

Bound love 711

Chapter 711:

Elyse instinctively averted her gaze and shook her head, her voice barely a whisper. “No, of course not.”

Irving remained silent, but his eyes spoke volumes. Elyse was a terrible liar; she didn’t even realize that the guilt written all over her face gave her away every time.

With a gentle pat on her head, Irving said gently, “Alright, alright. Go back and get some rest. Let’s talk once you’ve slept it off.”

Dismissed, Elyse trudged back to her room in a fog, collapsing onto her bed, her mind spinning.

Was it all just a dream?

As she pondered, sleep slowly reclaimed her.

By noon, a knock on the door awoke Elyse from her slumber. She groggily got up to open it and found Gavin standing there. Stifling a yawn, she mumbled, “Gavin, what’s up?”

“Get dressed. We’re going to have breakfast, and I’ll introduce you to your opponent,” Gavin announced with a mischievous smile.

Elyse blinked in surprise. “Opponent?”

“That’s right!” Gavin replied, his eyes twinkling with excitement. “He specifically asked to meet you after hearing about your impressive experience.”

Glancing at his watch, he quickly added, “You have one hour to get ready. Better hurry!”

Feeling the pressure, Elyse dashed into the bathroom to freshen up.

The next hour flew by in a blur. Bundled up warmly in her favorite coat, Elyse followed Gavin to the meeting.

The venue was a cozy restaurant with a live band playing soulful melodies. Elyse found herself captivated by the performance, her eyes glued to the musicians.

“Elyse, meet my friend, Edward McCoy,” Gavin introduced warmly.

Elyse, who had been so engrossed in the band’s performance, came to her senses and looked up at the newcomer curiously.

Edward was wearing a pristine white down jacket, and his curly hair peeked out from under a stylish hat. When he smiled at her, it was with the endearing innocence of a puppy.

However, what really caught Elyse’s attention were Edward’s dimples. She was just itching to poke them. This, coupled with his thick and cozy jacket, made him look quite friendly and approachable.

Edward’s eyes turned into half-moons as he smiled, extending his hand to shake Elyse’s. “Hello, it’s an honor to meet you. You look just like the beautiful princess Gavin described.”

Elyse’s cheeks flushed a rosy pink at the compliment. She scratched her head bashfully. “I’m not as great as you think. I’m just an ordinary girl.”

Edward flashed a charming smile. “You’re too modest.”

Then, as he scanned through the menu, he asked politely, “How about a glass of wine to warm up? Quite chilly today after all.”

Elyse, unable to resist his offer, nodded. “Sure, I’ll have some.”

With a satisfied nod, Edward motioned for Elyse and Gavin to sit down.

Once they were settled, he leaned forward, a glint of eagerness in his eyes. “So, for the free performance piece in the preliminary round, which piece do you choose?”

Elyse, who was just about to take a sip of water, choked instantly.

Chapter 712:

Gavin, observing her reaction, raised an amused eyebrow at his friend. “People normally beat around the bush, but not you—you just dive right in, huh?”

Edward shrugged, unabashed. “I can’t help it. I prefer getting straight to the point. Why waste time beating around the bush?”

Elyse sighed, a hint of helplessness in her voice. “So, do you really want to know?”

“Yup,” Edward affirmed with a nod. “Tell me. What piece have you prepared? We can share our choices to avoid any overlaps.”

Elyse leaned back, folded her arms, and hummed softly. “If you want to know what piece I’ve prepared, you’ll have to share yours first.”

Mimicking her stance, Edward hummed lightly, “You’re not very friendly.”

Elyse arched an eyebrow, a playful glint in her eyes. “There’s no room for friendliness in competition.”

Edward’s eyes sparkled with mischief as he flashed a cunning smile. “How about we reveal our choices together?”

Elyse considered for a moment, then nodded. “Alright, we’ll reveal them simultaneously so neither of us has the upper hand.”

“Violin Concerto No. 3 in G Major,” Elyse declared confidently.

“Csardas,” Edward announced with a smirk.

