

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 101[618 words]

It wasn't long before Jessamine hurried over. She had been picking out clothes for Corbin at the boutique when she heard that Elysia was also there, Concerned that no one had stood up for her, Jessamine made her way over as fast as she could.

"Ms. Thome."

A familiar female voice suddenly called from behind. Elysia turned around to see Mrs. Denton approaching.

"Mrs. Denton?"

Jessamine looked surprised and asked, "Is that really you? I saw your silhouette and thought it was you, but I wasn't sure. What happened to you?"

Elysia felt a bit awkward and answered, "Had a bit of a tiff with them."

Hearing this, Jessamine frowned and her gaze towards Oriana and her group was none too pleased.

Oriana was the only one who knew of the so called Mrs. Denton's status and shivered with fear.

The others didn't recognize Mrs. Denton and, buoyed by Orlana's backing from Keaton Huber, one blurted out. "What's this? You're the cavalry this little tramp has called in? Let me tell you, no one could save her now. She's done for!"

Oriana's pupils shock with fear, and she quickly tried to hush her friend, "Stop... just stop talking."

"What are you scared of? So what if she's some high-society lady? I refuse to believe there's anyone in Jindale City that Mr. Huber would be scared of! You're Mr. Huber's girlfriend, for heaven's sake. You

don't have to be

afraid of them."

When Mrs. Denton heard her brother's name mentioned, she gave Oriana a cold once-over, her eyes filled with

mockery.

“So, you’re Keaton’s latest flame?”

One of Oriana’s friends quickly chimed in. “That’s right, scared now, are you? Let me tell you, our darling Oriana is the apple of Mr. Huber’s eye. She’s his darling! You mess with her and see how Mr. Huber deals with you! Just you wait and weep!”

“Darling? Please! If I recall correctly, his girlfriend didn’t look like this yesterday morning. Did he switch up yesterday afternoon, or was it last night?”

Her words dripped with sarcasm, and the woman who had spoken earlier flared up, “What the hell, who are you mocking?! What does it matter when they made it official? Oriana is Mr. Huber’s girlfriend now!”

Jessamine’s brows furrowed. “Say that again. I dare you!”

“I will I-”

Oriana quickly stood up, covering the woman’s mouth with the fastest speed, and turned to Jessamine with a sheepish smile, “Jessamine.”

“Don’t try to cozy up to me. Let her go, and let her speak her mind, and after she’s had her say, she won’t be needing her tongue anymore!”

People were stunned.

“Wha-What? She’s saying... she and Mr. Huber...”

Oriana, blushing and biting her lip, clutched at her clothes, looking the very picture of misery as she said, *Jessamine, I’m sorry, my friend didn’t know who you are.”

89-38

Eter

“Don’t you dare call me ‘Jessamine, who do you think you’re fooling? Whether you know me or not is beside the point. You’re not so big yet you’re already playing the bully with someone else’s power, trying to leverage the Huber family’s influence. But even if you want to be the Huber family’s lapdog, you’d first need to ask if th Huber family is willing!”

Jessamine was not one to be trifled with, and Oriana’s entourage bowed their heads in fear. Tears were wetting up in Oriana’s eyes.

“Oriana!” Keaton rushed in, panting heavily.

It was clear he'd hurried over after receiving a call from his distressed girlfriend. A model boyfriend during the

throes of romance.

From afar, Keaton saw Oriana looking distressed and frowned deeply. He quickly strode over to her.

Oriana looked up, seeing Keaton she felt even more aggrieved. "Keaton."

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 102[620 words]

Oriana's eyes welled up, and tears began to cascade down her cheeks, a picture of utter distress.

Keaton, with a dark expression clouding his face, made his way towards Oriana, but before he could reach her...

"Stop right there!" Jessamine's sharp voice cut through the air.

It was then that Keaton realized his older sister was also present. He was taken aback and quickly mustered an

apologetic grin.

"Jessamine, what are you doing here?"

"First, you're going to explain to me what the deal is with this woman."

Without hesitation, Keaton owned up, "She's my girlfriend."

"Your girlfriend? Have you lost your mind, or did you donate your eyes to charity? You're picking up random chicks off the street now! What, are you running a junkyard?"

