

Bound love 841

Chapter 841:

Darren replied, “No, discussing this with you actually feels good. It’s a way to thank you for the pizza.”

Elyse looked at the pizza and responded casually, “Don’t worry about it. It’s just pizza. It’s yours to enjoy.”

Then Darren raised an eyebrow and probed, “Does that mean you and Jayden had a disagreement?”

Caught off guard by the mention of Jayden, Elyse shook her head. “No, not that. Lately, I’ve just been puzzled by love.”

Elyse reflected on her troubling situation with Jayden. Her eyes, weary and desolate, conveyed her disillusionment as she confessed, “I’ve lost my grasp on what love means. It once seemed so clear, but now, the thought of it often repels me.”

Darren, noticing her distress, furrowed his brows in concern and asked, “What’s been going on with you and Jayden? Has this been a long-standing issue?”

Elyse exhaled deeply and replied, “Let’s not dwell on it. These problems of mine persist regardless of our discussions.”

After a brief pause, her curiosity piqued. “If the woman you have a crush on were to become available, would you pursue her?”

Darren responded with a gentle shake of his head and a smile.

Surprised, Elyse questioned as she sipped her drink, “Why not? Isn’t she the one you care about?”

Darren laughed softly and said, “Even if she were single, it wouldn’t change her feelings for me.”

Elyse, puzzled, prodded further, “Why are you so certain? You’re a great catch.”

With a solemn tone, Darren explained, “I’m well aware she harbors feelings for another. Even if we were together, her heart would be elsewhere.”

Elyse, momentarily speechless, bit into her pizza, her thoughts swirling.

Darren broke the silence. “There’s no rush to resolve things with Jayden. Arguments highlight differences, giving you both something to ponder.”

Elyse contemplated that she had become the other woman but chose to keep it to herself, finding it too humiliating to discuss.

Changing the subject, she complimented Darren, “Your maturity is evident. Any woman would be fortunate to be with you.”

Darren, visibly buoyed by the praise, grinned broadly. His hunger seemed insatiable; after devouring a whole pizza, he eyed the menu again, ready for more.

As Darren polished off his meal, Elyse watched him contentedly clutch his full belly. She teased, “That was quite a feast. Aren’t you overdoing it?”

Unfazed, Darren chuckled. “I feel like I’ve been reborn.” He then leaned back, patted his stomach, and released a hearty burp, fully satisfied.

As Elyse picked up her violin case, she asked with a curious tone, “Why do you feel like you’ve been reborn?”

Chapter 842:

Darren responded with a knowing smile, “My happiness is something you wouldn’t quite understand, so I’ll keep it to myself.”

Darren then hummed a melody and made his way briskly toward the exit.

He kept to himself the fact that ever since meeting Elyse and discovering she was married, he had felt trapped in an emotional bind.

He believed that if Elyse were not married, she would inevitably fall for him.

Yet, he restrained himself from expressing his feelings, knowing it could complicate things and impact their friendship.

But today, Elyse had affirmed his qualities, suggesting anyone would be lucky to be with him.

This acknowledgment made him feel liberated from the constraints of his unspoken affection. He felt free to engage with others without the weight of his feelings for Elyse.

Fully resolved, Darren stepped outside the restaurant and gazed at the sunny sky, feeling a new beginning dawning. "Elyse, after this competition, I think I'm ready to start exploring relationships."

Elyse, basking in the sunlight herself, smiled gently and replied, "It'll be interesting to see your journey unfold, almost like a storyline from a romantic drama."

Darren agreed earnestly, "Yes, and whoever ends up with me is going to find true happiness."

Elyse chuckled and bowed her head, but as she looked forward, she spotted Jayden in the distance.

Darren also noticed Jayden and gently nudged Elyse, grinning. "How sweet, at the door waiting for you despite the argument. Go on, patch things up. You two together are like a live romance drama." With that, Darren stepped away, leaving Elyse by herself in the brisk wind, her thoughts swirling.

Jayden, noticing Elyse's stillness, approached her with a soft sigh, lowering his gaze, "Have you eaten enough?"

Elyse took a step back from him, her voice low. “What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be with Aarya? Why come after me?”

Jayden exhaled heavily. “You shouldn’t have confronted Aarya like that. It’s put you in a precarious spot.”

Elyse brushed her hair back, her smile strained, and questioned, “What exactly do you expect from me? Should I kneel and beg Aarya for mercy?”