Both fell silent, each lost in their own contemplations.

From the sidelines, Gavin smirked, observing the scene.

These two had a multitude of tricks up their sleeves, but who would ultimately outshine the other was still a mystery.

Elyse forced a smile and offered a hollow compliment. “You will definitely perform perfectly.”

Edward returned the sentiment, his tone equally insincere. “I’ve heard of your talent. You will surely shine.”

The weight of their mutual hypocrisy left them both feeling unsettled, prompting a strained silence.

Gavin stifled a chuckle, about to interject when his phone rang. He stood, excusing himself with a polite nod. “Excuse me, I need to take this call.”

Elyse watched Gavin exit the restaurant, her expression unreadable.

Edward, his interest piqued by Elyse, moved closer with his drink and took a seat beside her.

Elyse, indulging in a piece of cake to satiate her hunger, eyed Edward warily. “What do you want?” she asked, suspicion lacing her tone.

Edward assumed an innocent expression. “I’m not up to anything. I just want to chat and get to know you better.”

Elyse's brow furrowed in confusion. "Why do you want to get to know me?"

With a flourish, Edward extended his hands, performed a series of intricate gestures, and conjured a rose from his palm.

Offering the vibrant red rose to Elyse, he asked, "Would you accept my love?"

Elyse's eyes widened in surprise. "What?"

Edward nodded, his gaze intense. "Actually, from the moment you walked into this restaurant, I was captivated. Isn't this what they call love at first sight?"

Elyse struggled to swallow her cake, staring at him incredulously. "You fell in love with me in such a short time?"

Chapter 713:

Edward took Elyse's hand, his eyes brimming with sincerity as he placed the rose in her grasp. "Falling in love with you only took a second."

Elyse was stunned, her mind racing for a response.

Seizing the moment, Edward, now in full romantic mode, subtly tried to drape his arm around Elyse's shoulder.

Elyse was still in a daze.

Just as Edward's hand was about to touch Elyse, a large, well-defined hand intercepted his.

Confused, Edward looked up to see a man glaring at him fiercely.

Jayden's eyes blazed with anger as he tightened his grip, causing Edward to cry out in pain.

Elyse finally noticed Jayden's presence.

So yesterday wasn't a dream!

Elyse stood up, alarmed at the sight of Jayden gripping Edward's wrist. She hurried forward to intervene, "Don't hurt him."

Dressed in black, Jayden's face darkened further at Elyse's words.

In an icy tone, Jayden retorted, "Hurt him? He's trying to get his hands on you."

Elyse felt a bit helpless. "What ill intentions could he possibly have? Just let him go."

Edward forced a smile, attempting to defuse the tension. "How could I have any ill intentions toward Elyse? I'm simply drawn to beautiful women."

Edward's feigned innocence only deepened Jayden's ire.

"Drawn to her? You dare make a move on her in my presence?" Jayden snarled, his rage boiling over, itching to tear Edward apart.

Confused and desperate, Edward turned to Elyse. He had no idea who this fierce man was.

"Is he your friend? Please, ask him to let go. My hand is about to be crushed."

Unable to stand it any longer, Elyse intervened, prying the two men apart.

Even after being separated, Jayden's fury remained, his anger palpable and barely contained.

Elyse placed her hands on her hips and said firmly, “Enough! Edward didn’t mean any harm. Let him go.”

With a sly grin, Edward moved closer to Elyse, extending his hand. “Elyse, my wrist hurts. Could you give it a massage to help with the pain?”

Elyse, clearly uncomfortable, replied, “Massage it? That wouldn’t be appropriate.”

Jayden’s anger flared anew at Edward’s audacity.

Unable to tolerate any more, he grabbed Elyse by the collar and dragged her away like a rag doll.

Stunned, Edward watched for a moment before smirking, realizing the depth of Jayden’s feelings for Elyse.

Once Elyse was unceremoniously shoved into Jayden’s car, her face a storm of anger, she demanded, “Where are you taking me?”