"Come on... let's talk this out. Why the anger? It's not good for your health; it'll make you age faster."

"Shut it! If Mom and Dad were here, they'd be furious! We Hubers may not care about family background when it comes to choosing a spouse, but we insist on integrity and kindness. And look at what you've brought home? Her friends have already started pointing fingers and hurling insults

at me. What's next? Fisticuffs once she's through the door? I might not be important, but the Huber family's

reputation is. She's already throwing her weight around now; imagine the havoc she'll wreak once she's part of the family..."

"That's nonsense. You're the most important."

"Cut the slick talk! You're not getting any younger. I told you to settle down and find a decent wife, but you'd rather hang around these no-good women. You're a disgrace! A real disgrace!"

Jessamine, unable to contain her fury, landed two slaps across Keaton's face.

Keaton, awkwardly wishing he could sink into the ground, could only try to cajole Jessamine. "Come on, give me some credit here. I am your brother, after all."

"If you weren't, I'd have had you thrown into the river by now!"

Keaton's mouth twitched in discomfort. "Let's talk this through. What's the problem? Did Oriana upset you?"

Jessamine ignored him, turning instead to Elysia. "Ms. Thorne, what exactly happened here? Don't be afraid of them: I've got your back. Speak freely."

Only then did Keaton notice Elysia, his eyes narrowing slightly as a look of intrigue flitted across his face.

"Well, well, Ms. Thome, fancy seeing you here."

Elysia was speechless. She hadn't expected the woman's backup to be Keaton! She didn't know Keaton personally, but she was aware of who he was.

Just last night at the Jinpeach Restaurant, she had stumbled into a private room while trying to avoid Gage. He was there with Tarquin...

Considering they knew each other, Elysia immediately frowned, her distaste for Keaton apparent.

Keaton noticed her reaction and with a puppy-dog look, said innocently. "Ms. Thome, don't be so hostile. Even though Oriana is my girlfriend, I promise I won't take sides. Just tell your story."

Jessamine saw her brother grinning at Elysia and scolded him. "Move aside, and keep your distance from Ms. Thorne. Not every woman falls for your charm, and Ms. Thorne is definitely not interested."

Keaton was speechless.

09:38

Was there any other sister in the world who thought her brother wasn't good enough for a married woman with children?

"Ms. Thome, go ahead," Jessamine encouraged her.

Elysia steadied herself and recounted the events that had unfolded earlier.

Jessamine was livid. "Just as I thought, a piece of work who thinks too highly of herself."

She turned her wrath on Keaton, "She's using your influence to bully others, and you're aiding and abetting her! What's your solution? If you don't make this right for Ms. Thorne today. I swear I'll thrash you myself!"

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 103[608 words]

Keaton furrowed his brow, turning his head to glance at Oriana and her entourage.

Oriana's friends were clearly terrified, including her own sister, who stood to the side, trembling with fear.

"You gotta level with me," Keaton said. "If you're innocent, even if my sister comes at me with a baseball bat, I've got your back. But don't you dare lie to me."

Oriana was adamant in her denial. "It's her that's lying! Her son pushed my sister's son first, and he didn't even apologize. That's why I went to confront her. I just wanted to stand up for my nephew, but she went berserk and started throwing punches. Look at my ankle, Keaton! She injured me," Oriana whimpered.

Elysia snorted dismissively. "We can just check the surveillance footage, can't we?"

At that, Oriana shivered noticeably.

Keaton eyed her, then said, "I'm giving you one chance to come clean. If you admit it now, I can let you off with some dignity. But if you lie to me, don't expect me to go easy just because of our relationship."

"I... I don't know... That's what my sister told me. Sister, tell him!" Oriana desperately shifted the blame to the posh lady.

The posh lady broke down in tears. “Yes... yes, it was my son who pushed first, but her son pushed mine too!”

Keaton pursed his lips and called over security. “These women caused trouble; take them to the station and let the officers teach them a lesson.”

The women panicked at Keaton’s words. If he was personally ensuring they were “taught a lesson,” things were serious. Once in the station, it would be hard to get out.

Desperate, they didn’t dare beg Keaton for mercy, turning instead to Oriana.

