

Hitched 1001

Chapter 1001

Tarquin Bradford had a hunch and decided to test the waters. The storm brewing around the Hawkins family was, without a shadow of a doubt, linked to a mysterious figure lurking in the shadows.

"This trip to Oceanopolis might just be our chance to unmask them," he thought.

With a stoic expression, Tarquin ordered, "Grab Verity Bradford's illegitimate child first. Pretend I'll interrogate him personally. Arrange a private jet in secret; we're heading to Oceanopolis tonight!"

The child, having been raised within the mysterious figure's stronghold, surely knew much that could aid them.

After returning from Oceanopolis, a thorough interrogation was in order.

Hanging up the phone, Tarquin immediately sought out Elysia Thorne to inform her of their imminent departure to Oceanopolis.

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Oceanopolis, Dock No. 1.

As nightfall approached, a well-dressed, affluent woman lingered by the dock, refusing to leave. Clutching a rag doll, she hummed softly, her demeanor hinting at a troubled mind.

Her maids called out to her, "Madam, it's getting dark. It's time to head back for dinner."

The woman, lost in her own world, paid them no heed.

The maids, frustration evident on their faces, muttered among themselves, "Day after day, it's the same. Her daughter disappeared over twenty years ago. What's the point in waiting?"

"Exactly. If she's gone, she's gone. Why not just have another child and move on? She's asking for unnecessary suffering, bringing this upon herself." Their conversation was cut short by a phone call. Recognizing the caller ID, one maid's demeanor changed instantly to one of obsequiousness. "Hello, Helen."

Whatever was said on the other end prompted a quick response, "Of course, of course, I'll bring Pamela back right away. Just give us a moment." Hanging up, the other maid inquired, "Something up with Helen?"

"Yeah, she's looking for Pamela. Seems she's had a rough time; sounded quite upset."

"Poor Pamela's in for it then. Helen always comes down hard on her."

"Why bother with a madwoman? It's Pamela who suffers, not us. It'd be better if Helen kept her indoors. I'm tired of coming to the docks every day." Agreed. Let's convince her to head back."

Approaching the distressed woman, they coaxed, "Madam, it's time for dinner at home."

"I'm not going, waiting for Irene."

"No need to wait. Your daughter's already home."

Her eyes lighting up, the woman hurriedly got up, "Home, we must go home. Irene needs her mother. She's missing me. Let's hurry."

In her haste, the woman tripped, scraping her knees. Wincing in pain, she bit her lip and continued limping forward.

The maids, devoid of sympathy, rolled their eyes, secretly wishing she'd injured herself more severely to avoid future trips to the dock.

Noticing the woman heading in the wrong direction, they caught up with her, "Madam, the car's this way."

She ignored their disdain, repeating, "Home to Irene. She's missing her mother. She needs me..."

Chapter 1002

At the Hawkins Estate, a woman clad in designer fashion was seated in the living room of the main house, her fury palpable enough to terrify the household staff into silence.

In a fit of rage, she hurled her tea cup to the floor, shattering it as she shrieked, "Witch! Witch! Witch!"

The maids, petrified, knelt in unison, trembling uncontrollably.

This woman was Helen Murphy, known among the Hawkins as their own Helen. Nearing her fifties yet with a beauty regimen that made her appear barely over forty, Helen was innately jealous, especially since she didn't possess the natural beauty of Pamela Patel, Elysia's mother.

The object of her long-standing unrequited love, Clayton Hawkins, had chosen Pamela over her. Adding insult to injury, on the very day both women married into the Hawkins family, Old Mrs. Hawkins, Betty, had disregarded Helen's feelings entirely, passing the family reins to Pamela during the wedding celebrations.

Hence, from the day she married into the Hawkins family, Helen saw Pamela as a thorn in her side.

However, Pamela, before losing her sanity, had been the lady of the Hawkins Estate. Helen had to mask her hatred with respect, playing the part of a loving sister-in-law.

Pamela's descent into madness was like springtime for Helen, freeing her from the need to hide her true feelings. She vented her frustrations on Pamela whenever she could. If not for the consideration of Clayton and the Patel family, Helen would have sought Pamela's demise long ago.

