

## Bound love 781

Chapter 781:

After what felt like an eternity, the car finally pulled up to the hotel. Jayden's gaze shifted to the entrance, where Gavin stood waiting, his overcoat barely concealing the tension in his posture. Jayden, however, remained unfazed. He helped Elyse sit up, his hands brushing through her hair in a gesture that felt more possessive than caring. "Go back and practice your violin," he said, his tone smooth but cold. "And don't get too close to other men."

Frustration bubbled over, and Elyse couldn't hold back any longer. "You already have a girlfriend, Jayden. Isn't it only fair that I find a boyfriend too?"

Jayden's response was immediate and terrifying. His hand clamped down on hers, his grip like iron as he leaned in close, his voice a venomous whisper. "If you dare get involved with another man, I'll kill him. You don't want someone to die because of you, do you?"

Elyse's blood ran cold, but her fury flared even hotter. "Then I'll go kill Aarya," she retorted, her words fueled by anger. "Believe me, I will."

Instead of reacting with the shock or anger she expected, Jayden's mood lightened disturbingly. A dark, twisted smile curled his lips as he kissed her cheek. "When do you plan to kill her?" he asked, his tone almost playful. "What tools do you need? Don't worry, babe, if you're afraid of handling the aftermath, I can take care of it for you."

Fear coiled around Elyse's heart, squeezing it tight. She had lashed out in the heat of the moment, but Jayden's response was chillingly serious.

"Let go!" she demanded as she tried to wrench her hand free. She reached for the car door, desperate to escape, but it wouldn't budge.

Panic set in as she realized she was trapped. Jayden gently turned her back toward him, a mischievous smile playing on his lips as he pointed to his cheek. "Are you really just going to leave so directly?" he teased.

Realizing Jayden's intention, Elyse's eyes narrowed with disdain. "I'm not kissing you," she said coldly. "Open the door. I want to leave."

Jayden leaned back, his expression unfazed. "You're not going anywhere without a kiss. That's the deal. You can leave once you kiss me."

Elyse widened her eyes, incredulous at his shameless demand. Weighing her options, she decided she had no choice. She grabbed his chin, her fingers trembling with anger, and leaned in to give him a quick, reluctant kiss.

Jayden's hand drifted to the spot where her lips had touched him, a smug smile spreading across his face as he looked at Elyse, who was now blushing with a mix of fury and embarrassment.

With an air of satisfaction, he reached over and unlocked the door. "Go ahead," he said, his tone light and mocking, "And don't forget what I told you."

The moment the door was open, Elyse bolted from the car, her anger spilling over as she snapped, "I won't remember. And don't you dare come looking for me!"

Jayden watched her run toward Gavin, her movements hurried as if she feared Jayden might drag her back at any moment. The sight amused him, and he chuckled to himself, finding her fear almost endearing. Not interested in a confrontation with Gavin, Jayden ordered the driver to leave.

As the car pulled away, Gavin glanced at Elyse, concern etched on his face. "Did Jayden do anything to you after taking you away?"

Guilt gnawed at Elyse, and she didn't want to admit what had happened. "No," she replied stubbornly, "he didn't do anything."

Gavin seemed to accept her answer, though his concern lingered. "When I last spoke to him, he seemed like he wanted to mend things with you. But he's extremely possessive, Elyse. I just hope you can focus on your competition."

Elyse pouted, clearly displeased. She was too embarrassed to explain that Jayden already had a girlfriend and was only interested in her out of a twisted sense of possession.

Chapter 782:

Before she could dwell on it further, she noticed something off about Gavin's expression. "Gavin, are you okay? You look like you haven't rested well."

Gavin forced a smile, though it was clear he was exhausted. "I'm fine. I just spent a lot of time and effort helping with the investigation of that troublemaking contestant," he replied, stifling a yawn.

Elyse's surprise was evident. "Did the investigation yield any results?"

A shadow passed through Gavin's eyes as he spoke. "I can't reveal much yet. We have a rough idea of who the suspect is, but without concrete evidence, we're keeping a close watch."

Elyse understood. They were biding their time to catch the culprit in the act.

After a moment of thought, she asked, "There's a Comeback Competition in three days. Can I go watch?"