“Oriana, please, talk to Mr. Huber for us. We can’t go to jail! Oriana, help us out. We only stepped in for you,” they sobbed.

Oriana hadn’t expected Keaton to take such drastic action. Just as she was about to speak up, Keaton cut her

off.

“You don’t have to go to jail. Consider it severance pay for our breakup.”

Oriana’s eyes bulged in shock. After all her efforts to get close to Keaton, they were breaking up after just one day?

“Keaton, listen to me, I don’t want to break up. I love you. It was my fault for listening to just one side of the story. I should’ve stopped them from fighting with Ms. Thome. I’ll apologize, okay? Can’t we just not break up?! love you,” Oriana blubbered, trying to wash her hands of any blame.

Keaton remained cool and detached.

“I don’t like clingy women. Don’t embarrass yourself. If you keep this up, I might lose my temper and send you off

too.”

Oriana was speechless. She slumped to the ground, deflated like a burst balloon.

After the wailing group of women were led away, the mall finally quieted down.

Keaton approached Elysia to apologize. “I’m really sorry, Ms. Thorne. This mess is partly on me. Is your son okay? Do you need to go to the hospital to get him checked out?”

Before Elysia could respond, Jessamine interjected, “Scram! We don’t need your ‘concern. Go back to where you came from and stop being an eyesore here.”

09:38:

She didn't want Keaton lingering around Elysia. She was worried that Keaton might take a liking to Elysia.

Jessamine knew her brother's character all too well, and she was truly grateful to Elysia. She didn't want to watch Elysia fall into a pit of fire.

In Jessamine's eyes, any girl Keaton set his sights on was bound for misfortune.

Of course, that didn't include those disreputable women.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 104[585 words]

Keaton paused, the sarcasm dripping from his voice, "Well, well, if it isn't my loving sister!"

He was about to throw another quip when, out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of a certain someone standing on the second floor, enjoying the commotion,

His words halted as he excused himself from Jessamine and headed to find Tarquin.

As soon as they met, the banter began.

"Why didn't you give a guy a heads-up to handle this mess? If you'd dealt with it earlier, my sister wouldn't have had the chance to chew me out, right?"

Tarquin replied with a smirk. "It was me who brought your sister here, to give you a reality check,"

"You? Hat What's the deal? You just doing this for kicks, to laugh at my expense?"

"I find it quite entertaining, actually. Your misfortune is quite the spectacle."

"Dude, you're no friend of mine!"

"I'm your boss."

"Boss, my foot! What's the big idea? Just to cover for Ms. Thorne, you're going to take me down too?"

"It's got nothing to do with her." He simply didn't appreciate Emmett being treated that way.

Keaton didn't buy it. "If you're into her, just man up and say it. No need to beat around the bush."

“At least I’m not afraid of women.”

“Oh, cut the cool act. You’re not afraid because you don’t have a sister! I’m proud to have a sister who loves and spoils me. It’s not fear, it’s affection.”

Jessamine might tease her brother constantly, but her love for Keaton was genuine. She had been his guardian angel since childhood, often putting herself at risk for his sake. Therefore, Keaton both feared and adored

Jessamine.

He swiftly changed the subject, “At least I’ll never be henpecked. Can’t say the same for someone else here. He’s got ‘whipped’ written all over him.”

Tarquin just rolled his eyes and didn’t respond. He glanced down at Elysia and Emmett in her arms, deep in

thought.

“Lowell...” Tarquin muttered something under his breath, and Lowell frowned.

“This... doesn’t seem quite right.”

“If I say it’s fine, it’s fine.”

Lowell just sighed silently.

Keaton chuckled, “Lowell, if you’ve got a bone to pick, just jot it down in your little notebook for now. Trust me, Tarquin here is headed straight to being henpecked. Just you wait until his lady love shows up. Stick with her. and when the time comes, you can use her to get back at him!”

Lowell’s lips twitched slightly as he said. “I’ve got no issues with Tarquin.”

Downstairs, Elysia felt a hostile gaze upon her, but by the time she looked up. Tarquin had vanished from the second floor.

Jessamine had dispersed the onlookers and found a quiet spot to chat with Elysia.

“Your boy must’ve been frightened.”