Jayden’s expression tightened slightly, his voice betraying a hint of unease he couldn’t place. “That’s not my point. The Hudsons wield significant power here, and even I need to tread carefully.”

Elyse halted him with a raised hand, her voice icy, “I’ve made myself clear—your dealings are irrelevant to me. Aarya and I share nothing but hatred. She’s endangered my life more than once, and I won’t forgive that.”

Taking a deep breath, Jayden pleaded, “I understand, and I’m not excusing her actions. Could you possibly wait for me? I promise to explain everything once this is settled.”

Elyse shook her head dismissively. “Save your explanations. I’ve lost all interest in whatever you have to say. Do as you please.”

Chapter 843:

Jayden’s tone softened as he reached out. “Please, let’s not end things this way. We can still talk this through. I don’t want to lose you.”

“Perhaps Aarya should take my place,” Elyse retorted coldly, turning to leave.

Jayden attempted to follow, reaching out, but Elyse sharply knocked his hand aside. Her gaze was frosty. “Don’t touch me. Stay away from me.”

As Elyse walked away, Jayden stood frozen, watching her departure shatter his hopes. He pondered deeply, feeling abandoned yet again, though he had his reasons which remained unsaid. Why was it so hard for her to see his perspective?

Overwhelmed by confusion and unable to reach a conclusion, he finally pulled out his phone and called Peyton.

In Warsaw, Peyton was abruptly awakened and answered the call with irritation, his voice heavy with anger. "What's the issue? Aren't you aware it's night in my country? Why not wait until morning?"

Jayden, hesitating, whispered, "It seems Elyse truly despises me now."

Peyton sighed deeply upon hearing this. "You've earned this. Perhaps solitude is your destiny."

Back at the hotel, Elyse lay reflecting on Jayden's actions, her mind swirling with frustration. Stirred by a need to escape her thoughts, she muttered about needing violin practice, seized her case, and left her room.

She didn't exit the building but instead ascended to the hotel's sky garden. The hour was late, leaving the garden quiet and nearly empty, ideal for some solitude and violin practice.

Upon arrival, she was surprised to see Edward there as well, deep in a phone conversation.

Debating whether to approach, she moved closer and overheard him mention the "Hudson family" and a "cleanup."

Elyse's confusion deepened. She paused, a frown forming as she questioned internally the nature of Edward's involvement with the Hudson family.

Just then, Edward stood, still on the phone, and said sharply, "The plan is nearing completion. The fewer people aware, the better. Understand?"

Seconds after ending his call, he hastily departed, seemingly preoccupied and unaware of Elyse's presence behind him.

Elyse observed him with a mix of curiosity and concern, realizing that Edward, too, harbored secrets.

Overwhelmed by her jumbled thoughts, she sighed deeply, opened her violin case, and started to practice, seeking solace in her music.

Two days later marked the commencement of the Grand Final of the Swan Cup.

Elyse rose early, dressed in her performance attire with her violin in hand, and exited the hotel.

She entered a taxi waiting at the hotel's entrance and provided the driver with her destination.

However, concern washed over her as they quickly bypassed the music hall. She urgently interjected, "You've missed the turn. We need to go back. Please stop." The driver accelerated instead of stopping, deepening Elyse's anxiety.

She stared at the unresponsive driver, a feeling of dread building within her.

Chapter 844:

"Who are you? What are you trying to do?" she demanded, but the driver remained silent. As the music hall grew distant, despair settled in her heart.

Was she really going to miss the competition like this? There was still an hour left before the competition, and she knew she had to act fast to find a way out.

Meanwhile, twenty minutes after Elyse's departure, Fiona casually boarded another taxi at the hotel, heading to the music hall. She allowed a secretive smile to play across her lips, lost in thought.

Elyse was transported to the suburbs and confined in a desolate warehouse by the driver. After being shoved roughly, her handbag and violin fell to the ground. She quickly got up and attempted to follow him, but the driver locked the warehouse door and departed without a second glance.

Elyse pounded on the iron doors, calling out desperately, "Wait! Who instructed you to do this? I'll pay you triple, no, five, even ten times more. Just let me go!"

Her shouts diminished into the distance as the driver's silhouette vanished.

Frustration mounting, Elyse tugged at the lock to no avail, then slumped against the door, panting heavily from the effort. She lamented the possibility of missing the Grand Final she had worked tirelessly to reach.