Gavin nodded. "Of course, but I won't be able to join you. I'll be busy assisting with the investigation." He suggested, "Why not invite your friends? You mentioned that Vicky and Darren are here, and Edward could join you too."

Elyse considered this before replying, "I'll think about it. The last time I asked Darren to practice with me, he declined, saying he avoids any distractions before the competition."

Gavin agreed with a nod. "Alright, but on the day of the Comeback Competition, be cautious. I won't be there to watch over you. You've made it to the final, and the real competition is about to start. Your opponents will be tough."

Elyse's expression grew serious. "I understand."

Just as Gavin was about to leave, he paused and turned back to Elyse. "By the way, Mr. Tucker has been attending all your performances from the audience."

Elyse was taken aback. "But wasn't he with an old friend recently?"

"He came back a while ago," Gavin said with a gentle smile. "He's been closely following your progress, observing every bit of improvement and growth in your performances."

He then patted Elyse's head affectionately. "After each performance, he praised you in front of me, commenting on how much more composed and impressive you've become."

Elyse's eyes widened in disbelief, her hand flying to her mouth.

Gavin chuckled and lowered his voice. "This is just between us. He didn't want me to tell you."

Gavin blinked, a small smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "Don't let it slip. He didn't want to make you nervous. But honestly, I think you've conquered stage fright."

Elyse, touched by his words, replied, "The stage is incredible. Standing there, playing the violin... it brings me true happiness."

"Keep going," Gavin encouraged before leaving. "Your journey with the violin has only just begun."

As Elyse returned to her room, she was still on cloud nine. Lying on her bed, she replayed Gavin's words in her mind, a deep sense of contentment washing over her. She savored the moment, drifting into a deep sleep, only waking when evening had settled in.

She sat up, walked to the window, and gazed out at the scenery below. The snow had stopped at some point, and the streetlights now bathed the scene in a warm, golden glow.

Grabbing her violin, Elyse left the hotel, intending to enjoy a meal before her practice session. To her surprise, she ran into Fiona at the restaurant.

Fiona was also there for a meal, and when she spotted Elyse, a flash of disdain flickered in her eyes.

Elyse wasn't surprised. She knew Fiona didn't like her, but the feeling was mutual.

Chapter 783:

After placing her order, Elyse chose a quiet corner to sit alone. She had just taken a bite of her burger when Fiona unexpectedly sat down across from her, tray in hand.

Elyse looked up, confused. "What are you doing? This is my table."

Fiona glanced around the restaurant impatiently. "There are no other seats available. Can't I sit here?"

Annoyed but unwilling to cause a scene, Elyse decided to let it go. She felt frustrated but couldn't bring herself to chase Fiona away.

Fiona noticed Elyse's glare and snapped, "Stop looking at me like that. I'll leave as soon as I'm done eating. It's not like I enjoy sitting with you. I can't stand you either."

Elyse snorted. "Good. We're not the type to sit and eat together, so don't get too close."

Fiona bit back her irritation and continued eating her burger. Halfway through, she suddenly asked, "Are you and Jayden on the outs? Why hasn't he come to see you?"

Elyse's eyebrows raised as she responded sarcastically, "Why haven't you given up yet? Still dreaming of becoming Jayden's wife?"

Fiona shot back, “Why should I give up? Everyone knows how I feel about him. Just answer my question.”

Elyse sipped her cola, her mind wandering to Jayden and Aarya. Aarya’s possessiveness over Jayden bordered on obsession. If Elyse revealed that she and Jayden were divorced, Fiona would almost certainly seize the opportunity to chase after him. But if Aarya discovered Fiona’s intentions...

There was no predicting what lengths Aarya might go to in order to protect her claim on Jayden.

Elyse, with Fiona’s safety in mind, chose not to disclose her recent divorce from Jayden.

“Jayden’s buried in work, and I’m tied up with competitions. Just because we’re not seen together much, does that make you think we’re estranged?”

A shadow of disappointment passed over Fiona’s face. Seeing this, Elyse managed a forced smile and said, “It seems you’re upset we haven’t fallen out. Are you planning to pursue him in our disagreement?”

Fiona gave Elyse a frosty stare. “Since you’ve already figured it out, why state the obvious?”