The source of Helen's current rage was a humiliating experience at a high-society luncheon earlier that day. A wealthy rival had publicly exposed her, claiming her husband, Carl Hawkins, was entangled with a tall, leggy inte star, making her the subject of gossip.

Mockingly, the woman had advised Helen to "keep a tighter leash" on her husband. As if! Carl, known for his philandering ways, had countless mistresses. Their marriage, a result of Helen's scheming, lacked any foundation of love, leaving her powerless against his abuses.

The insult was clear: Helen was being publicly shamed.

Furthermore, the woman claimed that the Hawkins family was now solely upheld by Clayton, insinuating that the rest were mere parasites. Equally infuriating was their praise for Pamela, now considered a lunatic, as "Oceanopolis's most graceful woman," her beauty and intellect unmatched even in madness.

Fuming, Helen cursed, "Even in her madness, she dares to overshadow me? What serene grace, what scholarly poise, what nonsense! She's just a crazy dead woman walking!

That damned witch, why doesn't she just die already!

Always babbling about her daughter, as if the dead care. She should be searching in hell, for that's where her daughter must be!

She must be doing this to spite me, living out of sheer malice. A heartless, vile witch!"

As if on cue, Pamela staggered into the living room, her presence a stark contrast to the tension. Her beauty, undiminished by her disheveled state, was a bitter reminder to Helen of her own insecurities.

Despite Helen's reluctance to admit it, Pamela was indeed more beautiful.

Oblivious to Helen's rage and the servants cowering on the floor, Pamela headed straight upstairs, murmuring, "Irene, Irene, mommy's home..."

Her maids, indifferent to her plight, approached Helen with sycophantic smiles, eager to align with the power within the Hawkins Estate, "Mrs. Murphy, how can we assist you?"

In the grand homes of the elite, loyalty was as fickle as the shifting balance of power.

Chapter 1003

After Pamela lost her grip on reality, Helen took charge of the household, naturally asserting her dominance over everyone. Whatever Helen commanded, they did without question!

Though these two maids were initially hired by Clayton, they had long been swayed by Helen's influence.

Pamela's once-loyal confidantes were either dead or incapacitated, all discreetly removed from the Hawkins estate by Helen. Seated at the head of the dining table, Helen regarded the maids with a chilling detachment, her gaze fixed upstairs.

Moments later, Pamela came rushing down, panic written all over her face,

"Where's Irene? Have you seen my Irene? Where could she be? She's not at home!"

The kneeling servants remained silent, as Helen glanced at the shattered porcelain mug beside her, eyeing Pamela coldly,

"I know where your daughter is. Come here, and I'll tell you."

Pamela's eyes lit up, falling right into the trap as she hurried over,

"You do? Where's my Irene?"

As she spoke, her foot found the broken porcelain!

The shards pierced through her soft shoes, injuring Pamela's foot.

She twisted in pain and fell, her hands landing on the sharp porcelain, blood instantly pooling from several cuts.

Pamela's reaction was childlike, tears flowing freely as she cried from the pain,

"It hurts, it hurts, waaah, it hurts..."

The maids watched impassively, offering no comfort.

After a brief moment of weeping, Pamela looked up at Helen again, "Where's Irene? My Irene?"

Helen's malice was palpable as she cruelly stated, "She's dead!"

Pamela's eyes widened in shock,

"Dead? No, no! My Irene can't be dead, she won't die, she can't be..."

"She is dead! And her death was tragic! She was taken by beggars, left hungry and cold, and constantly abused!

Then, she fell off a cliff, breaking her arms and legs, shattering her bones! She bled out, attracting a pack of wild dogs that tore her apart and devoured her alive!"

Pamela's breathing became erratic, her cries intensified,

"Liar! You're lying! My daughter is alive... waaah... my Irene is fine..."

The more she cried, the more Helen enjoyed it, "I'm not lying. Ask them if you don't believe me."

The maids quickly nodded, exaggerating the tale,

"The poor girl's death was horrific, the hunting dogs were brutal, ripping her arm off in one bite. It was pitiful to see her like that."

"And before she died, she kept crying and calling for you, over and over again: 'Mommy, save me, Mommy, it hurts, Mommy, where are you, Mommy, please save me...'"

Pamela let out a wail, her heartache palpable.

This was a knife twisting in her heart!

