

Bound love 801

Chapter 801:

Sitting alone in the concert hall's lounge, she stared at her phone, her mind swirling with questions about what Jayden could possibly be doing.

As she pondered, she suddenly caught herself wasting energy on someone who no longer mattered.

With a firm resolution, she told herself, "No more wasting time on him. I need to focus on what's important."

Rejuvenated, Elyse set her phone aside, picked up her violin, and strode toward the backstage area with renewed focus.

Arriving backstage, she was greeted by familiar faces—Vicky, Darren, Edward, Geraldine, and other competitors were all there.

Edward, ever the enthusiast, beckoned her over. "Hey, Elyse! What are you doing over there? Join us!"

"Sure!" Elyse responded with a smile and moved to join the group, but then she heard footsteps behind her. Turning, she saw Fiona entering.

As Fiona walked in, the previously vibrant atmosphere dampened, and a hush fell over the group.

Fiona, perceiving the sudden shift, glanced around with a bemused smile. "What's with all the stares? I'm not a stranger or anything, am I?"

Elyse was also taken aback by the reaction but recalled Fiona was the last-minute substitute for a contestant who had been in a serious accident. The circumstances stirred an uneasy feeling within her.

Spurred by the shared discomfort, another contestant voiced the suspicion in the air. “That accident... it wasn’t caused by you, was it? How could you replace someone so suddenly?”

Fiona’s face registered shock, and she quickly defended herself. “Are you suggesting I had something to do with that? How could I possibly orchestrate such a thing? I’m just like any one of you here.”

Fiona’s words did not alleviate the other contestants’ suspicions. In fact, their distrust of Fiona deepened.

Standing beside Edward, Elyse asked curiously, “Why is everyone so hostile towards Fiona?”

Edward’s lips twisted into a knowing smile. “She is quite suspicious, isn’t she? She came in second in the Comeback Competition, which didn’t actually qualify her for the final. However, she replaced a contestant who had to withdraw. Understandably, that stirred some resentment among the others.”

Elyse nodded thoughtfully. “When someone’s position doesn’t seem to reflect their skills, it does tend to cause unrest.”

Edward shook his head and let out a sigh. “We should focus more on ourselves. I’ve heard that only five contestants will advance from this round. It’s uncertain if we’ll be among the chosen.”

Surprised, Elyse looked at Edward. “Do you doubt your abilities too?”

Edward responded with a playful tone, “No, I’m concerned for you. I’m confident I’ll secure the top spot, but your chances are less certain.”

Chapter 802:

“Humph! You’re the one who’s going to be cut.” Elyse ended the conversation abruptly, grabbed her violin case, and walked to a corner to tune her violin.

As Elyse was adjusting her violin, Fiona walked up with her violin case. Elyse glanced up and noticed Fiona's stern expression, prompting her to frown and ask, "Why are you staring at me?"

Fiona looked directly at Elyse and asked, "I reached the final based on my own abilities. Does that intimidate you?"

It was a pointed question, leaving Elyse speechless for a moment.

Elyse looked at Fiona with mixed emotions before standing with her violin and inquiring, "Didn't you just luck into the final?"

"Luck can be a form of strength," Fiona retorted, tilting her head slightly, her eyes radiating arrogance.

Elyse was at a loss for words. Fiona had become so different, almost unrecognizable to her now.

What had prompted such a change in Fiona? Was it because of unrequited love? Had she transformed this way because she couldn't be with Jayden?

After a lengthy silence, Elyse said softly, "I actually hoped you would make it this far. From the beginning, my wish was for both of us to be in the final, competing for the top spot together."

Elyse paused, a gentle smile appearing on her face. "Let's vie for first place together, Fiona."

Fiona appeared briefly taken aback, her eyes showing a rush of conflicting emotions. She responded quietly, "If you were truly that gracious, why have you made things so hard for me?"

Elyse's face shifted subtly. "Fiona, how is this my fault? What does your situation have to do with me? Did I push you to change like this?"

The complexity in Fiona's gaze faded into stark indifference. "Forget it. We have nothing left to discuss. And as for competing for first place? Sorry, but you're not even qualified to challenge me."

Elyse's expression hardened, and she scoffed coldly, "You seem quite sure of yourself."

With that, Elyse quickly moved past Fiona and headed towards Edward and the others.