Elyse found it hard to have a nice talk with Fiona. It was as though Fiona had morphed into someone entirely unrecognizable. Struggling to grasp the transformation, Elyse pondered silently why love had changed Fiona so profoundly.

Distractedly munching on her burger, Elyse was oblivious to the scheming expression that flickered across Fiona’s face.

“By the way, did Gavin ever mention who the competitor stirring up trouble during the contest is?” Fiona asked, her tone casual but probing.

Without even glancing at Fiona, Elyse responded with a hint of impatience, “If you’re so curious, why don’t you ask him directly? Don’t bother me with it; I’m not involved.”

Fiona persisted, probing further, “Hasn’t he mentioned anything? He’s been on this case for a while now, right?”

Visibly annoyed, Elyse looked up sharply and retorted, “I don’t care who’s responsible. Why would I inquire? If you’re so curious, go ask him yourself.”

Fiona gave a strained smile. “Gavin and I aren’t exactly close. He wouldn’t share anything with me.”

Elyse’s expression turned into a frown. “But you asked him to help you with your practice, right? You weren’t close back then either.”

Chapter 784:

Irritated by Elyse’s continual denials, Fiona’s temper flared as she exclaimed, “All I did was ask a simple question, and you’re getting this upset with me?”

Elyse, though puzzled by Fiona’s insistence, tried to keep her composure as she clarified, “Look, first off, you and I aren’t exactly friends, and secondly, I couldn’t care less about whatever that competitor is up to. So, no matter how much you press, I simply don’t have the answers.”

With a serious look, Elyse continued, “The Comeback Competition is just three days away, and it looks like you’re not focusing on that. You didn’t even make it to the finals. Why worry about others’ misdeeds?”

Fiona slammed her hand on the table, frustration boiling over. “I was just trying to have a normal chat with you, and this is how you react? I totally misread you.”

Without hesitation, Elyse snapped back, “No, it seems I’m the one who misread you. Gavin did too, and so did Mr. Tucker.”

“You!” Fiona was seething, her anger ignited by Elyse’s words. She inhaled deeply, attempting to soothe her fury, before declaring, “I will reach the finals. Just you wait.”

Elyse responded with grave sincerity, “I doubt you can surpass Geraldine. Her professionalism, skill, and attitude outshine yours by far. You’re simply no match for her.”

This time, Fiona chose not to retaliate. Instead, she flashed an enigmatic smile and remarked, “Does it really matter if she’s superior? The main thing is reaching the finals, isn’t it?”

Elyse found Fiona’s response peculiar, yet she couldn’t quite figure out why. She eyed Fiona with a hint of suspicion.

Nevertheless, Fiona wasn’t interested in prolonging their discussion. She swiftly finished her burger, gathered her tray, and departed. With Fiona absent, Elyse felt a wave of relief wash over her. She leisurely finished her meal and noted that night had enveloped the sky.

Upon leaving the restaurant, Elyse resolved to practice her violin. As she strolled past a small square, a beautiful melody reached her ears. It was the sound of a violin.

With her violin case in hand, Elyse approached the source of the music, finding someone deeply engrossed in their performance beside a flowerbed. As she approached, the figure beneath the streetlight became clear—it was Edward.

At his feet lay his violin case, now serving as a makeshift collection box for appreciative onlookers who tossed in coins. Edward seemed indifferent to the passersby, yet each time a coin clinked against the case, a cunning smile briefly played across his lips.

Elyse caught that fleeting grin; she had not missed it. She recalled Gavin mentioning once how Edward could earn enough from a single commercial gig to afford a new car, yet here he was, delighting in the modest earnings from his street performance.

After pondering for a moment, Elyse pulled out her own violin, positioned herself, and awaited the perfect cue to harmonize with his melody.



Edward, catching the sound of her preparations, turned with a look of surprise. Upon seeing Elyse, his surprise morphed into joy.

He ceased playing and addressed her, “Can you play ‘City of Stars’? Let’s go with that—it’s just right for this beautiful evening.”

Elyse suppressed a laugh. She adjusted her stance and delicately struck the strings of her violin. Edward faced her, entering the melody at the perfect moment.

Tonight, the snow had taken a break, prompting more pedestrians to venture out. Attracted by the melody, a few slowly gathered around them.