"Liar! All of you, liars, waaah, liars..."

Overwhelmed by grief, Pamela lashed out in a frenzy, "My Irene isn't dead, waaah, my Irene isn't dead!"

Caught off guard, the maids were struck before they could react, their hair pulled, their faces scratched.

Helen, too, received a vicious bite.

Enraged but cautious not to hit Pamela's face, Helen aimed for her wound,

"How dare you bite me! You're asking for it!"

Her foot struck Pamela's injured knee, and Pamela fell with a thud.

She landed among the broken porcelain!

As she reflexively tried to lift her hand, a high heel pressed down on it, brutally forcing her back onto the sharp fragments!

Helen's face twisted with fury as she ground Pamela's hand under her stiletto heel, forcing the porcelain deeper, piercing through flesh and bone!

Chapter 1004

"Ouch, oh no, it hurts..."

Pamela cried as she tried to pull her hand away, but couldn't break free.

The harder she tried to escape, the firmer Helen gripped, "Dare to bite me? You've turned the world upside down! The worst is yet to come!"

She pulled out a long needle she had prepared earlier, aiming it at Pamela...

She targeted spots hidden from plain sight!

She jabbed the needle into Pamela's hand, into her bleeding knees, and into her fingertips, pushing it under her fingernails...

Each finger connected to her heart, making Pamela scream in agony.

Helen ordered the maid to hold Pamela's arms, restraining her from moving!

She also had the maid cover Pamela's mouth to keep her from screaming!

Helen was like a venomous scorpion, relentlessly stabbing Pamela with the needle, venting her anger.

When Pamela fainted from the pain, she would wake her up just to torment her further.

The commotion was not small and even disturbed the other members of the Hawkins family.

The other women acted as if nothing was unusual, continuing with their face masks and flower arranging in their own rooms, with not a single one offering to help Pamela in the main house.

...

Meanwhile, Tarquin and Elysia had already set off.

On their private jet, Elysia's face was scrunched up, her brows knitted tighter and tighter.

"What's wrong? Are you feeling unwell?"

Tarquin, worried, touched her forehead, which wasn't hot.

Elysia looked at him with teary eyes, her tears falling before she could speak.

Tarquin, startled, immediately took her into his arms, soothing her gently,

"Don't cry, what's the matter? Talk to me."

Elysia sobbed, "I...I just feel so upset."

"Upset? Are you sick? Should I call a doctor?"

"It's not a sickness, just a feeling of discomfort."

Tarquin guessed, "Is it because you're worried about mom and dad?"

He had initially referred to Clayton and Mrs. Hawkins with formal titles, but as soon as Elysia decided to go back to Oceanopolis to reconnect with her family, he quickly started calling them mom and dad.

His attitude towards Clayton depended entirely on Elysia.

Elysia didn't contradict him, but she didn't nod either, choking out,

"I don't know why, but I feel terrible. My heart hurts, my hands hurt, my whole body hurts, and I just want to cry."

"If you want to cry, cry. There's no need to hold it in front of your husband."

Elysia, somewhat losing control, clung to Tarquin's shirt, crying even harder.

There was no apparent reason, just a sudden, overwhelming pain and urge to cry.

Tarquin thought she was just worried about Clayton and his wife, holding her and comforting her softly,

"We'll arrive in Oceanopolis first thing tomorrow morning. You'll see mom and dad soon, don't worry. I'm here, and I'll make sure they're protected."

The kids on the plane, hearing the commotion, came running over.

Seeing Elysia cry, they were immensely distressed.

Elliot and Elijah declared, "Mommy, don't worry, we'll protect grandma and grandpa too!"

Evan said, "If anyone dares to bully my grandparents, I'll fight them! I'll be the bodyguard for grandma and grandpa!"

Emmett, emotional, with tears in his eyes,

"Mommy, don't cry. Grandma and grandpa will be so happy to see us, maybe grandma will even get better just from the happiness."

Baby also chimed in with a baby voice,

"Grandma and grandpa will surely love little bunnies too. I'll let Lan play with them and make them happy."

Elysia, moved, sniffled hard,

"Grandma and grandpa will be over the moon seeing you. Mommy won't cry anymore, you don't have to worry about me, okay? Now, head back to your seats, safety first."

