

## Bound love 481

Chapter 481:

Jayden remained silent, simply opening the bottle and taking a long swig directly from it. Peyton and Clive exchanged dismayed glances. Jayden's demeanor made it clear that something had gone awry between him and Elyse.

Clive, too, indulged in a bottle of whiskey. With deliberate pace, he dropped two ice cubes into his glass and poured himself a measure of the whiskey. "What transpired between you and Elyse?" he inquired calmly.

Peyton, relishing Jayden's evident distress, interjected, "Seems like Elyse has kicked Jayden out. Otherwise, why else would he be seeking solace with us over a drink?"

"Quite possibly. She refused to come back home," Jayden said, downing the bottle in one go, his demeanor surprisingly collected.

Clive was taken aback by Jayden's unexpected composure. "Where is she now? Are you simply allowing her to stay elsewhere?" he asked.

"She's holed up with Tracy at Shaun Kennedy's place," Jayden revealed, popping open another bottle and pouring it into a glass. "She claims I don't comprehend her. But haven't I provided for her needs and desires? Haven't I understood her well enough?"

Seeing Jayden's emotional turmoil, Clive couldn't help but feel surprised. It was the first time he had witnessed Jayden display such vulnerability. Jayden, who had always been composed, was now openly expressing his frustration.

Clive asked gently, "Could it be that Elyse's grievances aren't material but rather emotional?"

Peyton scoffed, "Haha, emotions? How could Jayden grasp that concept? This man has no feelings." He then turned to Jayden, probing, "You're wondering why Elyse is upset about something like this. Well, let me ask you this: Why did you opt to keep the genuine state of your legs concealed from Elyse?"

Peyton had Jayden pinned. After a moment of silence, Jayden confessed, “It didn’t feel right to burden her with it. It’s too risky for her.”

Shaking his head, Peyton countered, “It’s not about safety concerns; it’s about trust. You don’t trust Elyse. You doubt that the woman who married you truly loves you. You’ve never truly placed your trust in her. You’ve never considered her your family or friend.”

“Stop talking nonsense,” Jayden retorted with a furrowed brow.

Peyton’s words cut through the air with conviction. “I speak the truth, not folly. Within your household, save for Elyse, every servant holds knowledge of your secret. Why does she remain the lone soul you withhold it from?”

Jayden lapsed into contemplative silence.

As Peyton leaned casually against his wheelchair, he popped a can of cola open, taking a satisfying gulp before continuing. “Elyse has inquired about you on more than one occasion, yet you’ve chosen to keep her in the dark. There seems no explanation other than a lack of trust.”

Jayden deliberated for an extended moment before speaking slowly. “It’s not a matter of mistrust, but rather...” His thoughts became tangled, a labyrinth he struggled to navigate. He realized he couldn’t articulate his feelings succinctly. Yet his affection for Elyse was undeniable. He held her in high regard, to the extent that he was prepared to fulfill her every desire.

Observing the anguish on Jayden’s face, Clive had a sudden revelation. “Jayden, do you truly comprehend the essence of love? Is it simply about satisfying material desires, or is there something deeper?”

Peyton, impressed by Clive’s insight, patted him on the shoulder. “You’re quite astute. You’ve hit the mark.”

A shadow crossed Jayden’s features. “I provide her with everything she desires. How dare you insinuate that I lack love for her?”

Peyton countered swiftly, “But what of her soul, thoughts, and emotions?”

Chapter 482:

With a darkened expression on his face, Jayden asked, “I don’t even understand. What are you trying to say?”

Peyton, dripping with sarcasm, responded, “You never loved her, huh? Gotta hand it to her, she must be an angel for putting up with you.”

“You think so? Am I that bad?” Jayden asked with a forced grin.

Clive rolled his eyes. “We’ve put up with you all these years because we love you, bro.”

Jayden was disgusted by Clive’s sarcasm. “Come on,” he muttered through gritted teeth.

Peyton, tapping his fingers on the table, took the topic seriously. “Instead of asking whether or not you understand Elyse, I’ll ask if you understand yourself. What do you really want deep down in your heart? Do you know love? What is love to you?”

Jayden was thrown off balance by Peyton’s barrage of questions. He had always been a quick thinker, but he was speechless at the moment.

Clive, glad Peyton was supporting him, raised his glass to clink with Peyton’s can of coke.

Jayden felt betrayed. “Really? Is that how bad you guys think of me?”

Peyton glared at him with rage. “There’s nothing wrong with being like this. We totally understand you because you are our friend.” He gulped down the rest of the coke, making him burp again. “You will reflect on what you have done and apologize to Elyse tomorrow. Does pissing her off make you feel better?”

“You must be drunk,” Jayden said after a moment of silence.