Unbeknownst to Elyse, Fiona remained stationary, her gaze filled with intense animosity as she watched her leave.

Upon reaching Edward, Elyse noticed Darren was also there. She looked around and asked curiously, "Where's Vicky? Why are you here by yourself?"

Darren, while tuning his violin, answered, "She's in the restroom. She's so anxious she keeps running there."

Elyse teased, "When did she start picking up your habits?"

Darren glanced up and replied, "I used to just avoid things when I was nervous, not run to the restroom."

Elyse tried to remember the details. "Is that so? I don't really recall that."

"If you don't remember, it's no big deal. I've changed; now, I'm impressively strong." Darren flexed his arm, though his biceps weren't particularly imposing.

Chapter 803:

Edward imitated Darren's gesture, jokingly adding, "Let's all give it our best. Looks like second and third places are up for grabs for you."

Elyse gave Edward a sharp look. "I'm setting my sights on first."

It was clear that they weren't the only ones aiming for the top spot. Geraldine, approaching with her violin in hand, exuded confidence as she looked at Elyse and declared, "Sorry, but first place will be mine."

Elyse fixed her gaze on Geraldine, remembering how she had narrowly beaten her by a slim margin last time, which stirred a sense of unease in her.

What if Geraldine were to surpass her this time?

Elyse instantly felt her nerves tense up. She scanned her surroundings, keenly aware that everyone present was a rival.

The atmosphere backstage was thick with tension. All ten contestants were on stage, each displaying a stern face. None appeared at ease.

The host surveyed the room and declared, "The final piece will be the 'Violin Concerto in A Minor.' We are eager to witness each contestant's rendition."

Upon hearing the name of the selected piece, Elyse's spirits immediately fell. Known for its complexity, performing this piece solo demanded extraordinary skill and unwavering focus.

Edward caught the shift in Elyse's demeanor and playfully remarked, "Look at your face. Is this piece your Achilles' heel?"

"No, it just makes things more interesting," Elyse responded with composed assurance.

The selected piece elicited varied reactions. Some contestants were content, while others, like Fiona, were disheartened. This was a piece Fiona did not master well.

Standing on stage, she felt incredibly uneasy, as though she were walking on eggshells. Despite this, she was resolute in her determination to reach the Grand Final, to validate her worth to those who doubted her, and to release her pent-up frustrations.

The contestants performed one by one on stage. Fiona went backstage, where she discreetly took out her phone and sent a message asking for advice.

The reply came quickly, assuring her, “Concentrate on your performance. I’ll handle everything else.”

This response made Fiona feel significantly relieved. She then approached Elyse, a smug look evident on her face. “With this piece, it wouldn’t be surprising if you didn’t make it.”

Elyse was puzzled by Fiona’s confident demeanor and replied, “It’s still uncertain whether I’ll lose. However, by your expression, you seem to think you’ve already secured a win. Is this piece your forte?”

Elyse’s direct question caught Fiona off guard. Knowing this piece was not her strength and that she could potentially make numerous errors during her performance only added to her unease.

Swallowing nervously, Fiona tried to mask her uncertainty by raising her voice. “Whether I’m skilled at it or not, why should that matter to you?”

Elyse was taken aback by Fiona’s loud reaction but chose not to engage further, fearing it might disturb her focus before performing.

Chapter 804:

Frowning, Elyse replied firmly, “I’m next to perform, so please stop trying to distract me. Don’t you have others to talk to?”

Realizing she was being dismissed, Fiona’s anger flared. “Who are you to speak to me like that? I’ll tell you this—I’m reaching the Grand Final, and you’re going to be just another competitor I surpass.”

Elyse looked at Fiona, noticing her emotional turmoil, and suggested, “You should try to keep your emotions steady before going on stage. It could impact your performance.”

“It’s none of your business.” With those words, Fiona stormed off.

Elyse scratched her head, bewildered by Fiona's conduct.

Vicky, who had silently approached Elyse, inquired curiously, "What's the deal with this former violin partner of yours? She acts so superior like she's the best here. Why is she so confident?"

Elyse shook her head, equally puzzled. "I'm not sure. I'm curious as well. But it's not my concern anymore. Like you said, she's just a former partner."

Vicky persisted. "What's her level of expertise?"