The little ones each gave Elysia a kiss, obediently following Lowell back to their seats.

Elysia wiped her tears away, not crying anymore. She leaned into Tarquin's embrace, looking out the window with a sorrowful expression.

Chapter 1005

Tarquin's brows furrowed deeply, his heart aching for her.

No matter where he was or whose territory it was, causing his darling Elysia sorrow was simply unacceptable.

Though he had no prior connections with the Hawkins family, Elysia was Clayton's daughter, which made him Clayton's son-in-law by default!

In his eyes, a son-in-law was as good as a son, and the affairs of the Hawkins family were now his business!

He couldn't care less about the saying "even a mighty dragon cannot suppress a local snake" or about being outnumbered. His guiding principle was simple:

Whatever makes my wife happy, I'll do.

Those who bring joy to his wife were allies.

And those who brought her sorrow were enemies!

Over in Oceanopolis, Helen suddenly received the news that Clayton was on his way home, nearly there.

She immediately ceased her actions, glaring at Pamela who was on the verge of passing out from pain, and ordered the servants,

"Carry her to her bedroom! Leave the mess on the floor for now, and get Dr. White here ASAP."

After issuing her commands, she began fixing her hair and clothes...

Soon, Clayton arrived in a whirlwind of haste.

He had received a call from the maid, informing him that Pamela had suffered another episode, which is why he rushed back so urgently.

Upon entering the house, the first thing he saw was the bloodstains and shattered ceramics on the floor, causing his brow to furrow deeply as he inquired anxiously,

"Where's Pamela?!"

The maid waiting at the foot of the stairs, tears in her eyes, said:

"Madam is in the bedroom, sir. Helen is up there taking care of her."

Not bothering to change his shoes, Clayton hurried upstairs, asking as he went,

"What happened all of a sudden? Wasn't she fine when she went to the docks today?"

"Yes, sir, madam spent the entire day at the docks without issue. She returned and, as usual, went to Miss's room, but for some reason, she came rushing down not long after, crying and looking for Miss."

The more we tried to calm her, the more agitated she became, throwing cups and lashing out at us. She didn't just hit us; she harmed herself too. We struggled to get her up to her bedroom."

With his brows knitted tightly together, Clayton ascended the stairs two at a time, filled with urgency.

Pushing open the master bedroom door, the first thing he saw was Helen.

She stood by the bed, wiping away tears, lamenting,

"Why does she torment herself so? Can't the heavens show some mercy to Pamela? Losing her daughter was hard enough, and now she's afflicted with this madness..."

Clayton, with his brow furrowed, stepped forward, "Pamela!"

Helen quickly looked up at him, a flicker of joy in her gaze.

Clayton, standing over six feet tall, was once known as the most handsome man in Oceanopolis.

His years as a Marine, followed by time spent at a military academy, only added to his allure.

Back in the day, his military uniform and commanding presence had captivated countless women in Oceanopolis.

Helen was among them.

She had harbored a secret love for Clayton, hoping to marry him, but Clayton had eyes only for Pamela, insisting on marrying no one but her! So, Helen ended up marrying Carl, a man who thought with everything but his brain.

Now in his fifties, Clayton's presence had not diminished.

Traveling frequently for work had tanned his skin to a bronze hue, making him look even healthier and more rugged-a true embodiment of masculinity.

Helen's heart still fluttered for him. She tried to squeeze out a few more tears, hoping to gain Clayton's sympathy,

"Clayton, you're back. Pamela... she's had another episode."

Clayton spared her not a single glance, nor did he acknowledge her, his brow furrowed as he approached the bed.

Seeing Pamela, covered in scars and wounds, his eyes instantly reddened.

He knelt by the bed, wanting to grasp Pamela's hand tightly but afraid of causing her pain, so he gently touched her, letting her feel his presence, "Pamela, I'm here."

Chapter 1006

Pamela lay weakly in bed, her condition visibly fragile. At the sight of Clayton, a spark of excitement flickered in her eyes, reminiscent of a lost child finally finding a parent.

Yet, when she spoke, it wasn't to complain or to seek comfort; it was to call out for her daughter, "Irene, Irene..."

It was evident Pamela was lost in her own world, her mind fixated on finding her daughter, oblivious to her own plight.