Elyse sat in the car, feeling the waves of irritability and tension emanating from Jayden. When he didn’t respond, she asked again, “Gavin is still waiting for me at the restaurant. If you take me away, he’ll be worried.”

Jayden turned his head, a careless smile tugging at the corners of his mouth, his tone flat and icy. “I’m taking you to the airport.”

Chapter 714:

Elyse’s face paled in shock. “Are you crazy? You don’t intend to take me back home, do you? I have a competition coming up. You can’t do this.”

Jayden’s expression darkened, his grip tightening. “I do what I want. Don’t forget, you are my woman.”

Elyse couldn't hold back any longer. "We're already divorced. You have no right to interfere with my life!"

Jayden grabbed her chin, pressing closer; cornering her in the confined space of the car.

"Divorce? I decide when this marriage ends. It's not up to you."

Trembling with anger, Elyse retorted, "Don't go too far, Jayden. Turn around immediately. I want to go back."

Jayden remained silent.

"You know how important this competition is to me. If you really take me to the airport and forcefully bring me home, I will never forgive you." Elyse bit her lower lip tightly, but her bright eyes remained defiant.

Jayden stayed silent for a long moment before sneering. "What's so important about that competition? You should stay by my side."

Elyse replied firmly, "I have my own life, and participating in this competition is the most important thing for me right now."

She stared at Jayden, who was unwilling to relent, and added seriously, "Turn this car around. If you turn around, we can talk."

After a prolonged silence, Jayden finally instructed the driver, "Don't go to the airport."

The driver asked, "Sir, where should we go instead?"

Jayden scratched his head in frustration. "Anywhere but the airport."

Elyse glared at Jayden. "Where are you taking me?"

Jayden roared back, "If you keep asking, I'll throw you into the forest."

It was the first time Jayden had yelled at her since their marriage. Stunned for more than ten seconds, Elyse pouted, looking sad.

Realizing his tone was too harsh, Jayden couldn't bear to see such an expression on Elyse's face, which only made him more irritable. "Fine, I'll send you back, okay? Just don't look at me like that. It makes me feel..."

Unable to say the word "heartbroken," Jayden changed his wording. "It makes me feel disgusted."

Elyse grew even more aggravated and angry.

She punched him and shouted furiously, "You are disgusting! You hear me? Your whole family's disgusting!"

Jayden conceded, "You're right. My family is truly disgusting."

Hearing this, Elyse rolled her eyes in frustration, crossed her arms, leaned back in her seat, and stared blankly at her feet.

Noticing Elyse's calm demeanor, Jayden also quieted down.

They were seated just inches apart, so close that a slight movement would cause them to touch.

Elyse was aware of their proximity, but she didn't expect Jayden to be so audacious, leaning on her shoulder, making it go numb.

"Jayden, we are divorced. Don't be so shameless," Elyse snapped angrily.

Jayden remained silent.

Elyse continued, "You're heavy. Get up."

Chapter 715:

Despite her repeated demands, Jayden didn't respond. Growing increasingly frustrated, she said, "Seriously, move it."

The driver glanced back through the rearview mirror and explained, "It looks like he is asleep."

Elyse was stunned. She turned to look at Jayden, noticing his steady breathing and tightly closed eyes.

She raised her hand and pinched his nose, but he didn't react, only snorting a little.

Elyse was speechless. "Is he pretending? How could he fall asleep so quickly?"

The driver glanced at her through the rearview mirror and explained, "Mrs. Owen, since you left, he hasn't been eating properly or going home. He works at the company all day. Driscoll mentioned that Mr. Owen isn't sleeping well and only gets three or four hours of sleep each night."

Elyse quietly observed Jayden, noticing the dark circles under his eyes and feeling a pang of discomfort.

The driver added, "Mr. Owen may have a bad temper, but he truly relies on you."

Elyse's mood was a swirl of conflicting emotions as she listened to the driver's words.

She had originally been pinching Jayden's face, but her gesture had unconsciously softened into a caress.

