

Hitched 1141

Chapter 1142

After Emmett's grandparents on her mother's side passed away, the Yeager family cut ties with her early on. With both parents of the White family gone, those relatives from that side weren't stepping in to help either.

If they didn't care, there might not even be anyone to claim her body when the time came.

"Alright, I'll handle it," Tarquin agreed without hesitation.

"And Maria, once she's able to be moved, we'll transfer her to Jindale City. It just so happens Emmett's grandfather is settling down there. We'll all head back."

"Good, I'll call Benjamin Lawson ahead of time to arrange the transfer to his hospital."

"Right, Cecil's in for a heavy sentence this time, isn't he?"

"He is! With all the charges against him, even if he avoids the death penalty, he's looking at life without parole. He'll never see the outside of a prison again."

Elysia said bitterly, "Serves him right! It's all karma!"

She was no saint and felt no pity for Cecil; the harsher his sentence, the better.

"Cecil really did squander a good hand. I wonder what he thinks, now knowing his real dad is Bertram?"

"He already knows. I had a friend tell him."

"Really?" Elysia looked surprised.

Tarquin smirked, "On purpose, just to rile him up!"

Cecil indeed knew by now. He had just learned that his biological father was a big shot, wealthy beyond measure!

He was a bona fide rich kid, with more money than he could ever spend in a lifetime!

And all those glamorous actresses he drooled over? Die-hard fans of his dad!

But then, his dad publicly announced that he wouldn't be inheriting a dime; all his wealth was going to Emmett and Maria.

It was like someone telling you:

"Dude, you hit the jackpot. Your dad's a mogul, you're the real deal rich kid with more money than you can ever spend!"

Just as you're getting thrilled, imagining champagne, sports cars, and beauties, the next second, they add:

"But, sadly, your dad didn't leave you the inheritance; it's all going to your kids and grandkids!"

Cecil was in shock, dumbfounded!

He was stunned, shouting, "Impossible! Absolutely impossible!"

How could he mess up such a good hand? It just couldn't be!

No, no, no!

Was he really that pathetic?

It must be a lie. If his dad was such a big shot, he'd surely find a way to save him. There's no way he'd just abandon him!

"Impossible... It can't be real, no, no, no..." Cecil muttered "impossible" between sobs, slapping himself hard across the face until he cried himself unconscious.

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Back at the hotel, Tarquin was serenading Elysia with love songs.

Elysia loved drifting off to his songs; they always led to sweet dreams.

"I've always wanted to tell you, you bring joy I never expected,"

"Like an oasis to the desert, you said you'd

anyways be with me... It's a

you, through sadness abo

and joy,

giving meaning to the mundane..."

Tarquin's melodious voice filled the bedroom, growing softer and softer.

Not until Elysia was deep in sleep did he quiet down.

Gently withdrawing his arm, he got out of bed, tucked her in properly.

Then, bending down to brush her

hair away from her face, he planted a kiss on her forehead before he went out to the balcony.

With Emmett's situation reaching a happy conclusion, it was time for some comeuppance.

There had been quite a few taking advantage of Emmett's ordeal, and he'd been too preoccupied to deal with them.

Now, with some free time on his hands, it was the perfect moment to teach them a lesson.

Chapter 1143

When you mess up, there's always a price to pay.

It's not enough to just realize your mistake and zip it.

After all, the damage caused when you lash out at someone is real!

Bertram kicked off the morning by sending out a cease and desist letter.

Clayton was hot on his heels, having the PR team at Hawkins Sea-freight do the

same.

One was defending his grandson's honor.

The other, his daughter's.

These weren't your average cease and desist letters.

After all, behind Bertram was the entire fashion and film industry, along with some heavy-hitting investors!

And behind Clayton was the world-renowned Hawkins Sea-freight, along with the enigmatic Patel family!

Offending so many powerful figures at once, what else could they expect but disaster?

As soon as those letters were released, the troublemakers started to quake in their boots.

But then-

Tarquin made his move, and they realized they had been scared too soon.

The real storm was yet to come!

Tarquin was truly fearsome!

Not only did he issue a cease and desist for the personal attacks against Elysia and Emmett.

He also dug up the dirt on those responsible!

With no time for nonsense, he exposed their secrets, effectively ending them on social media!

A public takedown!