Peyton was so infuriated that he banged his hand on the table. "I'm not drunk at all! Truth be told, I blame Elyse for falling in love with someone like you. No sane person would want to marry someone like you."

Just then, two waiters came in. One of them said respectfully, "Here's the whiskey you ordered."

Clive was stunned. "You ordered another whiskey?"

Jayden stared coldly at the two waiters. "I didn't place any order for this."

"Are you sure, sir? We came as soon as we got the order."

One of the waiters walked to the table, pretending to put the bottle down. Tactically, he slipped a dagger from under his sleeves and stabbed at Jayden. However, Jayden seemed to have expected it. He quickly gave him a hard kick in the stomach.

Peyton, who stood close to Jayden and witnessed the attack, screamed in horror.

The other waiter, who stood by the door, dropped his pretense. He slipped out his own dagger and stabbed Clive, who was nearest to him.

It dawned on Jayden that they were hired killers. They were after him but were careful not to leave any witnesses. This explained why they had attacked Clive.

Jayden immediately pulled Peyton up and stood in front of him to shield him from danger. He then went after the man who stabbed Clive with a bottle, smashing his head with all the force he could muster.

The situation quickly escalated into a violent struggle.

Peyton, terrified, cried out, "My leg is injured, you should protect me!"

Clive anxiously added, “I can’t protect you. Let Jayden do it! I only practiced kickboxing for a short period as a child.”

Peyton pleaded, “Jayden, you have to protect me. I’ll learn freestyle grappling as soon as I recover from this leg injury.”

“Keep quiet! I won’t let anything happen to you. You won’t die!” Jayden was charged up, staring at the two assassins with murderous intent. “Send a text to Tobin with my phone. Tell him there may be two corpses he’ll have to deal with today.”

Peyton collected Jayden’s phone, then asked, “Why don’t you relate this situation to Elyse?”

“Don’t you dare!” Jayden’s eyes turned cold. “She is a goddess who deserves to be worshipped and cheered by her audience. I’ll kill you if you dare to involve her in this filthy situation!”

To him, Elyse was so innocent and pure that he couldn’t afford to stain her with the blood on his hands. She deserved to stand in the sunshine and live happily ever after, enjoying music and the scent of beautiful flowers. He’d rather handle the situation himself.

Jayden’s stubbornness left Peyton speechless. He thought it was a good opportunity to ease the tension in their relationship.

Did Jayden get the wrong idea? Did he misunderstand him?

“Okay, okay. I’ll only send a message to Tobin. I won’t tell Elyse anything about this.” He sent the message as promised.

The assassin in front of them made a move. Seeing that, Jayden quickly grabbed a bottle and fought the two killers, who were armed with daggers.

“Jayden, watch out!”

Chapter 483:

Elyse had a restless night. She felt a persistent unease, as if something was amiss, which left her anxious. Eventually, she drifted off, only to be woken by Tracy the next morning for the final competition.

The venue for the final was bustling with people and media crews conducting interviews. Wearing a hat and carrying her violin case, Elyse, not in the best of spirits, followed Tracy into the backstage area.

Fiona, already in the lounge applying her makeup, noticed Elyse's pale face and couldn't suppress a flicker of smugness. She stood up, feigning concern. "Elyse, are you okay? Haven't you eaten breakfast?"

Elyse managed a weak smile. "Don't worry about me. I'm just too nervous to eat."

Tracy, holding a lunch box, insisted, "Go change your clothes first. I've brought food for you. You need to eat something later, or you might feel faint."

Elyse nodded and took the clothes from Tracy, heading to a changing cubicle. Seated again, Fiona watched Tracy and eventually couldn't resist asking, "You seem very close to Elyse. Are you friends?"

Tracy nodded, pulling a biscuit from her pocket. "I've heard about you. Here, have a biscuit. Thanks for looking out for her."

Fiona accepted the biscuit with a smile. "It's my pleasure to take care of her."

After a brief chat, Elyse emerged from the cubicle. She was transformed, wearing a long, slim-fitting black dress adorned with a layer of tulle around her waist embedded with silver diamonds. Each step she took made the diamonds sparkle.

Tracy gazed at her in awe and beckoned her over to sit down.

Fiona, too, was briefly amazed, but her admiration quickly turned to jealousy and envy. She could tell the worth of this dress. Its craftsmanship and material quality suggested it was high-end and likely very expensive.

She reached out, touching the hem of Elyse's dress. "It's beautiful. How much does it cost?"

Elyse looked down, a hint of pride in her voice. "It's quite special. It's probably worth over a million. The designer sewed the diamonds on himself."

"Over a million dollars! Did you buy it?" Fiona inquired tentatively.

Elyse shook her head. "No, my husband bought it for me."

As Jayden's name was mentioned, sadness deepened in her eyes.