The driver continued, "Mrs. Owen, since you left, Mr. Owen has seemed like a robot. It's as if your departure took everything from him."

Elyse's lips curved into a small smile. "But he isn't aware of this, right? He doesn't understand his own behavior and feelings."

If Jayden truly understood his feelings, he would have supported her dreams. But after nearly two months of separation, he still hadn't come to terms with it.

The driver knew he was an outsider and aware of the couple's internal conflicts. He offered what he could and then fell silent.

Elyse had been apart from Jayden for a long time, and she hadn't really looked at him closely in a long while. Though she had secretly kept his photos, she had avoided looking at them, hiding them away in a box and pretending they didn't exist.

Now, as she lowered her head and quietly observed Jayden, she noted that while his overall appearance hadn't changed much, the dark circles under his eyes and the gauntness of his chin revealed how poorly he had been faring.

What unsettled her even more was the strange mix of emotions stirring within her.

Jayden's condition was a result of her actions. She should have felt a sense of vindication, but instead, she felt only a deep sense of unease.

How had things come to this?

This wasn't what she wanted at all.

"We're stuck in traffic," the driver said. "The road ahead is too slippery due to the snow, and there's been an accident. Mrs. Owen, we'll need to wait a bit longer."

Elyse, originally feeling sorry for Jayden, was struck by a sudden surge of anger at the news.

She had left the hotel on an empty stomach, and now, because of Jayden, she had to remain hungry even longer.

She was beyond frustrated and wanted to shake him awake. Yet, as she reached out, she hesitated.

Looking at Jayden, her anger began to fade as she saw him sleeping so soundly. Her emotions softened unexpectedly.

With a heavy sigh, she leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes, trying to ignore her growling stomach.

Chapter 716:

About half an hour later, the traffic finally started to move. As they neared the restaurant, Elyse turned to Jayden and gave him a firm slap.

Jayden stirred awake, groggy and disheveled, his hair all over the place. Still half-asleep and confused, Jayden instinctively nuzzled against Elyse's neck, completely forgetting that they had been at odds.

Feeling Jayden's warm breath against her neck made Elyse's body go numb. She stiffened and, after a few seconds, said angrily, "Jayden, if you do that again, I'll slap you again."

Jayden slowly woke up, and upon realizing what he had done, he withdrew and smoothed his hair with a nonchalant air, "It wasn't even comfortable. Don't think I enjoyed it. I actually felt terrible."

Elyse's anger flared at his words. She was so infuriated that she immediately wanted to leave the car.

Quickly opening the door, she slipped out and made her way into the restaurant.

Seeing this, Jayden asked, "Why didn't you lock the car?"

The driver, feeling slightly perplexed, replied, "Aren't we at the destination?"

“Forget it,” Jayden said with a frown as he opened the car door and hurried after her.

Elyse had already entered the restaurant and was relieved to find Edward and Gavin seated at their table. She jogged over, apologizing nervously, “Sorry, Gavin. I had some issues and went out for a bit.”

“It’s okay,” Gavin said warmly. “Edward filled me in on what happened. As long as you’re alright.”

Gavin then pulled Elyse into a seat and continued, “You’ve been gone for a while. Did you eat? If not, you should hurry and dig in. We’ve ordered all your favorite dishes.”

Elyse’s hunger made her stomach growl. She picked up a fork, speared a sausage, and took a bite. The hot sausage felt heavenly in her mouth.

Then, she curiously asked, “By the way, Gavin, what did Edward tell you?”

Gavin poured her a hot drink and replied softly, “He mentioned that you were deceived by a man, cried and begged him to stay, and then chased after him when he refused.”

Elyse’s hand holding the fork froze. She stared incredulously at Edward, “What a load of crap, I was clearly kidnapped.”

Edward shrugged and said, “It’s not important. Sometimes, you need to add a little drama to the story, right?”

Elyse’s silence filled the air, as if time had stopped just for her.

Suddenly, Jayden appeared, his rapid footsteps echoing through the restaurant.