09:38

‘It’s okay, Emmell’s a tough cookie. Thanks a lot for today. I would’ve been in a real bind otherwise,”

Even if the cops had shown up, it wasn't certain she'd have made it out unscathed. She owed Jessamine bag

But Jessamine brushed it off. "Don't mention it. You're a lifesaver to the Denton family. You have no idea what it was like before we met you... Corbin, he..."

Jessamine's thoughts drifted to the past, and her eyes began to water,

"When he got sick, he wouldn't recognize anyone, not even me or his dad. He had only two ways of dealing with us. Either he'd shut himself away, ignoring us completely, or he'd... lash out, screaming, throwing punches..."

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 105[717 words]

Jessamine's eyes grew redder as she spoke, "Seriously, only when you have a kid like that at home, can you understand how tough it is to be a parent. I haven't had a good night's sleep in two years, nor have I had a peaceful meal... During the first couple of years after Corbin was born, I didn't dare to watch my diet too much because I was breastfeeding. It eventually led to binge eating, and at my heaviest, I nearly tipped the scales at 400 pounds. But ever since the incident with him, I've dropped down to 180 pounds in just two months... It's just so hard... so incredibly hard..."

Elysia listened quietly until Jessamine finished, then she spoke, "I know, these years must have been so hard for you."

Empathy is just a word; those who haven't experienced it themselves can hardly fully understand someone else's feelings.

But as a mother herself, she could understand Jessamine's pain.

Her triplets were five this year, and they'd been sick many times over those five years. Every time any of them caught a fever or a cold, she was terrified, sleepless, never daring to leave her child's side even for a moment.

And Corbin's situation, with the potential for self-harm or worse... The struggles of Mrs. Denton over these years were unimaginable.

Jessamine sniffed and managed a smile. "You wouldn't believe it but the other day after you talked to him, he suddenly called me 'Mommy... I was so close to breaking down in tears. Then he said he wanted my homemade spaghetti, and I... I..."

Overwhelmed, Jessamine couldn't help but cry.

Elysia reached for a tissue and handed it to her. "It'll get better."

"Yeah! It will get better. I only started believing that after I met you. Before you came along, both his father and I had lost hope. We're not short of money in our family, and we've sought out renowned doctors everywhere, but none could cure him. It wasn't until we saw you that we began to hope again... Ms. Thorne, you're Corbin's savior, a guardian angel to the Denton family!"

Elysia quickly interjected. "You're too kind. It was the least I could do. I haven't done much, and I haven't cured him completely..."

The treatment of mental illness is often a very long process. It requires a long period of recovery, stepping out of the shadows completely, to regain health.

"What might seem like a small gesture to you is more valuable than heaven and earth to us." Jessamine continued, "The first time we met by chance, you had left before we could express our gratitude. The second time we tried to offer you something, you wouldn't accept anything. We really do want to repay you, it's just that we haven't found the right way yet."

They tried to give Elysia money, but she didn't take it. They wanted to gift her a house, a car, jewelry. but Elysia refused straight away.

Plus, not knowing much about Elysia made it hard for the Denton family to find a way to show their gratitude.

09:39

Elysia was also quite helpless about this.

The two times she helped Corbin were nothing out of her way, and she never thought about compensation, but then Mr. Denton handed her a check for a million dollars one day.

A million dollars! That number scared her to death.

If they'd offered a few thousand as a token of thanks, she might have accepted, given her financial situation at the time.

ey were u

After all, she knew and she was far from it.

But a million dollars right off the bat? That was too much, and she was too frightened to accept it!

What was a great favor for the Denton family was, to her, too simple a task to merit such a sum.

"I helped you before, and today you've helped me. Let's call it even.

Jessamine immediately protested, “How can this be even? I hardly did anything today, compared to how you helped Corbin...”

“It’s all the same.”

Jessamine sighed, looking at Elysia before breaking into a gentle smile, “In the future, don’t call me Mrs. Denton, it’s too formal. Just call me by my first name, I’m Jessamine, or you can call me Jess if you like.”

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 106[665 words]

“Ah? This... this Isn’t quite right,” Elysia hesitated, a frown creasing her forehead.