Checking her phone, she noted 40 minutes remained until the start of the competition, but, dismayingly, there was no cell signal in this isolated location.

Elyse had hoped that she could contact the authorities once the driver was gone. She couldn't believe the lack of connectivity. Exasperated, she exclaimed, "This is incredibly frustrating! Why is there no signal here?" The stress nearly overwhelmed her, and she found herself tugging at her hair in despair.

However, she soon regained her composure, determined not to succumb to defeat. Realizing she might still make it, she resolved to reach the competition venue, regardless of her tardiness.

To regain her focus, she slapped her cheeks and carefully scanned her surroundings for any sign of escape. Looking through the rusted gaps in the warehouse doors, she spotted a small house about a hundred meters away. Excited, she called out through the gaps, hoping to catch someone's attention, but no one heard her.

Elyse's frustration deepened as she tried to figure out how to alert someone to her predicament. Then her eyes caught sight of her violin case on the ground.

Inspired, she picked up her violin and began playing by the gap between the doors, hoping the music would draw someone's attention.

After playing for an indeterminate amount of time, she finally heard a voice from outside. “Is someone there?”

Elyse responded eagerly, “Yes, please help! I’ll even offer a reward!” She rushed to the doors and was surprised to find David there. “David! What are you doing here?”

David looked equally surprised and explained, “This is my family’s old warehouse. It hasn’t been used for years. How did you end up here?”

Elyse quickly recounted her ordeal, and David glanced at his watch, his expression turning grave. “It’s nearly time for your competition—it starts in five minutes.”

Chapter 845:

Trying to remain composed, Elyse insisted, “I need to get there regardless. I can’t miss it.”

David thought for a moment before offering, “I can help.”

Stunned, Elyse asked, “But how?”

David smiled reassuringly. “Trust me, I won’t let you down.”

Meanwhile, at the music hall, Gavin was growing impatient. “Where is Elyse? She should have been here by now. Didn’t she leave the hotel quite a while ago?”

Irving responded with concern, “She left earlier and said goodbye to me. But there’s been no word from her since, and she’s out of signal range.” His face was lined with worry.

Gavin paced anxiously, his movements rapid and tense. He turned to Irving with a worried expression. “Do you think something happened to her? How could she be out of signal range?”

Irving, looking somber, replied, "I've informed the police, but they're unable to pinpoint her location without any surveillance footage. All they could verify is that she left in a taxi from the hotel."

Just then, Darren and Edward arrived at the competition venue, entering one after the other.

Darren, noticing the tension, asked, "What's happening here? Did you guys have a dispute? And where's Elyse? We've been trying to find her."

Gavin responded gravely, "She's missing. Have either of you heard anything about her whereabouts?"

Both Darren and Edward were taken aback by the news. Edward, completely taken by surprise, exclaimed, "When did she go missing? Why wasn't this mentioned to us sooner?"

Darren, visibly distressed, added, "What is going on with this competition? Why is there always an incident involving one of the participants? The contestant who had a car accident is still in the hospital."

As Gavin listened to Darren's words, a thought suddenly struck him—someone who might know something. Just then, Fiona appeared, carrying a violin case and a bag of clothes. She greeted everyone with a soft smile and said, "The competition is about to start. Why are you all gathered here?"

Gavin, curious about her belongings, asked cautiously, "What do you have there?"

Fiona held up the items for everyone to see. "These are a violin and some clothes for the competition."

Darren, puzzled, remarked, "But weren't you eliminated from the competition? What are you doing with these items? Are you trying to re-enter the competition?"

Fiona responded with a slight frown, "I'm not competing. I'm just bringing these for Elyse. She asked me to deliver them."

Looking around, she added, “Speaking of which, where is Elyse? It’s almost time for her to perform.”

At this, Gavin and Irving shared a knowing look, a silent acknowledgment passing between them.

Edward chimed in with a scowl, “I recall you and Elyse had some issues. Weren’t you interested in her partner at one point? How can we trust you’re actually helping?”

Chapter 846:

Fiona replied, her expression tense, “Yes, our relationship has had its challenges, but I’m not a terrible person. Sometimes, I’m willing to help.”

Edward, still skeptical, muttered, “You don’t seem very trustworthy to me.”

Gavin, attempting to redirect the focus, interjected, “Enough with the bickering. We need to locate Elyse. I’m going to inform the authorities about this situation.” He then quickly moved to take action.