"Not quite as good as either of us," Elyse responded after a moment, offering a candid evaluation.

Vicky nodded, understanding the situation. "So, her abilities aren't quite there, but her confidence is through the roof. Hopefully, she won't end up too disappointed after the contest."

Elyse let out a laugh. "Don't just sit back and enjoy the show. You need to stay focused too. With only a fifty percent chance of advancing, the pressure is real."

Vicky agreed. "Let's both make it to the next round."

As the previous contestant finished their performance, Elyse walked onto the stage. She positioned herself under the spotlight, dressed in a simple black gown.

"Elyse, good luck. I love you." Someone suddenly called out from the crowd, disrupting Elyse's focus. She turned in surprise and saw the last person she expected—Theo.

Theo was energetically waving his arms, his expression full of fervent passion and love, causing a stir among the nearby audience.

Elyse felt far from pleased as she quickly looked away, striving to regain her concentration.

Brook had told her that Theo had sacrificed everything for her. She had initially thought Brook was being dramatic, but now it seemed Theo really had changed a lot.

Receiving her signal, Elyse began her performance. The piece she was playing was complex, and she felt uncertain about her ability to fully express its depth and emotion.

All she could do was completely immerse herself, aiming to transport everyone into the original composer's emotional landscape.

Backstage, Edward was listening to Elyse's performance, his eyes glowing with undeniable affection and admiration.

Every time he listened to her play, he felt a deep connection, as if her music echoed his own emotions.

Darren walked up to Edward and, noticing the tender look in his eyes, asked in surprise, "Do you have feelings for Elyse?"

Chapter 805:

Edward looked away and retorted, "Has anyone mentioned you're quite blunt?"

Darren nodded and, trying to be more tactful, inquired, "Do you want to be Elyse's boyfriend?"

Edward touched his nose. "Ever heard of being subtle?"

Darren laughed, seeing right through him, and remarked, "The fondness in your eyes is too evident. Subtlety isn't your strong suit."

After a short pause, Darren continued, "But you shouldn't fall for her. She's already married to a man who adores her. Love is about timing."

Edward looked at Darren and questioned, "I sense that you have feelings for Elyse too, but then it seems like you don't. So, do you love her or not?"

Darren lowered his voice and chuckled. "I used to have feelings for her, but that was it."

Edward nodded, showing he understood. "What a pity."

Darren replied honestly, "There's no need for regrets. Being friends is also quite enjoyable. I'm happy with how things are."

Edward scowled. "Is just being friends really enough for you? Don't you ever think about wanting more?"

Darren mirrored Edward's frown. "What are you suggesting? Elyse was already married. What more could I have pursued?"

"You could still pursue her, despite her marriage," Edward declared loudly.

Darren quickly looked around, alarmed, and then hurried to cover Edward's mouth, scolding him firmly. "She's married. What are you thinking of pursuing? That would only harm her marriage."

Edward blinked and grinned. "But if I don't make a move, how will I ever have a chance? And it wouldn't cost her anything. She could simply switch husbands."

Darren's expression turned to one of shock. "Have you lost your senses? You should respect Elyse's decisions. How could she ever accept such a ludicrous idea?"

Edward nodded, appearing contemplative. "You've made a point. Elyse is very cautious in her relationships. That might not be beneficial."

Darren massaged his forehead. "Being loyal in a relationship is commendable. If she weren't, she'd be unfaithful, right? Would you really want to be with someone unfaithful?"

Edward nodded once more. "You're right. I appreciate that Elyse is faithful. If she were unfaithful, I wouldn't admire her as much."

Darren exhaled with relief. “Man, don’t be foolish. Just because you like someone doesn’t mean you need to be with them. Sometimes, it’s enough to cherish those feelings privately.”

Edward nodded, but internally, he didn’t fully concur with Darren’s view.

To him, liking someone meant desiring to spend a lifetime together. If they couldn’t be together, the emotional burden would be too great, and he disliked carrying such a weight.

On stage, Elyse concluded her performance and bowed to the applause.

Theo began to shout again. “Elyse, you were fantastic. You’re the woman I love the most.”

Chapter 806:

Elyse showed a look of discomfort. She glanced toward Theo, sighed deeply, and then turned to leave the stage.

Backstage, Fiona approached Elyse with arrogance and said, “Elyse, I’ve noticed you’re really good at acting. You’re married, yet you keep things ambiguous with so many men.”