Among the exposed were a female influencer with millions of followers, featured in scandalous videos with several partners, her face unblurred to ensure everyone knew who she was.

Then there was an animal lover, caught in extremely cruel acts against animals.

Leaks from inside a charity organization.

And even some officials caught taking bribes.

From high-ranking officials and influencers with millions of followers to your average keyboard warriors, Tarquin laid them all bare.

His approach was indiscriminate!

He not only ruined their careers and reputations but also set them up for a stint with the law.

Their futures were effectively over!

Of course, hefty fines were also part of the deal.

Tarquin made it clear what comes from speaking ill and acting out of turn!

The news was everywhere in no time!

Even the seasoned journalists were dazzled, unsure of where to begin.

It was all explosive news!

The trending topics were like a playground, with new ones popping up with every refresh.

Just when you thought you'd seen the most shocking news, something even more explosive appeared!

Tarquin's actions served as a lesson for all!

Speaking up for justice is for justice is virtuous,

but spouting off about things

knowing about can only

trouble. , to

Misusing your voice to slander others will eventually come back to bite you!

The internet is not a lawless place, so tread carefully!

After defending his wife and son, Tarquin made a call to Lowell,

"Donate all the compensation we received, send blessings to Elysia and Emmett."

"Tarquin, there's something from Jindale City, quite important."

"What happened?"

"Verity's illegitimate son is having some trouble."

Hearing this, Tarquin frowned slightly, "What's wrong with him?"

"He's sick, but the doctors can't figure out what's wrong. It came on suddenly and he's been in the hospital for a week. Dr. Benjamin is worried it might be serious and urged us to come back as soon as possible."

Dr. Benjamin knew the boy had returned from Karl Town and might be linked to

some mysterious figure.

He was concerned that if Tarquin didn't

potentially passed away, thevel.net potern before the boy

lose a crucial lead.

Tarquin's brow furrowed, "I understand."

After hanging up, he seemed troubled by the thought, lighting a cigarette with a stern expression.

Elysia slept through to the evening, waking up to find the internet still buzzing.

Tarquin remained at the top of the trending list, with other news stories continuously shifting the rankings.

Chapter 1144

Elysia grabbed her phone from the nightstand, intending to check the time, but the push notification on the screen instantly caught her attention.

She was wide awake in a heartbeat!

Tapping into Tarquin's trending topic, she scrolled through the comments.

#Just saying, who wouldn't fall for such a powerful and commanding man? Not just women, even a guy like me is totally smitten!#

#If I can't be Mr. Bradford's man in life, I'll be his ghost in death! When I die, I'm gonna haunt him day and night!#

#While Emmett's story showcased Ms. Thorne's virtues, the feud over who gets the guy with her is absolutely unforgivable!#

Elysia skimmed a few comments, her mouth twitching at times, and at others, she shivered with disbelief.

The love for Tarquin was... indescribable!

After surfing the web for a while, laughing at some bizarre comments, and learning why Tarquin was trending again, her lips curled into a smile involuntarily, her face radiating happiness, her heart filled with warmth.

Glancing around the room, she spotted Tarquin on the balcony.

He stood there with his hands in his pockets, tall and striking, his long legs particularly eye-catching.

His profile was stunning, as if he'd stepped right out of a comic book.

Wrapping herself in a robe, Elysia went out to him.

Tarquin, sensing her approach, turned and smiled upon seeing her, looking even more handsome.

"You're up."

"Yeah." Elysia walked over and hugged him from behind. "Something on your mind?"

"No."

"Liar."

Elysia's certainty made Tarquin turn around to face her, his eyes narrowing with curiosity.

"How can you be so sure I'm preoccupied?"

"You smell like smoke. You always smoke when you're worried. I know you."

Tarquin affectionately tousled her hair.

"Smarty-pants, I only had one, didn't dare to smoke more. I'll shower in a bit."

He knew Elysia disliked the smell of smoke.

Elysia kept her arms around his waist, not letting go.

"I'm not upset about the smoking. I'm asking what's bothering you?"

After Emmett's incident, everything had settled down nicely; they should all be happy.

But Elysia could sense his melancholy.

"If you don't want to talk about it, that's fine. I won't press you. But I want you to be happy. You're the heart of our family; if you're not happy, none of us can be."