During a brief lull in Edward’s performance, he stole a glance at Elyse.

Clad in a gray woolen hat and wrapped in a thick down jacket, her fingers were tinged red from the chill.

Her gaze was locked on her violin, and lost in her focus, she parted her lips slightly, releasing a warm breath into the cold air.

Chapter 785:

Her eyes, too, seemed to mist over from the intensity of her concentration.

Edward diverted his gaze, letting himself sink deeper into the rhythm of the music.

When they concluded their piece, the crowd around them burst into applause. An elderly man with a flushed, red nose stepped forward, placing a hefty bill in Edward’s violin case. His laughter boomed as he turned to Edward. “That was flawless! Are you two together?”

With a shared knowing look, Elyse and Edward burst into laughter. “No, but we’re partners, perfectly in sync.”

His curiosity satisfied, the man's grin widened. He clapped Edward on the back and continued on his way.

Intrigued by the connection they shared through music, Elyse, her enthusiasm undimmed, proposed, "Shall we play another?"

Edward rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "What are you in the mood to play? I'm fine with anything."

After a brief pause, Elyse ventured a suggestion. "How about 'Think of Me'? What do you think?"

Edward's face lit up with agreement. "That sounds perfect. Let's dive into it."

With mutual nods, they resumed their musical endeavor. As they played, delicate snowflakes resumed their dance in the chill air, setting a magical scene for their duet.

The performance touched the audience deeply, evoking feelings of yearning, love, and delight.

As the final notes faded, applause filled the air, and several spectators tossed coins into Edward's violin case, visibly delighting him. After expressing his gratitude, he eagerly scooped up the coins.

Counting his earnings and slipping them into a wallet, Edward flashed a grin at Elyse. "Looks like I'm treating tonight. Pick anything you fancy."

Elyse was already packing up her violin. "Go ahead without me; I've eaten and really should get back to practice."

Edward stepped in closer, offering a gentle objection. "You've earned half of this. Join me for dinner, then you can practice."

Elyse bit her lip, indecisive. "I've really already eaten, though."

“Come on, have another meal. You look like you could use it. You’re all skin and bones!” Edward urged as he steered Elyse towards a restaurant.

Elyse found herself being ushered into the restaurant somewhat against her will. Once seated, the warmth of the place overwhelmed her.

She shrugged off her down jacket, draped it over her chair back, and reached for a glass of water from the table, taking a long sip.

Edward, meanwhile, perused the menu. Just as he was about to ask Elyse what she felt like eating, he noticed her sipping her water.

Her hair was pulled back into a loose ponytail, a few strands rebelliously poking out, giving her an air of effortless charm and a touch of cuteness.

His eyes then inadvertently dropped to a red mark peeking above her sweater’s collar.

As a grown man, Edward instantly recognized what it was. He stared momentarily before returning his attention to the menu. “Want me to pick something for you?”

“Sure, I’m not picky,” Elyse replied, placing the glass back on the table and exhaling softly.

After Edward placed the order, he decided to break the ice while they waited. “So, have you seen your ex lately?” he asked casually.

Elyse tensed, her eyes narrowing slightly at Edward. She was puzzled—and a bit wary—about why he would bring up Jayden out of the blue.

Narrowing her eyes, she asked, “Why are you bringing up Jayden?”

“Just wondering. I want to make sure he’s not causing you any trouble,” Edward responded, twirling his glass without taking a sip.

Elyse let out a soft sigh. “He’s a nuisance now and then, but not all the time.”

Edward quirked an eyebrow. “Do you still have feelings for him? Or does his pestering annoy you?”

Elyse’s expression tightened, her face clouding over. “It’s complicated. I can’t pinpoint my feelings, but I definitely don’t appreciate the annoyance.”

Edward offered a reassuring smile. “What if I had a plan to get him off your back?”

Elyse looked intrigued. “What are you thinking? It better not be something foolish.”

Edward shook his head, his tone earnest. “Hear me out. Pretend we’re dating. Tell Jayden you’re with me now and I’m all you care about.”

Elyse paused, visibly taken aback. After a moment, she replied, somewhat helpless, “I said no foolish ideas.”