Elyse was initially pleased with her performance, but Fiona’s words quickly soured her mood. “What are you talking about now?”

Fiona raised an eyebrow and challenged, “Isn’t that the truth? Your admirer is declaring his love for you in public. If you weren’t leading him on and giving him hope, why would he openly say ‘I love you?’”

Fiona’s last comment was dripping with sarcasm, nearly accusing Elyse of being promiscuous and disloyal to Jayden.

Elyse found Fiona's remarks so absurd that she burst out laughing. "Yes, of course, I gave him hope. Go ahead, tell Jayden that someone is pursuing me, and let him break up with me."

"Fine, I will. I can't wait to see you two split up." Fiona was eager for this moment, hoping to step into Elyse's shoes.

Elyse did not attempt to stop Fiona. If Fiona could actually convince Jayden to end their relationship, she would have to thank Fiona for inadvertently doing her a favor.

Darren had been observing the exchange and asked in bewilderment, "She's making such accusations. Why aren't you upset and stopping her from causing trouble?"

Elyse turned and gave Darren a stern look. "You're about to perform in the competition. Stay out of this, or it might impact your focus."

Darren chuckled heartily. "But I'm feeling fantastic. Just making it this far is an achievement. I won't have any regrets even if I don't win."

Elyse smiled at his response. "I'm not sure if you're truly in a good headspace or not."

Darren laughed again. "I definitely am. I feel incredibly strong right now."

Elyse was taken aback for a moment, then burst into laughter. She turned to retrieve her violin case to pack away her instrument.

Edward glanced at Darren. "You really value your friendship with her."

Darren nodded. "I'm very practical. I know there's no possibility between us, not just because she's married, but because she doesn't feel the same way. Love has to be reciprocal."

Edward paused to think. "While I think you lack courage, your perspective is logical."

Darren clenched his teeth. "You're the one lacking courage."

Edward chuckled, then picked up his violin, straightened his clothes, and declared, "Enough chatting. I'm heading to the competition."

Darren nodded and watched as Edward took his turn on stage.

After storing her violin, Elyse approached with her violin case and stood next to Darren. "What position do you think Edward will achieve this time?"

"I'm not sure. What position are you hoping he'll get?" Darren asked with curiosity.

Chapter 807:

"Fifth, maybe. He's too full of himself. It'd be good for him to lose for once, to humble him a bit," Elyse mused aloud.

Darren inquired again, "And what position do you hope I secure?"

Elyse paused for a moment and then responded, "First place. You could use a boost in confidence."

Darren's heart pounded in his chest, his fists clenched tightly. Swallowing his emotions, he asked again, "If I take first place, where will you rank?"

Elyse tilted her head slightly. "Second place, of course. I wouldn't want to fall too far behind," she responded with a faint smile.

"You are better than me," Darren admitted, trying to suppress the turmoil within.

His heart fluttered once more, but he dismissed it quickly. There was no room for other thoughts.

After several deep breaths, the storm inside him slowly subsided.

Nine out of the ten contestants had already performed, leaving only Fiona to take the stage.

This round was crucial in determining who would advance to the Grand Final, and the thought of returning to the waiting room was unbearable for any contestant.

Among them, Elyse stood with her gaze fixed on Fiona, who exuded confidence with each step she took toward the stage. She couldn't help but wonder about Fiona's upcoming performance.

However, Fiona's performance soon took everyone by surprise.

Moments after she began, she stumbled over a note, and the errors started to pile up, revealing gaps in both skill and preparation.

"I might not take first, but I'm definitely not coming in last," a contestant muttered.

"Compared to Fiona, I think I'm faring much better. Being ninth isn't too shameful," another remarked.

"It's surprising that she made it this far," another contestant said. "There were many who got eliminated despite being more talented. I guess luck really is unpredictable."

As Elyse listened to the contestants' chatter, her heart stirred. Fiona, once her equal, had fallen behind in their shared pursuit of mastery of the violin.

Edward's gaze fixed on Elyse as she stood lost in thought. Driven by curiosity, he leaned in and whispered, "Fiona is being criticized. Won't you defend her?"

Elyse glanced at him, her expression puzzled. "Why should I?" she asked.

Edward chuckled. "I thought you were her advocate," he remarked.