At that moment, an anonymous call came in, claiming that a bomb had been planted at the music hall, set to detonate if the competition went ahead as scheduled.

With the crowd gathering, including notable personalities from the music industry, the organizers decided not to dismiss the threat lightly and opted to delay the event to ensure everyone’s safety.

Meanwhile, Elyse had been liberated from the warehouse. David had managed to cut through the lock with a chainsaw and swiftly brought Elyse into his car. As they drove, Elyse questioned, “Why was there no signal at that warehouse?”

David responded nonchalantly, “I couldn’t afford it. I’ll get a signal service when I have the money.” He then suggested to Elyse, “You can do your makeup in my car before we get there. Once I drop you off, head straight to the stage.”

Elyse acknowledged and began retrieving her makeup bag.

Upon entering the city center where the signal was available, she immediately called Irving to update him and explain her situation.

Irving, clearly relieved to hear from her, urged, "Hurry over here. We've encountered an issue at the venue. Don't delay."

After the call, Elyse, harboring some doubts, inquired, "What if the police investigate the bomb threat and find it was false? Could you get arrested?"

David reassured her with a confident smile, "Don't worry about me, I can handle it."

Elyse, still skeptical, remarked, "I doubt it. You can't even afford a signal for that warehouse."

Reflecting further, Elyse then asked, "If you're struggling with finances, how do you manage to maintain a car?"

David said, "A man might not need a signal, but he must have a car."

Elyse, puzzled by his logic, asked, "How does that make sense?"

David's smile disappeared when they hit a traffic jam caused by the slippery roads.

Elyse, noticing the delay, became anxious, "Why is there a traffic jam now? I'm not going to be late, am I?"

David reassured her, "Don't worry, you won't miss the competition."

He then took out his phone and quickly sent a message.

A minute later, an explosion rocked the back door of the music hall.

The staff, initially doubtful about the anonymous threat, now spiraled into panic.

Chapter 847:

“Delay the competition! It must be postponed, or we risk catastrophe!”

Meanwhile, in the car, Elyse observed David’s composed demeanor and, with a puzzled expression, questioned him, “What did you do? I’ve just been told the competition has now been delayed.”

David offered Elyse a mysterious smile and a wink, teasing, “Curious, aren’t you? I might just keep you guessing.”

Elyse, visibly confused, stared at him, baffled by how someone without a phone signal could have influenced the competition’s schedule. David, amused by her puzzled look, added playfully, “Your confusion makes me want to hold onto the secret even longer.”

Meanwhile, Fiona was comfortably applying her makeup in the lounge assigned for Elyse’s use. Despite not qualifying for the Grand Final based on skill, Fiona had found a different way to be involved in the competition. She smirked at her reflection, pleased with how effortlessly she had secured a position meant for Elyse. While applying her lipstick, she mused aloud, “Elyse, I can’t wait to see the desperation on your face when you miss the competition.” Fiona admired her reflection as she applied her lipstick meticulously, then glanced at her phone to check the time.

To her astonishment, the scheduled time for the competition had already elapsed. Puzzled, she thought, “That’s odd. The competition should have started by now. What’s the delay?” Determined and fully prepared, she rose from her seat, intent on discovering what had happened. She sought out Darren, the only contestant with whom she felt she could communicate effectively.

Upon reaching his door, she knocked, but received no response. Persisting, she called his name, but the silence continued. Growing impatient, she finally pushed the door open, only to find the room empty. “Was I forgotten?” Fiona wondered aloud, a mix of confusion and concern in her voice. “Could the competition have started without anyone informing me?”

She rushed to the competition's backstage area in a panic. Upon arriving, she found only a few staff members chatting and no sign of the contestants, which brought her a momentary sense of relief.

Gavin confronted her with a stern look, his arms crossed. "Fiona, why are you here? You're not part of this competition. You shouldn't be backstage."

Turning to face him, Fiona quickly adopted a charming smile and inquired, "I'm waiting for Elyse. Have you seen her? Why hasn't she arrived yet?"

Gavin, visibly irritated, already knew from Irving that Elyse was en route to the venue and that the competition had been delayed temporarily. There was a chance Elyse might show up before the competition started. Eyeing Fiona with suspicion, he asked, "Why such interest in Elyse? Given your history, it's odd—almost as if you're hiding something."

Fiona's smile faltered as she silently rebuked Gavin. She detested how he always seemed to cast her in a negative light.

Frustrated, she responded coolly, "You are awfully wrong. And why can't you just leave me alone? Always prying into things that don't concern you."

