to Fiona with a tissue. "You're resilient! Keep your composure. They have nothing on you!"

As Fiona took a deep breath, trying to calm her nerves, she suddenly felt a forceful bump that nearly caused her to lose her balance.

"Hey! What the hell do you think you're doing?!" Elyse quickly assisted Fiona to her feet and addressed the individual in a firm manner. She was angry at that point.

Vicky, clad in a sleek black dress, her hair elegantly swept up into a bun, revealing her graceful neck, haughtily turned around to cast a disdainful glance at Fiona.

“Oh, I hit that weakling? Sorry about that. But so what if I did?”

Elyse’s eyes burned with rage when she heard that. “You’re being too arrogant!”

On hearing that, Vicky turned around and walked towards her in a confident manner.

“Too arrogant? You’ve got to be kidding me. I haven’t even actually said anything harsh yet, and you’re complaining I’m being too arrogant?!” Vicky spoke in derision, but her eyes were devoid of any smile.

The next second, she pushed Elyse by the chest, causing her to take a few steps backward. “If trouble is what you really want, I’m going to give you premium!”

Seeing that the situation was about to turn messy, Fiona quickly separated the two and shielded Elyse behind her. “Get the hell out of here!”

With a sneer, Vicky said to Elyse, “What? Scared now?!”

Elyse looked at her with bloodshot eyes. She wondered why and how in the world Vicky had become like that.

Without uttering another word, Vicky turned around and walked away with a grunt. However, her eyes caught sight of Rebekah, who hid in the audience.

Rebekah tried so hard to avoid Vicky, afraid of being discovered.

Without any hesitation, Vicky made a beeline for her. Taking a quick glance at her black dress, she sneered, “I see you had the guts to wear the same color as me. Do you really think black is a color you can pull off? I mean, look at you!”

Biting her lower lip, Rebekah fought back, “And why shouldn’t I wear black? Do you own the color? You’re so delusional!”

## Chapter 417:

“You ask me why? Just because you used to be my loyal lackey, always ready to do my bidding!” Vicky raised her hand, intending to slap Rebekah. Yet, aware of the spectators, she instead directed her stiletto heel onto Rebekah’s instep, pressing down with brutal force.

“I’m sorry! It won’t happen again,” Rebekah cried out in pain.

Vicky savored Rebekah’s distress; with a casual lift of her foot, she removed it. Casting a venomous glance at Elyse, she walked confidently toward the stage.

All the contestants witnessed the scene backstage, their whispers adding to the already strained atmosphere.

Fiona tightened her grip on Elyse’s hand and asked with thinly veiled anxiety, “Is that Vicky, your rival from Celestial Sounds Symphony?”

Elyse nodded, her feelings in turmoil.

Fiona shook her head firmly. “Her personality is just appalling. Such arrogance is truly repellent.”

Elyse sighed, choosing not to dwell on Vicky any longer. Her mind drifted to Darren. Vicky had shown up, yet Darren was noticeably absent.

Her gaze swept the room, looking for any sign of Darren, but he was not there. Memories of his usual habits brought a surge of worry.

“I need to find a friend. Will you be alright here by yourself?” Elyse asked softly.

Fiona smiled. “What could go wrong?” she remarked, waving her hand dismissively. “Go find your friend. I’ll be on stage soon.”

Elyse nodded and left the backstage area. As she walked down the hallway, she noticed Darren slouched near the restroom entrance.

Darren sat dejectedly against the wall, his violin sprawled beside him, mirroring his desolate state.

Elyse approached Darren, and seeing his downcast look, gently lifted him. With a note of frustration, she said, "Darren, you're not thinking of backing out of the performance, are you?"

Darren pursed his lips and shrugged off Elyse's hand. "Just leave me be. This is who I am. I'm not changing."

Elyse couldn't bear the despair in Darren's voice. "This is only the second round, Darren. Are you really ready to quit? Don't you remember our vow? We promised to make it into the top ten together and then compete on the international stage."