A look of surprise flashed over Gavin’s face, quickly turning into resigned acceptance. He had always known Jayden would find Elyse with his wide network, but Jayden’s arrival right before the competition made him anxious.

Elyse's eyes filled with a mix of emotions as they met Jayden's gaze. "What are you doing here?" she inquired.

Jayden chose not to respond, simply taking a seat instead.

Gavin watched him closely, noting how the past month apart had slightly thinned him.

"Can we step outside?" Gavin asked. He knew Jayden disapproved of Elyse's participation in the competition and felt a pressing need to change his mind.

Elyse immediately voiced her objection, her tone brimming with frustration. "What are you going to talk to him about? He never listens!"

Chapter 717:

Jayden gave Elyse a sharp look that quickly quieted her.

Elyse sulked, her attention turning sadly to her sausage.

Jayden got to his feet with resolve. "Fine. Let's talk." He motioned toward Gavin, who guided him out of the restaurant.

Elyse watched them covertly, her eyes staying on them until they were out of sight. As she looked away, she noticed Edward's inquisitive gaze.

"What are you looking at?" Elyse queried, her voice tinged with discomfort.

Edward rested his chin on one hand, his eyes shining with amusement. "You've got a story, haven't you? That rude man just now, was he your boyfriend? Did you two split up?"

"Why the interrogation?" Elyse responded, clearly irritated and not interested in talking with Edward.

Unfazed, Edward continued. “Just curious! The way he gazed at you, it’s almost like he wanted to swallow you whole. Did you dump him?”

“No, stop with the wild guesses,” Elyse replied, brushing him off.

Edward didn’t let up with his guessing. “Then you must have cheated on him. I can’t see any other reason for him to look at you like that.”

Elyse let out a laugh at Edward’s ridiculous assumptions. “What look are you talking about? Did he stare at me with murderous rage? Or did he absolutely despise me?”

Edward gave her a sly wink. “I can tell by looking at his eyes that there must be some stories between you two.”

Elyse choked when she heard that. She quickly grabbed a glass of water, drinking it down before sighing in relief.

Seeing her reaction, Edward grinned victoriously. “I’m right, aren’t I? I can tell there’s something odd about the way he looked at you. It’s obvious you two had a history.”

Elyse let out a deep sigh. “He’s my ex-husband, to be exact. We’re divorced.”

Edward was taken aback. The truth was more sensational than he had imagined. “What caused the divorce?” he asked, still curious.

Elyse’s lips curled into a dry smile. “We hit a dead end. No matter what we tried, it felt like a dead end. Separating was the only way I could breathe.”

Just as Edward was about to respond, Jayden entered. An idea popped into Edward’s head, and he pretended not to notice Jayden’s arrival.

“Even after a divorce, you can find your way back together. It seems clear that both of you still harbor feelings for each other.”

After a moment of silence, Elyse responded in a somber voice, “There’s no going back for us.”

Unknown to Elyse, Jayden had overheard her declaration. His face briefly displayed a tumult of emotions.

Just as Edward braced for Jayden to challenge Elyse, Jayden did something surprising—he simply turned and left.

Edward was puzzled. Why would he walk away? It would have been more typical for him to listen in further or to directly address Elyse. What was with his unpredictable actions?

As Edward pondered these questions, Elyse added, “If he can’t recognize his flaws and make a change for the better, then there’s no hope for our future.”

Chapter 718:

Edward found himself speechless, wondering why Elyse had not expressed these concerns earlier.

“So, what changes do you think he needs to make for you to reconsider?” Edward asked.

Elyse paused, furrowing her brow. “First, he must understand that I am a human being, not just an extension of him.”

Edward’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “Is it that simple?”

“It is easy to say, but not so easy for him,” Elyse replied, her mood clearly affected by the discussion.

She then fell silent and returned to her meal.

Despite the uncertainty about her relationship with Jayden, Elyse was determined to prioritize her own well-being.

Just then, Gavin returned, looking around the room.

“Where’s Jayden? I saw him come in,” he asked.