Chapter 786:

Edward pursed his lips, a hint of grievance in his voice as he protested, “I’m just trying to help, and here you are shooting down my idea. What’s your brilliant strategy for getting your ex-husband off your back?”

Elyse found herself at a loss for words, unable to muster a retort even after a long silence.

Noticing her struggle, Edward let out a gentle chuckle and pressed on, “See, you’re out of plans too. Why not consider mine? It could just make him back off.”

Elyse thought back to her conversation with Jayden that morning, his serious tone echoing in her memory. He was earnest in every word. If she were involved with any man, he would certainly take drastic actions.

After a moment of reflection, she firmly rejected the idea, out of concern for Edward. “No, I can’t agree to that. This issue is between Jayden and me. I don’t want to pull anyone else into this mess.”

Edward placed his water glass on the table and leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a whisper. “But what if I want to be a part of your world?”

Elyse stared at him, bewildered and taken aback. “What do you mean by that?”

His eyes twinkling with a mischievous glint, Edward confessed, “I think I’m starting to fall for you.”

Elyse instinctively recoiled, dodging his intense gaze as she stammered, “Are... are you serious?”

Edward straightened up, his smile unwavering but his eyes resolute. “I don’t joke about matters of the heart. Love is the purest joy there is. I do have a soft spot for you. I mean it.”

Caught off guard, Elyse grabbed her violin case and coat and hurried out of the restaurant.

Edward watched her flee with a mix of amusement and a trace of sorrow, remarking to himself, “In love, the coward surely misses out. I choose to be brave.”

For the subsequent days, Elyse chose to remain within the confines of the hotel, seeking refuge in the garden where she diligently practiced her violin.

Irving extended several invitations for meals, but she declined them all, persisting in her solitude until the day of the Comeback Competition arrived. That day, Elyse mustered her courage and prepared herself to attend the event.

As they sat in the audience, Irving, who was seated next to Elyse, noticed her face obscured by a scarf and inquired with a mix of concern and curiosity, “You’ve been quite elusive these past few days. Are you avoiding someone?”

“It’s just my preference to dress this way; don’t fret over it. Let’s enjoy the performances,” Elyse responded, her tone resolute.

Irving chose not to pursue the matter further and redirected his focus toward the stage.

The competition was structured into three groups, with the final rounds crucial in deciding the victor of the Comeback Competition.

Among the competitors, Elyse recognized Geraldine and Fiona. She leaned toward Irving and asked earnestly, “Irving, what are Fiona’s chances in this competition?”

Irving answered with a calm demeanor, “It’s hard to say. She sought me out for some intensive practice recently. Though she’s improved, the few days of practice aren’t enough to bridge the gap with contestants who have been preparing for much longer. She certainly won’t take first place. And in a contest like this, anything less than first is inconsequential.”

Elyse nodded, agreeing with Irving’s assessment.

Chapter 787:

An hour into their observation, they were only halfway through the competition. Fighting off a yawn, Elyse remarked, “Of all the contestants making a comeback, Geraldine is clearly the strongest. For her, competing here is effortless. She’s consistently outscoring everyone.”

Irving commented, “Let’s see how far Fiona can go. I’m curious to see how she measures up against these rather ordinary contestants.”

Elyse paused, then added, “It’s hard to say, but given she was once Mr. Tucker’s student, her ranking shouldn’t be too dismal.”

Irving pursed his lips. “Who knows?”

As the competition progressed, Fiona emerged as the winner of her group, earning a place in the showdown to face Geraldine.

Onstage, Geraldine accepted challenges from two other contestants.

As they moved forward with the matchups, Elyse yawned again. “Irving, do you reckon Fiona will take third place or second?”

Irving replied, disinterestedly, “Third. She doesn’t have the edge needed for second.”

“Then I’ll bet on second, just to differ,” Elyse countered, her expression weary.

Thirty minutes later, the match concluded. Geraldine claimed first place, and to Irving’s surprise, Fiona secured second.

However, Fiona didn’t advance to the final round.

Elyse rubbed her chin thoughtfully. “Fiona has potential. She just doesn’t apply herself enough to match those with real talent.”

Irving shrugged. “No surprises there. That’s exactly her limit. She’s not cut out to be the best.”

Leaving the competition venue, Elyse had just reached her hotel when she was met with some unsettling news.