Noticing her distress, Tracy intervened quickly. "Come here, Elyse. The competition is starting soon. You need to eat something to keep up your strength, or you might faint on stage."

This time, Elyse didn't resist. Encouraged by Tracy, she ate the nutritious breakfast specially prepared for her. Unbeknownst to her, Fiona was observing her with a complicated expression. Fiona had initially thought Elyse was married to an ordinary man. However, she later noticed the regular car that picked up Elyse and the increasingly lavish and expensive dresses she wore to competitions. It seemed Elyse was surrounded by luxury, whereas Fiona had nothing.

While eating, Elyse looked up and noticed Fiona staring at her. Without thinking much of it, she offered, "Fiona, are you hungry too? Would you like some?"

"No, thanks. I was just curious about your breakfast," Fiona responded quickly, turning her head away.

Elyse didn't dwell on the moment. After eating, she felt better and decided to send a text to Pearce.

Tracy, peering over her shoulder, saw Elyse texting a man and blurted out in surprise, "Is he your lover?"

Elyse looked baffled. “What? No, he’s my cousin. He’s coming to watch the competition but got stuck in traffic.”

Realizing her mistake, Tracy then suggested, “Do you want to message Jayden? It’s the grand final, after all. Don’t you want him here?”

“I do want him here,” Elyse murmured after a pause.

“Then send him a message,” Tracy urged.

“But we had a fight. I’m not ready to set aside my pride and invite him,” Elyse admitted, biting her lip.

Unable to watch Elyse’s hesitation any longer, Tracy took the phone from her hands. “If you’re too hesitant to send a message, I’ll do it for you.”

Elyse reached out anxiously to retrieve her phone, but Tracy was prepared. With her back to Elyse, she quickly sent the message.

“Retract it. I don’t want him to see it,” Elyse pleaded anxiously.

Just as Tracy was about to speak, she received a photo from Jayden. It showed the stage of the venue, revealing that he was already in the auditorium.

Surprised, she handed the phone back to Elyse. “See? What did I tell you? Taking the first step can change the story. It’s not that Jayden doesn’t love you. You two just had a disagreement.”

Continuing, she encouraged Elyse, “What couple doesn’t argue? As long as you still love him and hold him in your heart, no conflict is insurmountable. Talk to him about your pregnancy after the competition, okay?”

Chapter 484:



Tracy took it upon herself to persuade Elyse, seeing herself as a guardian of their love. When Elyse and Jayden eventually reconciled, they must reward her handsomely; otherwise, she would withhold her help the next time.

To Elyse's astonishment, Jayden appeared, despite their previous quarrel having been intense and tempestuous. She found the situation intricate. Holding her phone, she stared at the photo for a prolonged moment before finally sending a message. "I understand." She then set her phone aside.

Tracy observed that Elyse's expression had softened. Raising an eyebrow, she inquired with a hint of playful curiosity, "Feeling better now? He's waiting for you in the audience, isn't he?"

Elyse nodded. "I didn't expect him to come."

Tracy sprang to her feet, clapping her hands in delight. "My mission is accomplished. I'll be waiting in the audience. You should head backstage to get prepared."

Elyse nodded, watching Tracy depart. She then retrieved her lipstick from her purse and applied it, gazing at her reflection until she felt a sense of calm wash over her.

As the moment approached, Fiona stood and said, "Let's head backstage."

"Alright, let's go."

Elyse linked Fiona's arm, and they walked backstage at a leisurely pace. On their way, they encountered Vicky and Darren.

The moment Darren saw Elyse, he left Vicky behind and approached her with a smile. "Are you ready? I'm aiming to beat you to first place."

Elyse returned his smile. "Of course, I'm ready. I'm afraid you might not beat me."

Vicky was speechless as she witnessed the friendly banter between Elyse and Darren. "What a revolting conversation! How can the top two competitors have such a good relationship? You should be rivals, always."

Elyse glanced at Vicky with puzzlement. “Do you only see people as competitors and not friends in your life?”

“Can you be friends with your rivals?” Vicky scoffed.

Elyse responded calmly, “Human relationships are intricate and cannot be encapsulated in a single word. Darren and I can be friends and rivals simultaneously. We understand and challenge each other. It’s a beautiful dynamic.”

Darren stifled a laugh and remarked, “Let’s drop it. Vicky the genius has no friends, only sycophants, which is why she dislikes hanging out.”

“Darren Reynolds!” Vicky was livid. She truly couldn’t fathom why Darren was so supportive of Elyse. After all, she had known him longer than Elyse did. “Why do you always oppose me? Shouldn’t you be siding against Elyse now that she’s your rival?” Vicky asked in confusion, her tone aggrieved.