Elyse looked puzzled. “When?”

Edward remained silent, his gaze fixed downward.

Elyse didn’t dwell on Jayden’s departure, assuming he had other matters to handle. After dinner and bidding Edward farewell, she returned to the hotel with Gavin, where they continued practicing.

Two weeks of rigorous training passed, and Elyse found herself arriving at the concert hall, wrapped in a coat with her violin case in hand. She followed Gavin to a lounge, set down her violin case, and went to collect her participant number from the staff.

While waiting in line for her number tag, Elyse spotted a familiar face in the crowd. Fiona stood there, dressed in a white down jacket, radiating an aura of aloof independence. Elyse’s surprise quickly shifted to confusion and curiosity.

Tugging at Gavin’s sleeve, she whispered, “Gavin, look. Fiona’s here.”

Gavin, engrossed in his phone, initially dismissed her observation. “That can’t be right. Fiona didn’t qualify for the competition, and she didn’t have Mr. Tucker’s recommendation. How could she be here?”

Elyse subtly pointed towards Fiona. “But that’s definitely her. She’s in line.”

Reluctantly, Gavin set down his phone and glanced in the direction Elyse indicated. Noticing their gaze, Fiona turned her head. After briefly locking eyes with them, she looked away without acknowledging their presence.

Gavin was taken aback. “It really is Fiona,” he muttered, still baffled by her presence. How could she participate without the proper qualifications?

As they continued to speculate, Fiona collected her number tag and left without a word, making no effort to approach them. Elyse touched her nose, still puzzled, and asked, “Gavin, is it a good thing that Fiona is participating in the competition?”

Gavin’s expression turned thoughtful. “Maybe.”

Still perplexed, Elyse retrieved her number tag and returned to the lounge. With number 5 in hand, she was scheduled to perform early, prompting her to head backstage.

After shedding her coat, Elyse quickly made her way backstage to wait for her turn. Upon arriving, she spotted Edward, who looked pleasantly surprised to see her.

With curiosity, he asked, “What’s your number? I’m 7. It’s almost my turn.”

Chapter 719:

Elyse held up her tag and replied, “I’m 5. I’ll be performing before you.”

Raising an eyebrow, Edward remarked, “Well, congratulations. I hope your performance goes well.”

Elyse placed a confident hand on her chest and assured him, “It will be perfect.”

Positioning herself in a quiet corner backstage, she awaited her moment. Before long, it was time to take the stage. Draped in a green silk gown and clutching her violin, Elyse stepped into the spotlight. A quick glance revealed a packed audience, buzzing with anticipation.

The hall was filled with media representatives, cameras poised to capture every second of the performances. Suddenly, Elyse felt a wave of nerves as her palms began to sweat. This was the Swan Cup—her first major step onto the international stage. The mix of excitement and anxiety surged through her.

Taking a deep breath, she steadied her racing thoughts and prepared herself.

“Please enjoy ‘The Last Rose of Summer,’” she announced.

As her violin’s first notes filled the room, they flowed like a gentle stream through a sunlit forest, evoking beauty and hope. The melody shifted, effortlessly blending the vibrant energy of summer with a delicate tenderness.

Elyse’s performance was a flawless display of skill, maintaining grace and poise even through the most challenging passages. The audience’s applause reflected their admiration for her smooth, captivating rendition.

As the final notes faded into the air, Elyse gradually returned to the present. The delighted smiles on the audience’s faces confirmed her success. With a graceful bow, she walked off the stage, confident that she had delivered an exceptional performance.

Backstage, Edward approached with a hint of suspicion in his voice. “Weren’t you planning to play ‘Violin Concerto No. 3 in G Major’? Why did you switch to ‘The Last Rose of Summer’?”

Elyse boldly replied, “I can change my piece if I want to. When you asked, I felt like playing the concerto, but now I didn’t.”

Edward clenched his teeth in frustration. “Fine, fine. You like ‘The Last Rose of Summer,’ right? But that piece is notoriously difficult. What are you trying to prove by playing it at an exhibition? How will this affect the contestants who follow?”