Darren sat quietly, his face buried in his hands. His voice was a faint murmur as he confessed, "I can't do it. When I get nervous, my hands start shaking uncontrollably."

Elyse's face fell as she searched for the right words. Suddenly, she asked, "Are you sure it's just your nervousness making your hands shake?"

Darren looked up, puzzled. "What else could it be?"

"It might not be just anxiety," Elyse suggested, eyeing his hands. "Look, you're nervous now, but your hands are steady, right?"

Darren gave a wry laugh. "That's because I'm not on stage holding a violin."

Elyse glanced at his violin case. "Why not take it out now and see what happens?"

Though skeptical, Darren took out his violin as Elyse watched closely.

Elyse observed him carefully and pointed out, “You’re nervous now, yet your hands are stable while you’re handling the violin.”

“That’s different,” Darren argued weakly. “I’m not on a stage.”

Caught off guard by his continued excuses, Elyse noticed a few staff members nearby. Seizing the moment, she quickly explained the situation and gestured for them to come closer. “Anywhere you have an audience can be a stage. Try it now!” she encouraged Darren.

After a brief pause, Darren reluctantly played his violin. To his surprise, his hands were steady.

Elyse beamed. “Look, no shaking. I knew it.”

Darren muttered, “It’s bizarre. Why do they start trembling the moment I step onto a real stage?”

Elyse considered this, then offered a thought. “Maybe it’s not anxiety. It could be the thrill of the moment.”

Chapter 418:

Darren’s brow furrowed, confusion clouding his eyes. “Are you sure my hands are shaking from excitement?” he questioned, doubt lacing his voice.

Elyse held his gaze unflinchingly. “Exactly. If nervousness caused your tremors, they would have appeared before. You’ve faced plenty of pressure.”

A beat of silence, and then she added, “But now you’re surrounded by formidable opponents, and that prospect alone gets your hands jittery with anticipation.”

Even to her ears, it sounded logical. Briefly, she doubted her ability to convince Darren entirely.

A sliver of persuasion flickered in Darren's eyes, but skepticism lingered. "Am I sick? Why would I get excited facing strong opponents? Shouldn't I dread them?"

With unwavering conviction, Elyse placed her hands on his shoulders. "Because you crave strength, Darren. You live for a challenge more than you realize. You can't wait to test yourself against the best. That's why your hands are shaking."

Darren opened his mouth, her words resonating with him. Yet, a strange dissonance echoed within.

Sensing a shift in his mood, Elyse pressed on, her voice filled with encouragement. "Darren, don't hold back your excitement. You're already strong."

She recalled Cody's words—Darren's fundamentals were more solid than Vicky's. Such a foundation shouldn't guarantee second place. He possessed the potential for victory.

Elyse's words completely encouraged Darren. A surge of confidence and bravery ignited within him. "You're right," he declared, a newfound resolve hardening his voice. "I am strong. Strength shouldn't be feared; it should be embraced."

Elyse offered a solemn nod before ushering him backstage.

Elyse exhaled in relief. Adjusting her dress and clutching her violin case, she descended the stairs, seeking out Irving and Gavin.

Settling beside them, a comfortable silence enveloped the trio. Having missed Vicky's performance, Elyse caught Darren's and Fiona's flawless sets. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, they were safe.

Later, Rebekah took the stage, and to Elyse's surprise, faltered. Two jarring notes pierced the melody, audible even to the audience.

Yet, when the results were announced, Rebekah made it to the next round.

Astonishment contorted Elyse's features. Turning to Irving, she inquired, "There were rumors of an inside story with Rebekah's entry. Any truth to that?"

Irving cast her a sympathetic glance. “Whether it’s true or not is irrelevant to you. You’re in the top five. What threat could she possibly pose, trailing behind you?”

Elyse pursed her lips, unable to quell her simmering anger. Cheating undermined the integrity of the entire competition.

“The music world isn’t pristine,” Irving countered. “Absolute transparency is a fantasy. To challenge someone’s entry or allege an inside deal, you need proof. Otherwise, your accusations fall on deaf ears.”