Darren responded confidently, “Elyse is certainly my friend. We’re very close, and naturally, I’m willing to take her side.”

“Hopeless! Pathetic!” Vicky, not wanting to engage with Darren any longer, swiftly walked away, clutching the violin case tightly to her chest.

Elyse observed Vicky’s somber demeanor and furrowed her brow. “Haven’t we pushed too hard this time? She appears to be upset.”

Darren shook his head solemnly. “I honestly wish she’d allow herself to feel sad for once. Maybe then she’d take a moment to reflect on her issues. She’s never considered herself wrong before, always been so arrogant.”

Then, a thought struck Darren, and he continued, “You know what? Vicky has been in a really rough patch lately. She’s been making mistakes in the orchestra, and Grace’s overall score has been outshining hers. She must be starting to doubt herself, and that’s probably why she’s acting this way.”

## Chapter 485:

Elyse was taken aback by Darren's words, her confusion evident as she asked, "What happened to her?"

Darren, with a history of rivalry with Vicky, admitted his ignorance on the matter. "I'm not sure, but it's clear she's deeply affected by something."

Elyse ran her hand through the back of her hair. She had limited knowledge about Vicky, paled in comparison to Darren's. After all, he had known Vicky since they were young.

Backstage, the ten contestants stood apart, even those once on good terms opting for distance. They now weren't allies striving together but rivals locked in competition. Their camaraderie ceased at this pivotal moment.

"Let's welcome our ten contestants to the stage," the host announced.

Elyse, the first-place winner, led the way onto the stage. As she surveyed the judging panel, her surprise peaked at the sight of someone unexpected.

It was Freda! Why was she seated at the judging panel, prominently positioned?

Freda, chin in hand, delighted in Elyse's evident shock and doubt. Her satisfaction knew no bounds. This was precisely what Freda desired—to witness the disbelief on Elyse's face. She had endured to this moment for that express purpose.

Her family, deeply entrenched in the music industry despite their business ventures, held significant sway. They were major investors in various domestic events, including the Champions Cup. Thus, Freda's position as a judge, backed by her family's influence, was easily secured. Besides, the individuals in the music industry lacked the financial resources for such investments. If Freda aimed to secure a judging role, it would be a walk in the park.

Freda basked in her triumph, boldly winking at Elyse and even pulling a face, a deliberate act of provocation.

Receiving Freda's unmistakable signal of defiance, Elyse couldn't help but furrow her brow. Was Freda here to deliberately stir up trouble for her? The possibility gnawed at Elyse's mind as she contemplated the situation.

Speechless, Elyse hadn't anticipated becoming someone's target after severing ties with Theo. At that moment, she found herself grappling with an unfamiliar pang of regret, questioning the choice she once made to be with Theo.

"Elyse Lloyd will now grace us with the enchanting melody of 'The Wanderer,'" the host declared before exiting the stage with the other contestants, leaving Elyse to command the spotlight solo.

Elyse took center stage, striking a pose before drawing the first note from her violin, captivating the audience.

"Absolutely marvelous! Her performance is flawless, showing both skill and poise. She's a genius."

"It's like she's always been at the top, pouring her heart into every note."

"Did you know Elyse is Cody's apprentice? Her playing is anything but rigid; she exudes pure joy."

As the judges whispered their admiration, Freda couldn't hide her tight frown.

Did Elyse truly deserve such praise? Although not a music expert, Freda could appreciate beauty when she heard it. Elyse's violin resonated with haunting melodies, conveying the wanderer's profound solitude and the ethereal glow of moonlight.

Yet, despite the brilliance of her performance, Freda couldn't shake her disdain for Elyse. How could Elyse garner such high acclaim?

With a disdainful glance around, Freda dared to interject, "Let's not get carried away with Elyse's performance. She's not as exceptional as you believe."

After her remark, Freda scanned the room with a brazen air. Her eyes gleamed with determination as she silently cautioned several judges against awarding high scores to Elyse with a stern gaze.

Caught in a moment of uncertainty, the judges exchanged uneasy glances, mindful of Freda's influential position as an investor.

Unbeknownst to Freda, Gavin sat discreetly behind the judges' panel, overhearing every word. Gavin observed her with a hint of astonishment, pondering the underlying motive behind her relentless focus on targeting Elyse.

Chapter 486:

Elyse took a graceful bow, her movements like flowing water, before disappearing backstage.

"Such a flawless performance," someone whispered. "No wonder she's in the top spot. There's no way I can surpass her."

"She's incredible. Hope I can snag a spot for the international competition."

"Does Elyse even have any weaknesses? Seems like she's the whole package—no chinks in her armor."