“Nonsense, it’s perfectly fine if I say so. Unless, of course, you’re looking down on me,” Jessamine retorted with a playful smirk.

“No, no, not at all. It’s just that I feel... I’m out of my league here,” Elysia admitted, her cheeks flushed with modesty.

“Out of your league? If anything. I’m punching above my weight with you! Look, because of Corbin’s situation, I’ve been a bit of a recluse these past years. Haven’t really hit the social scene, my circle of friends has pretty much dried up. We met because of Corbin, and that’s fate if you ask me. If you don’t mind, let’s be friends from now on. We can be there for each other, lend an ear, share our thoughts and troubles. What do you say?” Jessamine’s eyes were earnest, searching Elysia’s for agreement.

Elysia found it impossible to refuse such a heartfelt offer. “Okay!”

Jessamine beamed. “Great!”

“Ding ding ding...”

The sudden sound of Elysia’s phone interrupted their moment. It was Blossom calling.

“You go ahead and take that,” Jessamine said, gesturing towards the phone.

Elysia nodded and swiped to answer, “Hey, Blossom.”

“Elysia, Elliot and I are just outside the mall. The place inside ran out of strawberry-flavored milkshakes, so we snagged some from a stand out here. It’s a bit crowded; just let Emmett know

there's no rush, okay?"

No wonder they were taking so long; they had stepped out.

"Sure thing, send me your location, and Emmett and I will come find you guys later."

"Will do."

After hanging up, Jessamine asked, "A friend of yours?"

"Yeah, my bestie. We came out together, and she took my other two sons to grab some milkshakes." "Other two? You got three kids?"

"That's right.

"That's lovely. When you've got some free time, bring the kiddos and their dad over. We could have a family get-together."

Elysia chuckled awkwardly. "Well, the kids... they don't have a dad. It's just me raising the three of them."

Jessamine paused, her brow furrowing with concern. "Did something happen to him, or did you split?"

"It was a... mutual parting." Elysia said, her voice tinged with a hint of sadness.

Jessamine understood the unspoken hardship. "You've had it tough."

A mother knows another mother's heart.

"It was difficult at first, but we've settled into a good rhythm. It's not bad."

"Listen, the Huber family has some clout here in Jindale City. If you ever run into any trouble, just let me know. I'll have your back!"

"Thanks, Jess. I appreciate that."

"I was hoping to take you out for dinner today, but since you've got plans with your friend, I won't keep you. However, if you could find some time after you're done, could you swing by the hospital to check on Corbin? He's been doing okay, just starting to resist the hospital environment. He hates the smell of the disinfectants... But I'm not sure about his current condition, and whether he's ready to be discharged, so... I could really use your help."

Before Elysia could respond, Jessamine hurriedly added, as though afraid of a rejection, "If you're busy today, that's fine. Just come by whenever you can."

“I’ll try to make it today, but it might be late,” Elysia considered.

Jessamine’s face lit up with gratitude as she said, “Oh, thank you, thank you!”

Once Jessamine had left, Emmett chimed in, “I like Auntie Jessamine. She’s as kind as you, Mommy.”

Elysia smiled gently. “She’s a wise and kind auntie. We owe her one for having our backs today. Otherwise...”

They would surely have been at a disadvantage. Especially with Oriana around, Elysia knew she would have been at a loss.

It seemed it always paid to do good deeds; you never knew when you’d need a helping hand. If she hadn’t helped Corbin that day, she wouldn’t have met Jessamine.

And today, she wouldn’t have had Jessamine to stand up for her.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 107[595 words]

“Every good deed counts, Emmett. When you grow up, you’ve got to be the kind of guy who helps out, you know? Lending a hand to someone else is like helping yourself.”

“Uh-huh. I will be a good boy, Mommy.”

Elysia chuckled, “Let’s put today’s drama behind us, okay? When we see Blossom and your brothers later, let’s not bring this up, alright?”

Elysia didn’t want Blossom or Elliot and Evan to get upset over something that had already happened.

Emmett scrunched up his little forehead and reluctantly nodded. He was still itching to tattle to his big bros, have them cook up a scheme to get back at those who’d wronged Mommy, but once Mommy said no, he knew he couldn’t squeal. He had to listen to Mommy; he had to be her sweet boy.