"She doesn't need me to defend her." Elyse shook her head dismissively.

Realizing his approach was leading nowhere, Edward stroked his chin and shifted gears. “How about a date after the competition?” he suggested.

Elyse crossed her arms, eyeing him skeptically. “Are you alright? As if I’d go out with you,” she retorted.

“Don’t dismiss me so quickly. I do have feelings, you know.” Edward covered his face, feigning distress.

Chapter 808:

With a weary sigh, Elyse saw through his act. “Edward, if you’re so afraid of rejection, why bother asking? You know I’m focusing on my career right now,” she said firmly.

“But your refusal upsets me,” Edward responded with a pout, attempting to lean closer.

Elyse stepped back, her expression tightening. “You’re trying to take advantage of me now!” she exclaimed.

Edward’s pretended sorrow deepened. “I haven’t even begun,” he murmured.

Elyse, annoyed, gently pushed him away with a finger to his forehead. “Aren’t you nervous about the ranks? It’s driving me crazy!” she exclaimed, her voice laced with exasperation.

Edward folded his arms and sighed deeply. He couldn’t fathom why Elyse was so worked up. He was confident in her ability to reach the Grand Final.

As Fiona’s performance ended, all the contestants went up on the stage. Their hearts pounded with anticipation as they awaited the judges’ verdict.

Despite her calm demeanor, Elyse couldn’t hide the sweat on her palms.

Beside her, Fiona was the first to notice her nervousness. With a light chuckle, she teased, “Even you get nervous? Afraid you won’t make it to the next round?”

Elyse's eyes widened. "Isn't it natural to feel anxious? Or are you saying you're not because you're so sure you'll make it?" she asked.

A flicker of doubt crossed Fiona's face before she regained her composure. "Of course I'm nervous. I'm no prodigy," she admitted.

Realizing Elyse was still watching her closely, Fiona laughed awkwardly and turned away, avoiding further interaction.

Elyse, puzzled by Fiona's reaction, couldn't shake off the suspicions that Gavin and others had raised earlier.

Ten minutes later, the rankings were revealed. Fiona placed tenth, and it didn't raise any eyebrows. The other contestants exchanged knowing glances, their silent understanding saying more than words ever could.

Fiona kept a smile on her face, though beneath it, she was silently grinding her teeth in frustration.

Tenth place, yet again! She also clinched tenth place in the national competition. Was she fated to rank at the bottom?

Fiona's gaze drifted over to Elyse, and seeing Elyse's indifferent expression made her insides churn. She blurted out, "You must be laughing at me deep down, right? I'm dead last again, just perfect for making you look even better."

Elyse looked at Fiona with a puzzled expression. "Your rank doesn't concern me. Honestly, I'm more focused on my own standings."

Fiona let out a disdainful snort, her eyes full of contempt. "You're the type who always plays the perfect, pitiful woman to milk sympathy from everyone. You're selfish, you know that?"

Elyse felt a spark of anger flare up at Fiona's words. "Fiona, when will you start using your brain? I didn't even say a word, and you're already convinced I'm mocking you in my head. Are you paranoid or something?"

With that, Elyse shot Fiona a look of disgust and moved to switch places with Geraldine on the other side.

Chapter 809:

Geraldine took Elyse's spot beside Fiona, casting a cold glance in Fiona's direction.

Feeling Geraldine's intimidating presence, Fiona immediately clammed up, too scared to throw any more insults.

Noticing Fiona's sudden silence, Geraldine crossed her arms, leaned close to Elyse, and whispered, "Fiona only has the guts to pick on you because you're an easy target. Around me, she wouldn't dare make a sound."

Elyse gave Fiona a glance and whispered back, "She can't push me around anyway."

Geraldine rolled her eyes silently. She thought Elyse must have a very loose definition of what counts as "pushing around."

The host continued with the announcements. "Fourth place, Geraldine Lawson. Third place, Edward McCoy. Second place, Elyse Lloyd. And in first place, Darren Reynolds."

Elyse was taken aback when she heard the rankings. She quickly leaned forward to catch a glimpse of Darren.

Darren, meanwhile, was utterly stunned, his mouth slightly open, and his eyes wide with disbelief.

Standing beside Darren, Vicky noticed his dazed expression. Unable to resist, she nudged him and whispered, "Hey, stop standing there like a statue. Go forward and take your bow."