Gavin called Elyse to relay the troubling news: a finalist had been struck by a car while dining out. Currently in the hospital and undergoing resuscitation, the contestant’s chances of participating in the finals were dwindling. If he didn’t recover in time, his spot would be filled by the runner-up from the Comeback Competition.

Shocked by the update, Elyse gasped. “How could something like this happen at such a crucial time?”

Remaining composed, Gavin advised, “From this point on, I’d stay away from Fiona if I were you. It’s best not to get too close.”

“Gavin, are you suggesting...” Elyse replied, her voice tinged with disbelief.

“The timing and circumstances are highly suspect. Fiona is under scrutiny, and for your safety, it’s wise to steer clear of her,” Gavin explained, then promptly ended the call.

Reeling from the conversation, Elyse collapsed onto her bed, her mind racing with the implausibility of it all.

Just then, a knock at the door startled her. She opened it without a second thought, only to find Edward on her threshold, grinning widely and holding a bouquet of teddy bears.

It was precisely what she had dreaded.

Chapter 788:

As her expression darkened, Elyse moved to shut the door, but Edward blocked it, his face falling.

With a heavy sigh, he pleaded, “How long will you keep avoiding me? Was my confession really that unbearable?”

Elyse appeared distressed. “No, it’s not that. I’m just not in the mood to date someone at the moment, so I can’t return your feelings.”

Edward, undeterred, flashed a grin. “Then I’ll wait until you’re ready.”

Her expression darkened, and she attempted to shut the door again.

Edward prevented it from closing and let out a sigh. “What’s troubling you now?”

Elyse, biting her lip, expressed her concerns. “I don’t want you to waste your time waiting for me. It would be better if you moved on and found someone else, rather than holding out hope for me.”



Edward scratched his head. "Finding someone who really gets your heart racing isn't simple. Some people search their whole lives without ever experiencing true love. But I've found it with you, and I'm not ready to let go. I understand you're not ready to accept me, but I'm willing to wait."

Elyse opened her mouth to object once more, but realizing she was only repeating herself, she resigned with a sigh.

Reluctantly, she conceded, "Alright, I won't avoid you, but that doesn't mean I'll be with you."

Edward assured her, "I get it, and I won't make you uncomfortable."

He then extended the bouquet, offering it with a smile. "However, making you uncomfortable doesn't mean you have to reject this gift."

Elyse cradled the bouquet in her arms, her lip caught between her teeth. "I really don't want to accept this."

"You actually do. Otherwise, I'll start taking off my clothes right here at your doorstep," Edward retorted, a mischievous grin on his face as he fiddled with his shirt buttons. "I'll show everyone how you've been mistreating me."

Rolling her eyes, Elyse conceded, "Alright, stop. I'll take it, okay?"

With that, Edward stopped his playful act and rebuttoned his shirt, his smile broadening. "Great. Now, how about a stroll?"

Elyse's gaze sharpened as she cautioned him, "Don't push your luck. I'm not going anywhere with you."

Edward arched an eyebrow, his tone shifting to a more serious one. "You've heard about the contestant who was hit by a car, haven't you? Doesn't that spark your curiosity?"

Elyse responded with a wary tone, "Curious about what exactly?"

Edward leaned in, his voice low. “The accident occurred just two kilometers away, near a mall. It’s always packed there. Isn’t it a bit too coincidental that a finalist was involved?”

“You’re suggesting we go check it out?” Elyse asked, clearly perplexed.

“Right. Let’s go have a look. Maybe there’s something everyone else missed,” Edward suggested, hands on his hips. “Missing one practice session won’t set us back. It’s more about experiences and talent now.”

Chapter 789:

Elyse paused to consider his words, then responded, “You might be right, but I really think we should stay clear of it.”

She recalled that Gavin was already on the case at the accident site.

Edward tried to persuade her further. “We’ll just sneak a quick peek and be back before you know it. If you feel like practicing later, I’ll join you.”

After a moment of hesitation, Elyse succumbed to the curiosity and agreed to accompany Edward to the mall.

Upon their arrival at the mall, they unfortunately bumped into Gavin, who was directing the investigation efforts.

Gavin looked from Edward’s mischievous grin to Elyse and asked, “Did you two come to the mall together?”