Fiona, tucked away in a corner, couldn't help but overhear the hushed whispers of the other three contestants. A bitter pang of envy twisted in her gut. Her gaze drifted upwards, landing on Elyse bathed in the warm glow of the spotlight. Violin tucked under one arm, the other hand gracefully holding the cascading folds of her dress, Elyse radiated a confident aura.

The dejection gnawing at Fiona solidified into a heavyweight, a suffocating stone crushing her spirit. Elyse was undeniably brilliant. Even with the subtle curve of her pregnant belly, she commanded attention effortlessly.

Fiona, despite sharing the same instructor, couldn't seem to capture the same magnetism. Her fists clenched, nails digging into her palms. A raw jealousy simmered within her.

Suddenly, a cheerful voice broke the tension. “Fiona! I was a nervous wreck out there, but I made it,” Elyse beamed, approaching Fiona with open arms. She grabbed Fiona’s arm, her voice tinged with a playful whine. “Now that the pressure’s off, I’m starving! Fancy hitting the lounge for some food? I can grab you something too.”

Fiona felt a prickle of irritation under Elyse’s touch. She averted her gaze. “Not hungry. You go ahead, though. You need the extra fuel.”

With a quick pat on Darren’s shoulder and a few encouraging words, Elyse darted towards the lounge.

Darren took a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and strode onto the stage, ready to face his musical challenge.

Backstage, Elyse dug into the lunchbox Tracy had thoughtfully prepared. Unburdened by performance anxiety, her appetite roared. Hunger gnawed at her. She couldn’t exactly order takeout at the moment. Forced to quell her grumbling stomach, she started to head back.

Passing by the restrooms, a sudden outburst of Vicky’s voice snagged her attention. Elyse stopped, brow furrowed in confusion. The unmistakable tirade of curses spilling from the restroom stall made her even more curious.

Pushing open the restroom door, Elyse found Vicky in a surprising state. Gone was the usual arrogant facade. Fists clenched, Vicky pressed them against her forehead, muttering what seemed to be a prayer that quickly devolved into a string of curses. Her entire demeanor was fragile, a stark contrast to her usual bravado.

“What’s going on? Shouldn’t you be prepping for your performance? Darren’s on stage, and you’re up next,” Elyse said, blinking in bewilderment.

Vicky whirled around, startled by Elyse’s sudden appearance. But she soon collected herself, saying curtly, “You’re just trying to sabotage me, right? Competing against you is a competition. Why the sudden concern? Trying to throw me off my game?”

“Why would caring be sabotage?” Elyse countered, genuinely confused. “If I wanted to give you a hard time, I wouldn’t be here reminding you to get ready.”

Vicky’s suspicious glare softened slightly under the weight of Elyse’s simple words. She turned away, refusing to meet Elyse’s gaze.

Noticing Vicky’s trembling hands, Elyse ventured a question, “Are you nervous?”

Vicky’s response was a curt dismissal. “None of your business. Leave me alone.”

Elyse frowned. “Vicky, you’ve always been so confident. Why are you so on edge today?”

Vicky snapped, her voice tight with barely concealed emotion. “Can’t you just leave me be? I treated you horribly, and here you are fussing over me. Are you crazy?”

Elyse blinked, surprised. “Of course, I know you weren’t exactly kind. But hey, I got you back for it, didn’t I? We’re even.”

Vicky was speechless. After a long moment, she muttered, “You must be out of your mind.”

Elyse studied Vicky intently. There had been a shift in her behavior recently, but today, it was a complete transformation.

“Please go. Leave me alone,” Vicky said, her tone lacking the confidence she once had. Elyse noticed Vicky looked even more vulnerable.

“Look,” Elyse said firmly, “you’re coming back with me. We’ve made it to the final. You have to be there, nerves or not.”

Chapter 487:

Elyse seized Vicky’s hand assertively and tugged her out of the restroom. For the first time, Vicky felt an overpowering aura radiate from Elyse. In her momentary distraction,

she found herself dragged far away. As they neared the backstage area, Vicky abruptly freed herself from Elyse's grasp.

"That's enough! I've told you to mind your own business. I don't want to compete, okay?" Vicky erupted, her voice echoing with anger.

Elyse stood her ground, unwavering. "I've told you that no matter what, you have to participate in the competition."

With a cold smirk, Vicky retorted, "Stop acting like you're being all kind-hearted with me. If I drop out, you'll face fewer competitors and have a better shot at winning easily. Wouldn't that suit you just fine?"

"For others, maybe. But for me, winning without a challenge is worthless," Elyse replied, her brow furrowed with discontent. "Don't talk nonsense if you don't know."

Vicky sneered, "Your insistence is absurd. Do you really want to cause yourself that much trouble?"

Elyse crossed her arms, raising an eyebrow with a confident smirk. "If there isn't a worthy opponent, winning first place would feel meaningless to me."