She was easy to pacify, like a toddler, believing anything she was told unless it was slander about her daughter or Clayton. That was the only time she showed anger, ready to defend and contradict.

With hands wrapped in bandages, she gently shook Clayton's hand, whispering, "Clayton, find Irene, find Irene..."

Clayton's heart ached at her words. He too had once had a warm home, a loving wife, and a delightful daughter. But ever since their daughter went missing, their home had shattered.

His daughter's whereabouts remained unknown, his wife had retreated into her own world in Oceanopolis, and he was left to search tirelessly for their daughter. A once happy family was now torn apart.

Choking back his emotions, Clayton assured her, "I know, I'm looking for Irene, I've always been."

Pamela's face twisted in distress, "Irene's alive, Irene's alive!"

"...Yes! Our Irene is strong and fortunate. She must be alive and well, maybe even happy, with a loving husband and sweet children....."

Helen, overhearing this, could barely hide her skepticism. Alive after more than twenty years? How absurd!

If Irene were alive, she'd consider herself gone.

Pamela, energized by hope, exclaimed, "Irene's alive? Irene's alive!"

Clayton nodded affirmatively, "Yes, Irene's alive."

Breathing a sigh of relief, Pamela's tense nerves relaxed as she lay there, smiling foolishly at the ceiling and then at everyone in the room, repeating, "My Irene's alive, alive..."

The others present exchanged looks, silently agreeing on the tragedy of her condition.

Clayton, with tears blurring his vision, remembered Pamela in better times - radiant, intelligent, and fiercely independent. Now, she was but a shadow of her former self.

Wiping away his tears, Clayton turned to the doctor, "How severe are Pamela's injuries? What happened to her?"

Clayton couldn't see the wounds beneath the bandages, nor the marks from needle stitches.

The senior doctor, after a hesitant glance at Helen, explained, "They're not life-threatening, though she has many. The main injuries are to her knees and hands, caused by shattered ceramic pieces."

Clayton frowned, "Another self-harm incident?"

A younger doctor quickly added, "Ms. Patel is overwhelmed with grief for her daughter. She finds some relief in physical pain, which momentarily eases her emotional suffering."

The perpetrators, standing nearby, showed no fear of being discovered.

After all, Pamela's mind was consumed with thoughts of her daughter, leaving no room for doubt or dispute.

Besides, any evidence that could have been used against them had been destroyed when Pamela supposedly damaged the surveillance equipment in a fit of madness.

Moreover, these two doctors had been personally chosen by Clayton to care for Pamela, one being a long-standing friend and the other a protégé he had supported through medical school.

Thus, Clayton placed his full trust in them, never suspecting betrayal.

A maid seized the moment to suggest, "Dr. White, could you please check on Helen later? Pamela bit her during an episode, and it looks pretty bad." Helen downplayed the injury with a 'it's nothing,' yet made sure Clayton saw the severity of the bite, displaying the bruised and broken skin as proof.

Chapter 1007

Clayton's gaze was icy, "It's getting late. You all should head out."

Not a single word of concern for her, not to mention he was basically showing them the door. Helen's heart sank!

And then seeing how tenderly he treated Pamela, jealousy drove her to the brink of madness!

She felt like she was choking on her own frustration, unable to vent it out but also unable to swallow it down.

Yet, she dared not lash out at Clayton, only managing to shoot Pamela a venomous glare!

Once they left the main house, Helen spat out:

"I can't stand the sight of her for another day. Haven't you figured out a way to get rid of her for good?!"

The family doctor frowned,

"You've been careful with your abuse, but if she actually dies, Clayton and the Patel family will investigate thoroughly. Given her history of mistreatment and the injuries she's sustained over the years, if discovered, it'd spell doom for us all!"

Helen clenched her teeth,

"Then we need to come up with a flawless plan! She needs to be gone by the end of the year, and it has to look like a tragic accident!"

"

No sooner had they left than Clayton's assistant stepped into the bedroom and whispered,

"Boss, they're here."

Clayton knew immediately who it was, furrowing his brow, "Have them wait in the living room!"

"Right away!"

"And, fire all the staff, bring in new people!"

He was well aware of Helen's disdain for Pamela.