Elysia smiled and playfully pinched Emmett’s tiny nose. “You’re the best, kiddo. Mommy’s going to hit the restroom. You need to go?”

“Nope.”

How about you come with me, then? I don't want to lose you.

"No way, that's embarrassing. I'll wait out here for you."

"Okay, then. Don't wander off, you hear?"

"Mm-hmm."

Emmett stood guard outside the restroom while Elysia went in.

She needed to splash some water on her face, maybe fix her hair a bit so Blossom and the boys wouldn't notice anything off.

Thankfully, she could handle herself well; there was no real damage to her face, just a bit of a tender scalp.

A quick rinse and a brush-through, and she looked as good as new.

"Phew..." Elysia exhaled in front of the mirror, flashing her reflection a wry smile.

A smile a day keeps the blues at bay. Life's still pretty sweet. Keep at it!

Pep talk over, she stepped out. But Emmett was gone!

"Emmett?"

No sign of the little guy. Elysia's heart skipped a beat. "Emmett? Emmett, Emmett! Emmett!"

She called out, but there was no answer. Panic set in, and she started grabbing passersby, asking frantically, "Excuse me, have you seen a little boy? Yay high, five years old, wearing a cream sweater and black joggers, real cute kid."

She rifled through her phone gallery for Emmett's photo to show around the mall.

"This little cutie here, with the chubby cheeks, was just waiting by the restroom for me."

"Nope, haven't seen him."

"Sorry, no."

After a fruitless search, Elysia broke down crying, "Where are you, Emmett? Emmett, ohh..."

Tears streaming, she fumbled with her phone to dial 911. Her gut told her those women were out for revenge; they'd snatched Emmett.

Then there was the fear of a kidnapper!

Before she could call the police, a strange call came through.

Without thinking, she swiped to answer, and a chilling, unfamiliar voice reached her. “Your son’s with us. If you want him safe, do exactly as I say.”

She’d never heard the voice before, rough and menacing.

Elysia held her breath, her heart pounding as she asked, “What do you mean? Who is this?”

Then she heard Emmett’s voice, “Let me go! Let me go, you bad man! I want my mommy, I want my

mommy...”

Elysia’s heart lodged in her throat, “Emmett! Mommy’s here! Where are you, baby? Emmett! Emmett!”

“He’s with us, safe for now.”

Elysia was gasping for air. “Who are you? What do you want? Don’t you hurt my son!”

“Just answer a few questions to our satisfaction, and we’ll release your boy. But if you lie, we’ll end this right now!”

Trembling, Elysia could barely stand. “Ask away! I won’t lie, I promise I won’t.”

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 108[569 words]

“What’s your reason for coming back to Jindale City this time?”

“Reason? What reason?” Panic surged through Elysia, her words jumbled as she struggled to find an

answer.

The man repeated his question with visible impatience, “You’ve been away from Jindale City for years. Why the sudden return? Think carefully before you speak! Lie to me, and your son pays the price!”

“I-I... Oh, that’s right, I came back to get my kids registered. They don’t have social security numbers yet, and they need one to enroll in school and get health insurance.”

“And your frequent appearances around some man, what’s the motive there?”

“Man? What man?” Elysia’s thoughts raced, until it clicked, “Are you talking about Elijah’s father?”

“Mm-hmm.”

Tears threatened to spill from Elysia’s eyes. Not him again!

“I never intended to get close to him. I’ve kept my distance all along. If it wasn’t for my son Evan scratching his car the day we got back, I wouldn’t even know he existed! I don’t know why he suspects me of deliberately approaching him. I don’t know why you’re all suspicious of me, but I swear I’m not lying! If I lie, may I never know peace! I have no clue who he is! To this day, all I know is he’s Elijah’s father, I don’t even know his name... oh my god...”

Sobs wracked Elysia’s body.

Meanwhile, Lowell couldn’t help but feel a twinge of pity. He turned to Tarquin and said,

“Tarquin, she doesn’t seem to be acting. There might be some misunderstanding here.”

Tarquin frowned, pressing on. “Are you sure? If you dare to lie, your son is as good as dead!”