Elyse’s smile widened with satisfaction. “I’m just showing off a little. Don’t get so worked up. You’re about to perform, so focus on yourself.”

With that, she covered her mouth and giggled, further provoking Edward until he was practically gnashing his teeth in frustration.

When Elyse glanced at Edward, she noticed his eyes were fixed on the stage with an intensity she rarely saw. His usual relaxed demeanor was replaced by a serious, almost brooding expression.

“Are you nervous?” she asked curiously.

Edward shook his head, his gaze unwavering. “No, I’m just observing my opponents. I want to see if they’re trying to hide their strengths or if they’re like you—eager to stand out from the get-go.”

Elyse let out a confident snort. “I don’t need to hide my real strength. I’m aiming for first place.”

Edward’s lips curved into a smile at her bold declaration. “Everyone knows you’re aiming for first place.”

“Is it that obvious?” Elyse felt a flush creep up her cheeks. She touched her face, suddenly shy.

Chapter 720:

After a moment of thought, Edward replied nonchalantly, “It’s actually a good thing. After all, it’s better to be straightforward about your ambitions than to scheme behind everyone’s back, right?”

Surprised, Elyse tilted her head. “‘Scheme’? What do you mean by that?”

Edward’s expression darkened as he recalled a painful memory. “A few years ago, during a competition, I faced a petty opponent. While I was in the bathroom, he tampered with the strings on my violin. By the time I realized what he did, it was too late—the string snapped mid-performance. It was a total disaster.”

“What?!” Elyse’s eyes widened in outrage. “How dare he? He must’ve been wildly insecure. Did you end up winning against him?”

“Of course,” Edward said, raising his chin proudly. “I had to think fast; I borrowed a violin from a friend who was waiting backstage and finished my piece. Good thing the judges let me have a do-over.” He stroked his chin, a glint of pride in his eyes. “I ended up winning first place. I don’t even remember where that guy placed.”

“Good!” Elyse grinned in satisfaction. “You foiled his plan and you even won first place. I’m really happy for you.”

Edward chuckled, his confidence restored. “Well, it’s my turn to perform now. Make sure to watch closely.” With a grin, he strode towards the stage, violin in tow.

Elyse stood behind the curtain, watching with bated breath.

Soon, Edward started to play.

As the first notes of “The Wanderer” filled the room, Elyse’s face hardened.

Edward had accused her earlier of not performing the piece she had originally planned, and now, he had responded in kind!

Clenching her fists, Elyse vowed to give Edward a piece of her mind once he stepped off the stage.

However, her resolve wavered as she was drawn to the music.

The rapid, intricate passages, with their energetic string plucking, propelled the music toward a breathtaking climax. The melancholic melody seemed to pour out from his very soul, pulling the audience into an emotional whirlpool.

Biting her lower lip, Elyse was stunned to realize this man was not only a master but perhaps even more skilled than she was!

Reflecting on Edward’s words just now, Elyse realized his choice of challenging pieces for the competition was a bold statement of his ambition, making the contestants who followed his performance seem dull in comparison.

She and Edward were cut from the same cloth, both driven by an insatiable hunger for the championship.

After the performance, Edward strode off the stage, his face alight with triumph, only to be met by Elyse's smoldering gaze.

Elyse parroted Edward's earlier accusation, her tone sharp. "Weren't you supposed to perform 'Csardas'? Why switch to 'The Wanderer'? Wasn't your rendition of 'Csardas' good enough?"

With a sly grin, Edward whistled and replied, "In competition, deception is just another tactic. I learned long ago that I can predict my opponent's moves—except for you. You, my friend, are an enigma."

Elyse rolled her eyes in exasperation and gave Edward a few playful, yet firm punches on the arm to release her frustration.

Edward rubbed the sore spot on his arm and chuckled. "Don't be mad. As a token of our friendly rivalry, I'll let you in on some insider information."

Elyse's curiosity was piqued. "What is it?"