But since Pamela refused to leave with him, he had no choice but to order that Helen stay away from Pamela, especially from the main house!

Regardless of the reason, Helen's presence in the main house today was a clear sign of negligence from the staff.

"Clayton, why don't you go find Irene? It's getting dark, and Irene might get scared," Pamela suddenly said, looking at him.

Clayton's eyes softened, and he replied gently,

"I'll go look for her in a bit. You get some sleep, and maybe by the time you wake up, Irene will be back."

Pamela nodded eagerly, "Okay, okay, I'll sleep, and when I wake up, Irene will be back."

She closed her eyes obediently.

Clayton stayed by her side until she fell into a deep sleep before he went downstairs.

The living room had already been tidied up, and a group of men was sitting there, enjoying a casual chat over coffee.

These were members of the Hawkins family, stakeholders in Hawkins Sea-freight. Seeing Clayton come down, they greeted him. Clayton guessed their purpose and, with a cold demeanor, took the head seat without engaging in pleasantries,

"There's no need to discuss this further. I won't agree to it."

The atmosphere shifted instantly!

They wanted to use the Hawkins family's cargo ships to smuggle contraband, and Clayton's refusal was the root of their conflict.

An elder spoke up, trying to reason with him,

"Clayton, why be so stubborn? You're a businessman, and the goal of a businessman is profit. To ignore such a lucrative opportunity seems foolish, doesn't it?"

Clayton looked at him,

"Over the years, Hawkins Sea-freight has flourished with the support of the nation, growing stronger each year through legitimate business. We've made enough money that way; why risk it with illegal ventures?"

"But the more money, the better. Legitimate business just doesn't bring in cash fast enough."

Clayton's response was icy,

"Greed leads to downfall. High risk might bring high rewards, but legitimate business, though slower, ensures stability.

Currently, the Hawkins family thrives solely in the shipping industry. If we jeopardize that, what will be left for future generations of the Hawkins family?"

The elder frowned,

"Smuggling a few prohibited items won't ruin us. Some of the Hawkins family's ships are exempt from inspection. If we don't disclose what's on board, no one will find out. It's risk-free, perfectly safe."

Risk-free? Perfectly safe?

Clayton's anger surged at the suggestion!

Chapter 1008

"You're playing with fire, gambling with the trust of the nation and the future of the Hawkins family as if you're striking a deal with the devil itself! Once you make a pact with the underworld, you become nothing more than a pawn in their game, and Hawkins Sea-freight will no longer be under the control of the Hawkins family!

You know this, yet you still proceed!

For your own gain, you disregard the welfare of your future generations. It's despicable and utterly reprehensible!"

The elder's words turned the faces of everyone in the room a shade of deep red, one of them getting particularly heated,

"Don't lecture us on morals. We came here to offer you an opportunity, not to beg for your approval!

If you play along, not only will we avoid a fallout, but you'll also save your own face!

But if you keep being stubborn, you won't just lose Hawkins Sea-freight, but your dignity too. Heck, you might even put your own life on the line! You know exactly the tight spot you're in!"

The threat in the speaker's eyes was palpable.

Clayton furrowed his brows, well aware that his position was precarious.

With only a 40% share in his grasp, while they held 45%.

Turning the tide seemed impossible unless...

Carl spoke up, calm and collected,

"Brother, you can't turn this situation around. I know that 15% is with Irene. If she could come back, you'd win hands down. But ask yourself, can Irene really return?"

Clayton turned to his brother, fuming,

"Did you spill the beans about the 15% to them?!"

Originally, he had 70% of Hawkins Sea-freight.

He had given his brother 10% to secure his future, out of genuine concern and fulfilling their father's dying wish.

He even gifted 5% to the younger members of the Hawkins family.

Later, he secretly bought an additional 15% under his daughter's name, as a safety for her.

With this 15%, his daughter, should she return, would be guaranteed a life of comfort and prosperity, even after they were gone.

This was a secret he had shared only with Carl!

And now, his betrayal had emboldened these vultures!

Without his daughter to attend the shareholders' meeting, her share would be considered forfeited.

Whoever held the majority of the remaining 85% would win.

With only a 40% share, his defeat was certain.

"We're blood, brothers! Even that 10% you hold was given by me, and now you..."