Taken aback by her blunt words, Gavin retorted with a smirk, "Oh, so now I'm nosy? If you think I'm meddling now, just wait—I'm just getting started."

He then turned to the nearby staff and commanded, "She's not a contestant. Please escort her out from backstage."

Chapter 848:

The staff members exchanged a look and moved toward Fiona, signaling it was time for her to leave. Fiona hastily retreated, asserting, "I'm merely delivering something for a friend. I'll be out of your way shortly."

Gavin was impatient. "Well, you should have left already. What's keeping you here?"

With a fierce glare, Fiona snapped, "Alright, I'm leaving."

Once out of Gavin's sight, Fiona exhaled deeply, feeling temporary relief from the confrontation. Under her breath, she muttered defiantly, "He thinks he can force me out? If Elyse doesn't show, I might just step in for her. It doesn't matter which one of us competes." Still, Fiona needed to understand the delay in the competition's start, so she went looking for someone in the know.

Meanwhile, in the car, Elyse noticed traffic clearing up ahead and excitedly remarked, "Look, the traffic's clearing!"

David, confident, responded, "Yes, it's clearing up. We'll get there in time for you to participate in the competition."

"What? Someone anonymously reported a bomb in the concert hall?"

Fiona had approached a staff member and discovered the reason for the delay in the competition. After pausing to think, she quickly added, "Is there actually a bomb, or could it just be a hoax?"

The staff member shook his head. "We haven't verified the presence of a bomb inside the concert hall, but there was definitely an explosion near the back door. For the safety of everyone, we must rule out any possible bomb threats before the competition can proceed."

Fiona nodded, showing her understanding, expressed her gratitude to the staff member, and hurried back to Elyse's lounge. She took out her phone and made a call. "Hello, Kaelyn. You need to come up with a plan quickly. Someone planted a bomb in the concert hall, and now the competition has been postponed."

Upon hearing this, Kaelyn responded indifferently, "If there's a bomb, just disarm it. Why involve me? I've done all I can for you. Do you expect me to handle bombs as well?"

Fiona replied anxiously, "That's not what I'm implying. Doesn't it strike you as odd? An anonymous tip about a bomb in the concert hall, and now the competition is on hold."

“You’re implying that someone intentionally postponed the competition?” While Kaelyn continued to casually tend to her fingernails, she mused, “Even with the delay, Elyse won’t be able to return. Do you know where I took her? She’s in a secluded area within the state, guarded by its own armed forces. Elyse might not even survive there.”

“Are you certain?” Fiona was dubious about Kaelyn’s claims.

Kaelyn scoffed, “If you don’t believe me, then don’t bother asking for my help. We’re nearly done with our partnership, and you’re still questioning me? I really don’t want to deal with someone like you anymore.”

Fiona, visibly embarrassed, quickly apologized. “Sorry, that wasn’t my intention. I’m just really worried that Elyse will steal my opportunity.”

Upon hearing this, Kaelyn couldn’t help but burst into laughter. She taunted, “Are you serious? Your opportunity? Had I not orchestrated a car accident to eliminate a finalist previously, would you even be here? Your abilities are truly mediocre. Every chance you’ve gotten has been due to my manipulations.”

Flushed with humiliation by Kaelyn’s remarks, Fiona quickly responded, “Regardless, I’m deeply thankful for all you’ve done. After the competition, I’ll make sure you get what you desire.”

Chapter 849:

“Great,” Kaelyn replied casually.

She viewed Fiona as a cowardly, greedy, selfish, and useless individual. Yet, she mused, if Fiona hadn’t been so morally corrupt, how would she have ever connected with her?

Kaelyn warned, “I expect you to keep our agreement. Otherwise, you’ll see the consequences.”

Fiona missed the ominous tone in Kaelyn’s voice and said impatiently, “Don’t worry. I remember everything. I’m ending the call now.”

Fiona hung up the phone, leaned back in her chair, and let out a sigh of relief. “Perfect. Elyse won’t be returning now.” She would still be the one competing.

After about thirty minutes, Fiona finally received confirmation that the competition was set to begin. Due to the hour-long delay, the organizers had arranged a special performance to entertain the audience while they waited for the competition to commence. Each contestant was to perform their signature piece, and Elyse had registered Paganini’s Caprice No. 24.