"A worthy opponent? Do you consider me worthy?" Vicky asked, a hint of realization dawning on her.

Elyse nodded without a moment's hesitation. "You're the first person I've competed against who's really made me feel the pressure. I've always been striving to keep up with you."

Elyse's words pierced the armor around Vicky's heart, melting her unease, fear, and confusion.

"Why do you support your opponent? Kick a man when he is down. Have you never heard of this?" Vicky asked, her stubbornness giving way to curiosity.

Elyse snorted. "I'm not like you, always looking to tear others down."



Vicky pointed at Elyse, poised to lash out. But she restrained herself, lowering her hand and muttering, “You have no idea what I’ve been through lately. Your words are meaningless to me.”

Leaning against the wall, Elyse replied seriously, “No matter what you’re facing or how hard it is, you can’t give up the competition.”

Vicky’s voice trembled. “Do you just want me there to make you look better?”

A swift, sardonic smile crossed Elyse’s lips. “Because your previous dedication to practicing the violin was genuine, and you didn’t depend on anyone else’s assistance or dishonesty to reach where you are now. You depended on your own efforts to make it to the final.”

With earnest eyes, Elyse continued, “So don’t quit. You need to secure a spot and face tougher competitors.”

After a moment of silence, Vicky whispered, “You’re really too compassionate.”

The door swung open, and a staff member peeked in. Spotting Vicky, he called out, “Vicky, it’s your time to go onstage. Come on, let’s go. Stop chatting!”

“Did you hear that? Good luck,” Elyse said, pushing Vicky toward the stage. As she moved, a staff member took Vicky by the arm, guiding her in.

Once Vicky was inside, Darren emerged, a grin spreading across his face. “I think I did well. I believe I’ve succeeded. I’m confident I secured a spot in the international competition.”

“You helped me stay calm, and now you’re my competition,” Elyse teased, smiling.

Darren puffed up with pride. “Do you have any regrets? If I remained nervous, I could end up getting eliminated.”

“I don’t regret it. In the end, I feel fortunate to be able to compete internationally alongside my friend,” Elyse said sincerely.

Darren, flustered by her honesty, scratched his head, unsure of what to say.

Curiosity flickering in her eyes, Elyse asked, “What’s been going on with Vicky lately? I ran into her earlier, and she mentioned wanting to withdraw from the competition.”

“She wants to quit?” Darren echoed in surprise. After a moment of thought, he added, “I’m not fully aware of her situation. All I know is that Abram doesn’t seem to pay much attention to her anymore. She’s no longer the favored one in our orchestra.”

Elyse was taken aback. “Why isn’t Abram supporting Vicky? She’s his apprentice, dedicated and talented. I don’t get why he’s considering abandoning her.”

Darren’s expression grew somber. “When it comes to power and status, the dynamic between the instructor and the apprentice can get absurd.”

Chapter 488:

Elyse didn’t know much about the internal strife within the Celestial Sounds Symphony. She was just relieved that Vicky didn’t quit. Her goal was to support Vicky in a way that would leave no regrets.

Elyse set aside her concerns about Vicky and rubbed her stomach. “Is there anything to eat around here? I’m starving. If I don’t eat soon, I might end up with low blood sugar,” she said with a hint of frustration.

Darren pulled out some chocolate from his pocket and questioned, “Didn’t you eat breakfast? Have some chocolate quickly. You don’t want to get low blood sugar.”

Elyse took the chocolate with an embarrassed smile. She felt too embarrassed to tell him that she had eaten a breakfast meant for three that morning and was still hungry.

She patted her flat belly and wondered if her baby was already needing so much food.

Watching Elyse quietly eating the chocolate, Darren thought for a moment and then said, "I've got some snacks in the lounge that I brought for an energy boost. I'll bring everything for you. Maybe that'll help."

Elyse's eyes lit up. "That would be wonderful!"

Darren felt a bit helpless. "You're that hungry? Hold on, I'll go grab them."

Elyse humbly waited for Darren. They found a secluded spot backstage and snacked while waiting for the competition to wrap up.

After the competition ended, Freda stepped down from her role as a judge. Her primary aim in being there was to ensure Elyse was disqualified, and with that accomplished, she felt little need to stay.

Leaving the music hall, she stepped into an empty corridor and dialed Theo's number. She was eager to inform Theo personally that she was about to eliminate the woman he loved, hinting that if he agreed to marry her, she would not make things difficult for Elyse.

But before her call could connect, her phone was snatched away.

"Who are you? How rude!" Freda was hoping Theo would reconsider during that moment, but her chance was abruptly cut off. She was furious.

Gavin ended the call, preventing Freda from reaching Theo. He said coldly, "Miss Jimenez, we need to talk."

"What is there to talk about? On what grounds do you think you can speak to me?" Freda didn't recognize Gavin, but his serious, handsome look took her by surprise.