Caught off guard, Elyse was speechless, while Edward swiftly replied, “I needed her to help me pick up some violin strings. Thinking of that car accident, we came by to have a quick check.”

Gavin scowled slightly and advised, “Do your shopping quickly and go back.”

Elyse nodded, taking his words to heart. “Understood, Gavin. We’ll make it quick and leave right after.”

Gavin didn’t doubt Elyse. Instead, he turned his attention to Edward, who stood nearby, smiling brightly.

Gavin set the document aside, gave Edward a scrutinizing look, and asked, “Do you have to take Elyse with you just to get violin strings? Edward, I told you to keep your distance from her.”

Elyse overheard this and shifted her gaze to Edward, her eyes filled with suspicion and caution.

Edward poked Gavin in the chest; his voice carried a tone of grievance. “I just wanted Elyse to come shopping with me. What’s so wrong with that?”

Gavin’s expression hardened with disdain. He stepped back and wiped the spot where Edward had poked him. “Can you try acting normal for once? Stop being so unpredictable.”

Hearing this, Edward became slightly more subdued before looking at Elyse. “Come on. The sooner we finish here, the sooner we can get back. Otherwise, Gavin will start thinking I’m up to something.”

Elyse stayed silent. She saw no need to call Edward out.

Edward led Elyse into the mall, winding through several turns before they emerged into an alley.

Elyse glanced around, noticing the buildings were quite old; their architecture was mostly from the last century.

They came to a halt in front of a shop with a gleaming glass facade.

Edward motioned toward it. "This shop specializes in violins; it's been here for over a hundred years. Their selection is unmatched."

Elyse's curiosity piqued. "You seem to know it well. Do you come here often?"

"That's right. I'm a regular." Edward leaned in closer, his voice taking on a conspiratorial tone. "I love this place so much. I usually don't tell anyone about it. Only you."

Chapter 790:

Elyse pushed Edward back, striding into the shop with determination.

The shop owner sat by the counter. When the door opened and the bell chimed, he instinctively looked up. The moment he saw Elyse, his eyes widened in surprise. "Rickey Benson! Is that really you?"

Elyse froze, shocked to hear her father's name. She looked at the man, bewildered. "How do you know my father's name?"

"What are you saying?" The owner's surprise deepened as he gave Elyse a thorough once-over. "If Rickey is your father, then are you his daughter?"

Elyse nodded, her curiosity growing as she observed the owner.

He was a tall, thin old man with graying hair and a beard, his large glasses perched on a weathered face. As he approached, his emotions seemed to overwhelm him, causing him to bump into the nearby counter.

Concerned, Elyse quickly moved to support him. "Are you alright?"

The owner shook his head, his gaze fixed intently on her face. After a long pause, he spoke with emotion, "You bear such a striking resemblance to your father. The moment I saw you, I thought it was him."

Elyse felt a wave of emotion wash over her. Since leaving Watscar, her deepest wish had been to follow in her parents' footsteps, hoping to meet those who had known them.

Standing before her was someone who had truly been a part of their lives. Elyse was profoundly moved.

She exclaimed, "I'm so happy to meet someone who knew my father."

The owner chuckled warmly. Returning to the counter, he pulled out a picture frame and handed it to Elyse.

"Take a look at this. It's a photo of me and Rickey. I keep it here so I can see him every day. That's how I recognized him in you," he said, his eyes softening with warmth.

Elyse's gaze lingered on the photo, absorbing every detail.

In the picture, a young Rickey held a violin, his expression full of energy and hope. The owner, still tall and thin back then, wore large black glasses and a serious look that contrasted with the warmth she now saw in him.

Elyse held the photo a little longer before finally handing it back. "Were you and my father close?" she asked quietly.

"We were," he replied. "He came here for the Swan Cup violin competition back then, the very one that's currently happening. After every performance, he'd always stop by to chat with me."

The owner adjusted his glasses and, with a nostalgic smile, added, "I used to tease him, always asking, 'Aren't you going to take the competition seriously and practice?'"

Pausing, he adopted Rickey's mischievous tone, grinning as he said, "Geniuses don't need to practice, you know."

Elyse laughed, the playful remark reminding her of Edward.

She couldn't resist asking, "What place did my father end up getting?"