Tarquin lifted her into his arms, hugging her, his chin resting on her head.

He did have something on his mind, about a mysterious figure.

"Elysia, if one day you found out someone close to you had deeply hurt you, what would you do?"

Elysia immediately became alert, looking up at him with wide eyes, asking,

"Who hurt you? How did they hurt you?"

Tarquin pulled her closer into his embrace, fibbing,

"It's not me. I'm talking about a friend's experience."

Before Elysia could discern the truth in his words, Tarquin shifted the conversation.

"Let's not talk about that. How long do you think before we can head back to Jindale City?"

Elysia countered, "Are you in a rush to get back?"

"Not particularly."

Elysia knew there had to be something up in Jindale City.

Trying to ease her concerns, Tarquin added, "It's just work stuff, nothing for you to worry about."

Elysia sighed softly,

"If you're in a hurry, we can go anytime. I'll wait for Maria to get through the critical phase, then we'll handle Claire's funeral with Emmett and head back."

"There's no rush these next few days. We'll go back together."

"Are you sure that won't interfere with your work?"

"It won't."

Tarquin held Elysia close, his brows furrowed.

Truth be told, he was torn. He wanted to rush back and expose the mysterious figure, yet he also wanted to escape.

He feared that confirming his suspicions back home would unleash a torrent of anger, frustration, and pain.

Chapter 1145

At dinner, Elysia noticed that Emmett was unusually downcast.

The little guy barely touched his food, just sipping on some chicken soup.

It pained Elysia to see him like this.

Lately, a lot had happened around Emmett. Even though he was young, these events were taking a toll on him.

If it weren't for Cecil cozying up to the press and leaking those stories, even sharing Emmett's photos.

She would have handled it privately, making sure Emmett never found out.

It wasn't something to be proud of. Knowing would only make the child sad.

Elysia frowned internally, cursing Cecil for his actions!

He was nowhere near fit to be Emmett's father!

After dinner, Elysia found an excuse to take Emmett downstairs alone.

Mother and son sat on a bench in the garden, stargazing.

After a bit of small talk, Elysia asked,

"Emmett, you're troubled about something, aren't you?"

Emmett turned to look at Elysia, his long eyelashes fluttering.

Elysia smiled tenderly, stroking his hair with immense gentleness,

"Emmett, you've said before that mommy can share her worries with you, so if you have any worries, you can share them with mommy too. We're mother and son, but we're also best friends, right?"

The little guy nodded, his eyes reddening before he even spoke.

Elysia immediately pulled him into a hug,

"Is something making you sad, Emmett?"

As soon as his mom mentioned it, Emmett's tears started flowing, sobbing uncontrollably.

"Mommy, it hurts... it really hurts..."

Elysia felt a pang of heartache, holding Emmett tightly, offering him the warmest embrace to let out his emotions.

"Mommy knows, mommy understands, I'm here for you."

The little guy sobbed, taking a while before he managed to speak,

"I don't want to go back to her, but I wish she could be happy."

"She gave birth to me, and I'm grateful to her, but now she's gone... I don't want her to be gone..."

Emmett was mourning Claire's death.

Elysia felt an immense sorrow for him.

This child was inherently kind-hearted. He didn't have much of a connection with Claire, but in his eyes, since Claire gave birth to him, she was his benefactor.

And now that his benefactor was gone, he was heartbroken.

"Death is a part of life, and no one can stop it. But I know she loved you, Emmett, and she wouldn't want you to be sad because of her passing. If you're happy, that's what would make her happy."

"How about we organize a beautiful funeral for her the day after tomorrow? She brought you into this world, and you'll help her move on to the next, as a way to thank her for bringing you into our lives."

Emmett nodded vigorously, "Yeah!"

"Mommy, will I... will I become a bad person?"

"They say... my father killed my mother, they say he was a bad man, and that I'll turn out bad too."

Elysia clenched her teeth internally, cursing those who slandered Emmett!

May they find their place in hell sooner!

They had no idea, or perhaps they didn't care, about the psychological trauma their cruel words could inflict on a child!

"No, sweetheart! Just because your father did bad things doesn't mean you will too. Look at your grandfather; he was a good man, but your father turned out differently."

Not all bad traits are inherited, and you, my dear Emmett, are the living proof of that.