Darren snapped back to reality, stumbled forward, bowed awkwardly, and returned with a dazed look on his face.

Elyse, seeing Darren's state of shock, knew he was utterly floored by the outcome.

But at that moment, the person Elyse was most eager to confront was Edward.

She gave Edward a playful smirk and said, "So, how did the top dog slip to third place? Is it because the first place isn't your thing anymore?"

Edward rubbed his nose and stubbornly replied, "I can explain, but I'm not spilling the details."

Elyse chuckled. "No need for excuses. I get it. A little too much swagger, and this is what you get. But I have to remind you, the next competition is the last round. No more slip-ups."

Edward glanced at Elyse's teasing grin and raised his hands in mock surrender. "Alright, alright, I hear you. You're always right, after all."

After the competition ended, emotions ran high among the eliminated contestants. Some were in tears, others couldn't accept the outcome, but Vicky remained unfazed. Losing didn't seem as dreadful to her as it did to the others.

Elyse approached her, concern etched on her face. "You came in sixth, just 0.1 points shy of fifth place. Such a close call."

Vicky nodded. "Yeah, if it weren't for that tiny 0.1-point difference, I might've tied for fifth and made it to the last round. Or maybe I would've faced Darren head-to-head for the win."

She paused, reflecting. "It's a pity, just 0.1 points."

Noticing the flicker of disappointment in Vicky's eyes, Elyse struggled to find the right words, unsure of how to console her.

But Vicky, seeing Elyse's concern, gave a light shrug. "Hey, don't worry about me. I knew the competition would be cutthroat, so I was ready for whatever happened, even losing."

Chapter 810:

Elyse studied Vicky for a moment before finally saying, "Next time, let's give it another shot."

Vicky smiled and nodded. "Absolutely. I'll never give up on the violin."

Vicky smiled at Elyse and turned around, showing off a poised posture. This view gave Elyse mixed feelings.

As the competition neared its conclusion, the intensity increased. Only one could claim the top spot, turning even friends into competitors if Elyse aimed for first place.

Darren approached Elyse, his voice choked, and said, "Did you hear? I won first place. It's my first time."

Elyse gathered her composure and replied with a bright smile, "That's because you're incredible. Your twenty years of effort have really paid off today."

Laughing and crying, Darren held his chest and said, "I'm overjoyed. It feels like I could end my competition journey here. I don't even need to go to the Grand Final."

Elyse smiled and said, "Keep going. You might even win first in the last round."

Darren covered his face and replied, "Oh, please. I just want to cherish this moment. It's been so tough to reach first place even once."

Elyse patted Darren's back to comfort him, then walked offstage with the other contestants.

In the dressing room, Elyse changed her outfit. Emerging with her hair loose, she was suddenly presented with a bouquet of beautiful roses.

Before she could react, Theo's excited smile welcomed her.

Elyse gazed at him for a few moments. With a touch of resignation in her voice, she questioned, "How did you manage to get backstage?"

"I paid a little," Theo replied, leaning in with an extremely tender gaze.

He offered the roses to Elyse and said, "Did you catch my confession on stage? I got these roses just for you, hoping you'd like them."

Elyse eyed the roses and asked with a smile, "If I take these roses, does that mean you'll be my boyfriend?"

Theo nodded affirmatively and said, "Absolutely. No one adores you more than I do."

He hesitated, then continued, "You might think Jayden loves you more, but he doesn't. His feelings aren't genuine."

Elyse looked at Theo for a long while before breaking into a smile. "You claim Jayden's love isn't genuine, but is yours truly sincere? Theo, I know you well. You and Jayden are not so different."

Theo exhaled deeply and said, "Haven't you heard about Jayden's history? Do you really think he's just an average guy? You're too naive, Elyse. Come with me, and you'll be better off. Staying with Jayden won't end well for you."

Elyse's expression turned thoughtful, saying, "What are you implying? What do you know about Jayden?"

Theo stroked his chin and said thoughtfully, “It seems you really don’t know. Of course, Jayden’s friends wouldn’t share that with you. If you knew the truth about him, you wouldn’t want to stay with him.”

Elyse was growing increasingly impatient with Theo. She furrowed her brows. “What exactly are you suggesting you know?”