Freda felt guilty and tried to stare at Gavin.

With a serious expression, Gavin asked, "I'm not sure what Elyse did to upset you, but the Champions Cup has always been about fairness and transparency. Could you explain why you scored Elyse so low?"

"Who are you? Why do you care so much about her?" Freda looked at Gavin from head to toe, trying to figure out who he was.

"I am also an apprentice of Cody Tucker," Gavin said clearly. "I overheard your words about Elyse. I urge you to remain fair if you hold any personal grudges."

He hesitated for a moment before walking slowly, pushing Freda back into a corner. His towering presence and imposing aura effectively trapped her.

With a stern face, Gavin proposed, "Or perhaps you'd prefer to settle this matter with me privately."

After holding his gaze for a few tense seconds, Freda suddenly shoved him aside and hurried back to the competition venue at full speed.

Returning to her seat, she attempted to regain her composure. Shortly after, Gavin reappeared and took a seat behind her.

Freda felt the weight of his stare on her back. It made her incredibly uneasy!

She clenched her teeth and was pissed that everyone was protective of Elyse. She decided she must give Elyse a hard time.

As the final results were about to be announced, the contestants stood on stage, awaiting the judges' decision.

A judge began calling the names, noticeably omitting Elyse, sparking curiosity among the audience. The audience had been attentive from the start and were well aware of Elyse's talent. It seemed unthinkable that she wouldn't be mentioned.

The judge also glanced at Freda, having previously warned her that it would be unjustifiable to exclude Elyse from the list of qualifiers given her outstanding performance. He had suggested placing Elyse first rather than omitting her entirely.

However, Freda completely ignored the judge's advice, determined not to let Elyse succeed.

Elyse, standing on the stage, looked directly at Freda, sensing her hand in this. She turned to the judge who just announced the qualifiers and questioned, "In what way was my performance lacking?"

The judge couldn't answer Elyse. He believed Elyse's performance was commendable and couldn't point out any flaws.

Silent and unable to justify the decision himself, he handed the microphone to Freda, unwilling to shoulder the blame.

Chapter 489:

Freda stared at the judge, her expression one of utter disbelief. Why had he handed her the microphone? Couldn't he handle such a straightforward issue on his own? Why was it up to her to intervene?

With a flash of irritation, Freda grabbed the microphone and addressed Elyse directly. "Do you really believe your performance was flawless? Didn't you see any faults at all?"

Elyse responded with a serene nod, her voice steady. "Yes, I believe my performance was flawless. You won't find any errors."

Gavin, observing Elyse's unwavering confidence, felt a surge of relief. Elyse's dedication was paying off. She was truly evolving. Determined to help her, he quietly excused himself and walked away.

At that moment, another judge quickly intervened, realizing the need to defuse the tension. "There's been a mix-up with the ranking table," he announced, holding up a

document. “Here’s the correct one. Elyse, you’re actually ranked seventh. Congratulations.”

The judge’s words were meant to ease the situation for Freda, giving her a graceful out.

Freda opened her mouth to respond, but the urgency in the judge’s voice pressed her into her seat. This was the final of the Champions Cup, after all. Any attempt by Freda to use her influence against the contestant could tarnish the event’s reputation.

While the judge managed to restrain Freda, Elyse remained defiant, unwilling to accept the situation.

Elyse’s expression was icy as she raised her voice to Freda. “I want the scores from each judge announced publicly. There’s no way my performance deserved seventh place.”

The judge, noticing Elyse’s persistence, grew angry. “You received high marks because of your talent. Don’t be ungrateful!”

Elyse shook her head firmly. “I refuse to accept seventh place if my performance didn’t warrant it. If there was any flaw in my performance, point it out. Otherwise, I reject this result.”

“That’s right! Elyse has consistently topped the charts. Why is she suddenly in seventh this time? There’s definitely something off here. The Champions Cup isn’t playing fair!” Tracy couldn’t hold back any longer and erupted in protest.

Following Tracy, other spectators rallied behind Elyse.

“If Elyse didn’t perform well, explain specifically where she went wrong. Don’t just score her low without reason.”

“We aren’t fools. We know a good performance when we see one. The judges need to provide a clear reason for Elyse’s low score, or you’ll never convince us.”

“I’ve been following Elyse in every tournament of the Champions Cup. I don’t accept this outcome!”

The audience’s unrest grew, their dissatisfaction loud and clear.

The situation was spiraling out of control. The head judge glanced at Freda, his voice low and urgent. “What do we do now? We can’t fabricate any reasons to score Elyse poorly. Miss Jimenez, your input is needed.”