“I’m sure! I’m positive! I haven’t lied! Please, don’t hurt him, he’s only five. I swear I don’t know that man. My return wasn’t about him; it was for my children’s registration!”

She was chasing after Tarquin for a divorce, just to sever ties and settle her children’s status.

That was her only goal!

Regardless of whether Elijah’s father was the man from her past, she never intended to confront him, seek revenge or demand child support. She had resented him, yes, but once the children were born, she let go of the grudge.

The children’s presence had healed her bitterness and resentment. All she wanted was a normal life with her kids...

“I’m just a regular single mom, trying to live an ordinary life with my children! I haven’t wronged anyone, haven’t crossed anyone. Why am I always under suspicion? If you refuse to believe anything I say, if in your eyes I’m nothing but a bad woman, then I beg you, don’t harm my son. If you have a problem with me, take it out on me, but let my son go. He’s only five. He’s innocent! Oh god...”

The love Elysia had for Emmett was beyond the typical motherly affection. She loved Elliot and Evan just as much, but for Emmett, her love was mixed with pity and tenderness. She felt sorry for him... Tarquin watched the nearly broken woman on the surveillance screen, his brows knotted. Clutching her phone, she had cried herself into a mess, her slender frame shaking and seeming on the verge of collapse.

Whether she was lying was clear to him.

Her concern for her son was genuine; she wouldn't dare lie, which meant she hadn't been trying to get close to him after all.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 109[658 words]

“What’s on your mind?” Tarquin asked, a hint of suspicion lurking in his tone.

“You didn’t want to get close to Elijah’s father, but what about Elijah? Did you worm your way into Corbin’s life to get to Elijah?”

Elysia shook her head fiercely. “It was an accident, helping Corbin! I just stumbled upon him having a fit in the street, and I helped him instinctively. Later, when the Dentons put out a missing person’s call, I was worried about his condition, so I visited him in the hospital. That’s how our paths crossed. I had no idea who Elijah was before that! Elijah’s father was the one who brought me there. If he hadn’t taken the initiative, I wouldn’t even know Elijah existed, let alone have met him. You can check the facts. I’m not lying!”

Tarquin watched her, his frustration palpable. After a moment, he said impatiently, “Let her go upstairs to get her son.”

Lowell quickly added, “Your son’s at the third-floor arcade entrance. Go find him yourself.”

The call ended.

Elysia’s eyes were red-rimmed as she stumbled towards the third floor.

At the arcade entrance, upon seeing Emmett, she felt a sting in her nostrils and lunged forward to embrace him, bursting into tears.

“Mommy... Mommy...”

“Emmett, you scared me to death. I thought I had lost you, whoops, sorry. I’m a terrible mom. I didn’t look after you well. Did you get hurt? Did they harm you?”

Emmett shook his head quickly. “Some guy just picked me up all of a sudden. I struggled a lot, but he said he got the wrong kid, and didn’t mean to, and then he told me you’d come for me and to wait here without wandering off.”

“What did this guy look like?”

“Tall, skinny, seemed pretty nice, and he even bought me candy. But I remembered what you said, not to take things from strangers, so I didn’t eat it.”

“Good boy, Emmett. Were you scared?”

“Not really, the guy didn’t hurt me or anything. He was nice.”

Elysia held Emmett tight, her heart still racing.

Her phone rang; it was Blossom. They had bought some milkshakes and couldn’t find them on the first floor.

Elysia said, “Emmett and I are on the third floor.”

“Why’d you go up there? We’re heading straight to the seventh floor then. Let’s meet outside the cinema.”

“Okay.”

09:39

Elysia calmed her nerves and gently told Emmett, “If the man didn’t hurt you, he probably did get the wrong person by mistake. Let’s not tell your big brothers about this, okay?”

She didn’t want Elliot and Evan entangled with that man.

“Okay.” Emmett nodded obediently.

“Good boy.” Just as Elysia was about to take Emmett upstairs, she spotted Keaton!

Keaton was a picture of casual charm with his floral shirt, crisp white suit, and the top two buttons carelessly undone, revealing a hint of collarbone and a teasing glimpse of his chest. His eyes, when squinted, exuded a roguish charm.

He was the epitome of a good-looking... rascal!