Clayton was visibly shaken, chest heaving with anger, but Carl remained indifferent,

"Big brother is like a father. With dad gone, it was your duty to look after me. Giving me 10% was the least you could do. I didn't even ask for half, which is more than generous."

"You..."

"Let's not dwell on the past. Focus on the now. Irene has been missing for over twenty years; she's probably long gone. Denying it won't change anything."

All these years, running around the globe, building docks in her name, what a waste of resources and energy on someone who's most likely dead. You'd have been better off lining your own pockets for retirement."

Clayton gasped for air, "Irene is your niece, for heaven's sake. You're actually hoping she's dead?!"

Carl just shrugged,

"I'm not hoping she's dead; I'm stating the obvious. She has no chance of being alive. Brother, it's time to be pragmatic. What's the harm in a little smuggling? If we keep it quiet, who's to know? Make a few generous donations later, and the public will still hail you as a philanthropist."

Chapter 1009

Clayton was livid, his anger boiling over.

"All those lessons your folks drummed into you, might as well have been told to a brick wall! You good-for-nothing!"

Carl's face darkened with rage.

"You had the whole highway to yourself, but no, you chose the tightrope. Go ahead, be that way. I've said my piece. I've done my duty as a brother. Just don't come crying to me for help later on! My conscience is clear, and I'm out!"

With a scoff, Carl stood up and left.

The rest followed suit, their egos inflated, eyes filled with resentment and scorn.

"Fine, if you'd rather face the music than enjoy the feast, see you at the shareholders' meeting in three days!"

They seemed to forget, who had been footing their bills all these years?

And who was it that single-handedly founded Hawkins Sea-freight?

They were living off Clayton's hard work, yet now they dared to lord over him!

Greedy and cold-hearted!

Nothing but wolves in sheep's clothing!

Clayton remained seated, his lips pressed thin, his facial muscles trembling with fury.

His assistant wanted to offer some words of comfort but couldn't find the right words.

Clayton was a man of courage and integrity, loyal and true-hearted. Yet, look where he found himself now!

His daughter missing, his wife lost to her own mind, betrayed by his own kin!

He had nurtured the Hawkins family for years, only for them to turn against him!

A classic tale of the farmer and the viper!

The only hope to turn things around now was for his daughter to return.

But could she? It seemed a forlorn hope...

After a while, Clayton sent his assistant away and went back to his bedroom.

He sat down by the bed, next to Pamela, his tears falling freely.

"Pamela, these heartless people... I treated them like family, and they treat me like dirt! They're nothing but ungrateful wolves!

"I'm not upset about the money, but losing Hawkins Sea-freight means it'll be even harder to find our daughter. If we don't look for her, who will remember our Irene?"

"Where could she be? I've searched so many places, why can't I find her?"

"Pamela, I miss Irene too. She's always been so timid, afraid of the dark! Every time I think of her alone and scared in the dark, my heart aches.

"She's our baby girl, not someone else's. Will anyone else care for her as we do? What if she encounters someone bad? Without us to protect her, can she grow up safely?

"Our Irene, is she still okay? Is she still alive? I... I..."

Clayton's pain overflowed as he spoke, a grown man of over fifty, sobbing uncontrollably.

His heart was shattered.

The next day, just as dawn was breaking, Tarquin and Elysia arrived at Oceanopolis airport.

"Let's head to Dock 1 first!" Elysia said as soon as they disembarked.

Dock 1 was where she had disappeared as a child. She had heard that her mother went there every day to wait for her.

Her mother would arrive before dawn and leave only at sunset, come rain or shine.

Eager to see her, Elysia couldn't wait.

Tarquin understood her feelings. "Okay!"

He arranged for the bodyguards to take their luggage to the hotel they had booked in advance and then took Elysia and the kids to Dock 1.

On the way, the children chattered excitedly, curious about the new city and looking forward to meeting their grandparents.

Elysia was silent, her fists clenched tight, clearly nervous.

Tarquin took her hand into his, warming it, trying to ease her tension.

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As they neared the pier, Elliot couldn't help but ask, "Dad, when we see grandma, do we just come out and say who we are?" Tarquin understood Elliot's concern. They needed to suss out the Hawkins family a bit more before making any moves.