Elyse held back a retort, opting for silence.

Gavin studied the rankings. “Fifth and sixth for you and Fiona. Safe spots, but the conservative tune selection hinders your chances of winning first place.”

Irving chimed in, “Next time, let Elyse tackle a more challenging piece. Ditch the simpler tunes.”

“Agreed,” Gavin mused, his gaze fixed on the rankings. “Something harder is a must.”

The urge to escape overwhelmed Elyse. Grabbing a garment bag, she headed for the restroom to get changed.

However, as she approached the door, she collided with Theo heading in the opposite direction.

Chapter 419:

When Elyse spotted Theo, she was certain she had recognized the right person from her position onstage. Indeed, Theo had come to see her performance.

Rushing towards Elyse, Theo clutched a bunch of flowers. Breathing a sigh of relief, he exclaimed, “Thank God you’re still here!”

He handed the flowers to Elyse, complimenting her, “Your performance was flawless. I hope you can make it to your next round.”

Elyse gazed at the flowers, momentarily lost in thought. They were pinkish-purple bluebells, her favorite.

Before their breakup, Elyse had always wished Theo would surprise her with bluebells.

However, when she shared this desire with Theo, he had only laughed. “You, onstage? That’s just a daydream.”

At that time, Elyse couldn’t pinpoint her feelings: she felt a mix of confusion, sadness, and profound disappointment.

Years had passed since then. Reflecting on those times today, Elyse realized she no longer clung to those old dreams.

“Theo, it must be hard for you to remember this,” she said, diverting her gaze and looking up at Theo with a detached expression.

Theo was ecstatic. He knew that Elyse hadn’t forgotten. She still remembered their shared past.

Unable to contain his excitement, Theo blurted out, “I knew you’d love them! The flowers arrived fresh this morning. They’re at their most beautiful, just like you.”

Elyse’s lips twitched into a smile. “Thank you. I do like them, but I can’t accept them.”

Theo’s smile froze. Struggling to keep his composure, he said, “I didn’t offer them as your ex-boyfriend, but as an admirer. I love the fiddle music you play.”

Elyse pursed her lips and said, “Theo, haven’t I made it clear I don’t want you getting too close?”



Theo's smile vanished, replaced by a steely look. "I understand. Do you still intend to reject me? I'm just wondering how many times I have to be nice before I can win your heart."

With a defiant sigh, Elyse looked up, her eyes conveying resignation. "You really should consider other options. I'm not the only one for you. Anyone can replace me. You're just being stubborn."

She did it again. How many times must she reject him before she could ease her frustration? Theo adjusted his collar, trying to regain his composure. "Are you trying to provoke me on purpose?"

Elyse remained silent. Where had her words fallen short, causing Theo to misunderstand her intentions?

Theo fixed her with a look that sent chills down her spine and said, "I hope you understand that my patience is thin. Love doesn't give you the right to repeatedly hurt me."

Struck dumb, Elyse managed to ask, "How have I hurt you? Does turning you down mean I'm trampling over your feelings? Theo, can you stop being so unreasonable?"

Had she made herself clear? She was married to Jayden and wouldn't entertain the advances of another man.

Yet Theo appeared completely out of control, convinced they still had a chance together.

Elyse balled her hands into fists, fighting the urge to shake some sense into him.

Theo's expression turned stormy, his gaze growing wild, which only made Elyse more anxious.

Noticing his darkening look, Elyse's instinct was to flee, but before she could, Theo caught her.

He held her close and buried his face in her neck, inhaling deeply as if trying to capture her essence.

Terrified, Elyse screamed, "Let me go!"

Theo tightened his grip, refusing to release her. "It's been so long since I last held you. You still smell as wonderful, Elyse. If I had known, I never would have left you at the altar."

The memory of being abandoned on her wedding day still pierced Elyse's heart like a shard of glass.

She vividly recalled the disgrace Theo had inflicted upon her. Was she about to let him demean her once more?