When Fiona heard that Elyse had chosen this piece as her signature piece, she nearly passed out. Was Elyse out of her mind? How could she choose this piece as her performance piece?

Darren, noticing that Fiona hadn’t departed yet, questioned, “Why are you still here? You’re not supposed to be backstage for the competition, are you?”

As he spoke, he looked at Fiona’s face with a puzzled expression. “And why have you applied makeup? What are you planning?”

Fiona, aware that other contestants were observing her, displayed an embarrassed look and clarified, “I just applied some makeup. Don’t read too much into it.”

Darren continued, “By the way, where’s Elyse? It’s been quite a while. Where did she go?”

Just as Fiona was about to respond, Edward chimed in, “She went to the restroom. I saw her.”

Fiona rolled her eyes. Edward was obviously making it up. Elyse was definitely not coming.

Geraldine, who was close by, scowled at Fiona and declared, “Hey, you’ve been eliminated, so please leave quickly. Don’t disrupt our competition.”

Her voice was notably stern, almost driving Fiona away. Reflecting on her potential victory, Fiona decided to withstand the hostility and smiled sheepishly. “Sorry, I didn’t intend to. I was just overly curious and wanted to stay to watch.”

Geraldine copied Fiona’s earlier gesture and rolled her eyes as well. “Who would believe that? Have you forgotten how you advanced to the final?”

Fiona feigned innocence, saying, “I was just fortunate enough to reach the final. It’s unfortunate for the contestant who had the car accident, but that’s beyond my control. Luck is a kind of strength, isn’t it?” She raised her chin slightly and strutted off.

Geraldine, filled with anger, spat in the direction Fiona had gone before sharply turning away. Darren and Edward shared a look but said nothing.

Once Fiona had departed, she kept her strategy in mind. In the lounge, she swiftly changed into a dress and approached a staff member, posing as Elyse.

She inquired about the requirements for the performance. The staff member, deceived into thinking Fiona was the actual contestant, carefully outlined the critical aspects of the performance.

With this knowledge, Fiona confidently headed to the backstage area.

Chapter 850:

Since the order of performance was determined by the final rankings, Fiona was scheduled to perform second to last. She just needed to bide her time. And she believed Darren could not stop her even if he noticed her.

The thought of her plan’s success filled Fiona with excitement. She stood by the backstage door, observing as Edward and the other violinists performed their parts. Her turn was approaching.

At the perfect moment, Fiona moved backstage. Darren quickly blocked her path, his tone filled with anger. “Have you gone mad? What are you doing here? Leave now!”

Fiona gave him a frosty stare. "If Elyse isn't here, someone needs to step in. Luck favors the ready, and I am that person."

She attempted to break free from Darren's hold.

However, Darren was determined to keep her in place. His tone was cold as he countered, "You think you can just replace Elyse? Elyse is already here. How do you plan to take her spot?"

Annoyed by Darren's words, Fiona retorted, "Then where is she? Show me!"

Darren looked at her with a cold, inscrutable face before his expression turned into a smile. "If you don't believe me, check for yourself."

"What do you mean?" A sense of dread washed over Fiona, and suddenly, an idea hit her. She dashed toward the stage and lifted the curtain slightly to take a look.

The orchestra was peacefully setting up to perform Paganini's Caprice No. 24. The audience appeared relaxed, oblivious to whether Elyse had made it or not. In a rush, Fiona exclaimed, "They're unsure when to begin since Elyse isn't here. They need me! I'm the one who can guide them!"

Right after her statement, the melody of a violin permeated the air. The music originated not from the stage, but from among the audience.

The audience members turned in surprise to see Elyse, clad in a striking red gown, effortlessly playing the violin as she advanced toward the stage.

"Wait... what's happening?"

"Is this a part of the show?"

"This is incredibly inventive! I adore it!"

"She's fantastic! I'm thrilled right now!"

With her gaze fixed, Elyse kept playing, her steps sure as she moved closer to the stage. She did not notice the middle-aged man seated nearby, observing her closely. It was Cody, who had come to watch her performance.

“Is she your apprentice? Such a skilled young lady! You’ve really found a gem,” the man beside Cody whispered, his voice tinged with admiration.

Cody’s face lit up with pride. “She’s gotten to this point through her own effort. I hardly did anything as her teacher.”

“Come on, don’t be modest now,” the man whispered, then fell quiet.

Elyse approached the stage, where the orchestra members, struck by her dramatic entrance, nodded their appreciation. The conductor also observed her with respect.