Elysia wasn’t drawn to men like him. It wasn’t exactly repulsion, but a deep-seated reluctance to engage more than necessary, sensing his lack of seriousness.

She preferred men like Zane and Benjamin – even Lowell was not bad, with a gaze that was clean and sincere.

And Elijah’s dad? Forget it. She liked him even less.

It was clear he hadn’t had a happy life before, which was probably why he always wore such a frosty expression. Like a walking freezer, chilling everything in his path!

But out of respect for Jessamine, Elysia didn’t show her disdain to Keaton, merely asking politely, “Is there something you need?”

Keaton squinted, a mischievous grin spreading across his face as he said, “Don’t be so tense. That mess today was my ex-girlfriend’s doing. I had no idea, honestly. Look, I even turned them all in to the

police, that’s got to count for something, right?”

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 110[595 words]

Elysia’s lips twitched at Keaton’s assertion.

“I’m one of the good guys,” he had said.

Who talks like that? The good guys certainly don’t announce themselves in such a manner. If anything, it made him seem less trustworthy.

Elysia wasn’t interested in prolonging the conversation. “Is that bit of drama from earlier all sorted then? Anything else you need?”

If not, it was time to say goodbye, and not the see-you-later kind.

“Yeah, there’s one more thing.”

“Go on.”

“Look, that whole charade was just Elijah’s father pulling your leg. No one’s snatching kids. Don’t be scared, and don’t overthink it. Definitely no need to call the cops.”

Elysia’s eyes widened in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“It’s exactly as I said. Elijah’s father was the one who took the kid. He was just messing with you.”

Her breathing grew erratic. “How do you know that?”

“I’ve been with him the whole time. Though I did tell him not to freak you out, he didn’t listen.”

Through gritted teeth, Elysia challenged him. “Why should I believe a word you say?”

“Do I look like I’m lying? If you don’t believe me, go ask him yourself. See, he’s right there in the café’s private booth. Hasn’t left yet.”

Without uttering another word, Elysia glanced at the café and, clutching Emmett tight, spun on her heel and left.

She didn’t seek out Tarquin. Instead, she stepped into the elevator and headed up to the seventh floor to find Blossom.

“Mommy, are you upset?” Emmett’s voice was cautious.

“No, sweetheart. I just got worried when you disappeared all of a sudden.”

Shaking with anger, Elysia knew it! She knew it had something to do with that rogue!

Once on the seventh floor, she handed Emmett over to Blossom and whispered, “Take the kids inside, and make sure they wear their masks, especially Elliot and Evan. We can’t let that wild man spot them. He’s lurking around the mall. I’ve got to confront him, but I’ll be back soon.”

Blossom, sensing her anxiety, quickly asked, “Is everything okay?”

“It’s nothing. I’ve got this. Just watch the kids for me. I’ll explain when I get back.”

“Okay, call me if you need anything.”

“I will.” After Elysia headed back down, Blossom ushered the kids into the cinema.

Elysia made a beeline for the café Keaton had mentioned and barged into the private booth.

Tarquin, Lowell, and Keaton were all there.

With fists clenched, Elysia glared at Tarquin like a cornered wildcat.

“Was it you who took Emmett and grilled me over the phone?”

Tarquin frowned, saying nothing.

“Don’t play dumb. If you’re a real man, own up to it! Hiding behind your actions, what kind of man does that make you?”

Tarquin’s expression darkened, but Keaton seemed amused by the whole scene.

Lowell caught Keaton’s look and immediately understood. Keaton had been chewed out by Jessamine because of Tarquin, and he was quick to seek revenge.

No need to ask: Keaton’s smirk said it all. He had been the one to spill the beans to Elysia.

Lowell jumped in to diffuse the situation. “Ms. Thorne, please, just cool off. It’s a misunderstanding.”

“A misunderstanding? So he’s too cowardly to admit it? All bark and no bite, a coward, a snake!”

Tarquin’s temper flared. “Yes, I did it! What are you going to do about it?”

Admitting it so brazenly only infuriated Elysia further. She balled her fists, her breaths short and sharp, eyes locked on Tarquin. “You... alright, alright...”

Shaking with rage, Elysia suddenly lunged at Tarquin like a pouncing tiger.