Absolutely not! Under no circumstances! Definitely not!

In a silent cry of defiance, Elyse stomped down hard on Theo's foot with her high heel.

Theo yelped in pain and instinctively shoved her away.

Elyse stumbled backward, nearly toppling to the floor.

Chapter 420:

Elyse regained her balance, then whirled around and delivered a sharp kick to Theo's chest.

Theo grunted as he collapsed onto the floor.

Bracing herself against the wall, fury in her eyes, Elyse confronted him. "You claim to love me? Then how could you just abandon me? Have you forgotten your actions? You professed your feelings while courting others. Oh, and Mabel? Did you not sleep with her? Is that your definition of love?"

Elyse's raised voice drew the attention of the concert hall staff and lingering contestants.

They witnessed a tense scene: a striking woman glaring at a man who seemed untrustworthy.

A concerned onlooker approached her. "Miss, are you okay?"

Haunted by Theo's recent actions, Elyse confessed, "He tried to harass me."

The crowd glared at Theo.

"You look decent. Why would you harass her?"

"A harasser like him deserves to be in jail."

The murmur of calling the police grew until Freda burst through the crowd, positioning herself before Theo.

Defensive, Freda addressed the bystanders, "He's my boyfriend, and he did not harass her. Please, don't accuse an innocent man."

Elyse gaped at Freda in shock.

Freda had witnessed everything, yet she chose to defend Theo. Overwhelmed, Elyse demanded, "If you saw everything, why didn't you help me? Why are you maligning me?"

Freda lifted her chin defiantly, her gaze fierce. "Maligning you? My boyfriend is innocent. Perhaps you are the one with dubious intentions."

With Freda vouching for Theo, the crowd's suspicion shifted away from Theo and toward Elyse.

Feeling their scrutinizing stares, Elyse found herself at a loss for words. It was clear that Theo's embrace had been forceful, and she had not fabricated the story.

Meanwhile, Theo, standing quietly behind Freda, chose to remain silent.

He watched Elyse intently, his eyes filled with a pained expression as if he were the one wronged.

While the crowd verbally berated Elyse, Theo simply observed, doing nothing to defend her.

He mused over how much simpler things would be if Elyse hadn't screamed.

She had not objected to his hugs before, but now her scream portrayed him as a villain.

This turn of events seemed to suit Theo. He didn't wish to harm Elyse himself; instead, he let the crowd do it, pondering whether this would make her less likely to defy him in the future.

Under the crowd's harsh judgment, Elyse struggled to articulate her side. She was unjustly labeled as promiscuous, accused of seeking unwanted attention.

Her eyes, fiery with indignation, glared at Theo.

Yet, Theo remained detached. He considered speaking on her behalf—if only she would ask him to.

Despite waiting, Elyse never sought his help.

Instead, she preferred to explain herself to the crowd, resisting the idea of asking anything of Theo.

Theo was frustrated, feeling that Elyse didn't depend on him at all.

“Excuse me, let me through, please.”

Amid her struggle to respond, Elyse heard Jayden’s voice.

The crowd parted for Jayden. Lifting her gaze, Elyse saw him approaching in a wheelchair, a large bouquet of roses in his lap.

Noticing her tearful eyes, Jayden teased with a smile, “Honey, are you so thrilled to see me that you’re about to cry?”

Elyse hurried over to Jayden, her lips pressed together.

She reached to hold his hand, but instead, Jayden presented her with the flowers.

“Congratulations, honey. I heard about your rank, so I brought these flowers especially for you,” Jayden said, his smile unwavering.

Elyse, ready to share her frustrations, found herself momentarily lost in the scent of the roses, cradling the bouquet.

Jayden surveyed the onlookers and declared coolly, “She is my wife and loves only me. The idea of her seeking another man’s attention is preposterous.”

The assertiveness of his tone made the crowd hesitate, reluctant to challenge him.

Freda, however, remained skeptical. “Does she really only love you? If she truly does, why would she embrace another man?”