It might be better to keep their identities under wraps for now, to avoid blowing their cover and to make things easier.

However, Tarquin didn't voice his opinion immediately but instead looked over at Elysia for her decision.

Frowning, Elysia said, "I'll see how she's doing first."

She was worried about Pamela's health. Her mother had been searching for her for years, and a reunion would surely be overwhelming.

For someone with mental health issues, excessive excitement could be dangerous.

Tarquin nodded, "Then we'll play it by ear."

Acknowledging each other could wait. It was bound to happen sooner or later.

However, upon their arrival at the pier, they discovered Pamela wasn't there at all!

Elysia's mind began to race, "Isn't she supposed to be here every day, come rain or shine? Why isn't she here today? Could she be sick?"

Trying to calm her, Tarquin suggested, "Let's not jump to conclusions. We'll get the kids settled in the hotel first, and then we can figure out when to visit the Hawkins family."

Elysia nodded, albeit with a worried expression.

Seeing their mom worried, the kids couldn't help but feel anxious too!

Evan, clenching his fists, whispered to Elliot, "Bro, I'll head to the Hawkins family and find out why grandma didn't show up at the pier today. If mom asks, just say I'm with the bodyguard in his car."

"Alright, just be careful and call if anything comes up. Don't do anything rash," Elliot responded.

Without Elysia noticing, Evan sneaked off with White towards the Hawkins family residence.

The Hawkins Mansion, located in Oceanopolis's most affluent villa district, was a sprawling estate comprising several cottages.

The main building, the centerpiece of the estate, was surrounded by these cottages. It offered the best views and symbolized the status of residing Hawkins family heads.

With Old Mr. Hawkins, Randal Hawkins, having passed away early and Betty having moved to a mountain retreat for peace, Clayton and Pamela lived in the main building.

Before her disappearance, Elysia had lived there too. Pamela's refusal to leave the mansion after her breakdown was due to the memories of Elysia that lingered within its walls.

Hiding in the shadows, Evan eyed the mansion's towering walls, pondering his next move.

He knew he could scale the wall easily, but he couldn't afford to make any noise.

They had just arrived in Oceanopolis, and with much still to investigate, revealing their presence was not an option.

Thus, he needed to bypass the Hawkins family's security and surveillance unnoticed - a task that required some strategic thinking.

As Evan was still brainstorming, a scar-faced figure suddenly appeared beside him, "Follow me!"

Evan was startled, "Why are you here too? Never mind, I don't even want to know right now. I've got serious business today and can't afford any distractions."

The figure, looking annoyed and strict, countered, "You wanted to sneak in, right? Come on!"

Evan, still dubious, questioned, "How did you know I wanted to sneak in?"

The scar-faced man, evidently impatient with Evan's questions, pressed, "Are you coming or not?" With a pout, Evan followed.

After a few minutes, the man stopped and pointed, "Climb over here, and you won't be detected." "How do you know?" Evan asked.

The man, frowning and clearly irritated, didn't bother to explain.

Despite his reservations, Evan trusted him and scaled the wall. As promised, there was no one around, nor any electronic surveillance in sight. Evan couldn't help but give the man another curious glance. What was his angle? One day he's after him, and the next, he's aiding his mission? Confused but focused on the task at hand, Evan let it go for now.

Inside, the estate was dotted with tall trees, which offered an excellent vantage point. Choosing a large tree, Evan climbed up for a better view. From his high perch, he could see far and wide, and it was less likely for him to be spotted.

The mysterious man followed him up the tree without a word, simply keeping watch.

Evan, his attention now divided, glanced at the man again but decided to ignore him for the moment. His thoughts were on his grandparents. Yet, instead of spotting his grandparents, he saw Helen.

Helen was leisurely strolling through the garden with a maid, both moving slowly and chatting.

The maid, clearly excited, shared, "I heard the poor woman woke up before dawn, insisting on going to the pier. Mr. Hawkins wouldn't allow it, and she just lay in bed crying, refusing to eat or drink until her voice was hoarse."

Evan perked up, realizing they were talking about his grandmother.

Eagerly, he listened closer, with White and the scar-faced man inadvertently joining his makeshift eavesdropping team. The man watched Helen and her maid with a look of impatience, clearly uninterested in their conversation.