Freda was taken aback by Elyse’s impact. Despite her limited experience in competitions, Elyse had amassed a surprising number of supporters. Clearly, Freda had miscalculated her reach. Yet, she couldn’t bring herself to acknowledge Elyse’s prowess.

In her frustration, she snapped, “If you can’t handle such a simple task, what good are you?”

The head judge responded firmly, “Then we must go by the actual scores. It seems Elyse has earned first place.”

“No way! She can’t be the winner!” Freda blurted out, thinking she could pressure Theo into reconsidering his decision.

There had to be another way.

Lost in her thoughts, Freda barely noticed a middle-aged man with a noticeable stature approaching the judges’ table alongside Gavin.

“Dad? What are you doing here?” Freda exclaimed in surprise, her eyes darting to Gavin. Had he brought her father here?

Ignoring Freda, the man reviewed the official score chart to verify the standings. Then, taking the microphone, he addressed the competitors on stage. “Given the dissatisfaction with the results, why not settle this with another round?”

Chapter 490:

After making his announcement, Karl Jimenez, Freda's father, faced the restless crowd and proposed, "Since everyone is dissatisfied with the outcome of this competition, we'll add another round."

The crowd quieted down, buzzing with whispers. Photographers from the media snapped away, energized by the new development.

Freda, seeing her father offer Elyse another chance, stomped her foot in anger. "Dad, can you not favor an outsider?"

"Shut up! Since when have you been so stupid and unreasonable?" Karl scolded, glaring at her. "Competition is serious. Keep your tricks out of it."

"Dad!" Freda's voice cracked, her frustration nearly bringing her to tears. She had hoped Elyse would lose, perhaps pushing Theo back toward herself.

With tears brimming, she accused, "Dad! Don't you care about me? You never consider my happiness."

"What nonsense are you talking about?" Karl responded, his hand on his chest, his expression one of utter frustration.

"I hate you!" Freda yelled, her anger boiling over as she ran away without a second glance, leaving chaos in her wake.

Karl, pressing his chest, took a moment to compose himself. He then turned to Gavin with an apologetic look. "I'm sorry. My daughter is too spoiled and willful. She's turned this competition into a mess."

Gavin chuckled, watching the direction Freda had gone. With a smile, he reassured, "It doesn't matter. She's young and thoughtless. I won't hold it against her."

Karl breathed a sigh of relief. Gavin, Cody's most accomplished apprentice and a rising star in the music industry, was someone he greatly admired and certainly did not want to offend.



Seating himself at the judging table in Freda's stead, he addressed the contestants on stage. "For the extra round, why don't you perform 'Devil's Trill Sonata'?"

The suggestion left the ten contestants visibly stunned. Mastery of "Devil's Trill Sonata" could dramatically showcase their talents, impressing both the audience and the media. However, failure to perform well would clearly indicate a lack of preparation and a need for further practice.

Vicky, who had secured second place, was visibly determined to win when she heard the selection. She knew the tune inside out.

"Seems destiny wants me to be first. Even God is on my side," she said, confidently glancing towards Elyse. She had been preparing, expecting to compete internationally as the top contender.

Elyse returned her look with an impassive expression. "You will still be second. The first place is mine."

The announcement of the extra round stirred mixed emotions among the contestants. Some, disappointed with their initial rankings, saw it as a chance to excel and improve their standings. Others, satisfied with their places, feared losing ground.

Fiona felt differently. She saw this as the end of her future. Not having made the top eight, she was relieved to hear she and Elyse were unranked, thinking Elyse's violin skills were as lacking as her own. Yet, she hadn't anticipated Elyse's failure was due to the unjust scoring of a judge. If Elyse ended up winning first place, where would that leave her? Could she settle for a mere top ten finish?

Clutching her violin, Fiona's fingers whitened with tension. She couldn't bring herself to look at Gavin, fearful of seeing disappointment in his eyes. In her heart, she lamented, maybe Elyse was the true prodigy among them, and she was merely taking up space.

Meanwhile, Karl conferred with the other judges and proposed a restart of the competition, with Elyse as the first contestant.

Elyse stood on the stage, her eyes alight with determination. She was ready to prove her mettle once again.

Below the stage, Darren watched her performance, his arms crossed, his expression laden with concern.

“Devil’s Trill Sonata” was notoriously challenging. Expressing the deep emotional realm of this tune when played solo was a formidable task. She was supposed to reflect the tension between earthly passions and spiritual aspirations, capturing the essence of the struggle between good and evil. Performing this tune demanded exceptional skill from the violinist. It involved a range of sophisticated techniques.

Among the young violinists, Darren had seen only a few, including Vicky, who could master such a complex piece.

Vicky, noticing Darren’s concerned look, approached him with a smirk. “Are you worried about Elyse? Afraid she’ll mess up?” Vicky asked, her voice tinged with provocation.