Chapter 1146

Emmett clearly didn't inherit Cecil's wickedness.

Upon hearing Elysia's words, Emmett relaxed significantly and asked, "Then... why would Dad want to hurt Mom? Aren't spouses supposed to be loving?"

Elysia replied honestly, "Not every couple in this world lives in harmony."

Emmett pressed on, "Would Dad ever hurt Mom?"

Elysia laughed at his question, "Of course not, honey. Dad treats Mom very well."

Emmett sighed in relief, seeming to find solace in her words.

He was saddened by Claire's death, especially learning that she was killed by her own husband, which made him worry for Elysia.

Innocent as Emmett. Kind as Emmett. Heartwarming as Emmett.

"Mom, will my sister get better?"

Elysia sighed quietly, "We hope she will, but if things don't go as planned, we need to accept it calmly. Life has its ups and downs."

"But your sister would want you to be happy, Emmett. If you're happy, she'll be happy too. Can you be a cheerful little guy for her?"

"Yeah!"

Elysia smiled, ruffling Emmett's hair again, "Feeling better now?"

"Yeah."

"Hungry?"

"Yeah."

"How about we go back and I make you some late-night snacks?"

"Yeah!"

Having felt better, the little guy realized he was hungry. Elysia's mood lifted with her son's spirits, and she carried him back to their room upstairs.

Tarquin and the other kids were still awake, looking anxious as they returned.

It was clear to everyone that Emmett was upset, and they were all worried about him.

Elysia announced, "Emmett's feeling better now, no need to worry. We've got a hungry little champ here needing some food."

A collective sigh of relief went through the room, calming everyone down.

"I made some snacks for Emmett earlier; let me get them," Tarquin said, heading to the kitchen.

He knew the little guy hadn't much for dinner and would be

prepared some late-night snacks especially for Emmett. .net

hungry upon returning.

The kids chimed in with their support, "Emmett, don't be sad. Even if your mother is gone, you still have us. We will always love you!"

"We'll protect you and always be with you!"

Baby, hugging Lan, cooed, "Emmett, don't be sad. Baby wants you to always be happy."

Moved, Emmett nodded vigorously, "Yeah!"

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The next day brought both good news and an unsettling event.

Maria's vital signs were stabilizing. Though she hadn't woken up, she was out of immediate danger. The little girl had fought hard to stay alive.

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What was distasteful, however, was the sudden appearance of people who had never shown their faces before, now arriving at the hospital with gifts for Maria, shedding tears and calling her a 'poor child! .net

They even raced to offer to adopt Maria.

Elysia found out they were relatives from Cecil's side, a bunch of outrageous family members!

Now they were calling Maria a 'poor child'. Where were they before?

When they and Cecil were calling Maria worthless and wishing her dead, did they not think she was pitiful then?

It was only because Bertram had returned that they saw Maria as a phoenix rising from the ashes, hoping to gain some benefit.

The nerve they had to show up!

Elysia had initially decided to ignore them, but her patience wore thin.

Together with Blossom, they fiercely confronted these shameless relatives before having security escort them out.

Chapter 1147

In the morning, after visiting Maria at the hospital, Elysia and Tarquin took Emmett for a somber trip to the funeral home to arrange the details for Claire's funeral the

next day.

Elysia even let Emmett personally select a plot for Claire's final resting place.

On the third day, it was time for Claire's funeral.

Emmett attended as her son, deeply feeling the weight of the moment.

Elysia and Tarquin were there as friends, their presence a silent support.

Pamela and a few of the younger kids came along too.

Blossom and Hollis made their appearance, a gesture of respect and closure.

No matter what had transpired in Claire's life, now was not the time for judgments. Everyone came together to pay their respects, acknowledging the dead's dignity and thanking her for bringing Emmett into the world.

Bertram made a point to come in person, bowing deeply to Claire in gratitude for her contributions to the Gibson family, leaving behind good children despite everything.

What Elysia didn't expect was the arrival of Claire's uncles and aunts.

A few of Claire's cousins also showed up, their arrival filling the chapel with genuine sorrow. Their cries and heartfelt grief tore through the somber silence.

After shedding their tears, they turned to Elysia and Tarquin, bowing deeply in gratitude.

"We're deeply grateful for what you're doing for Claire, especially after all the trouble she caused. It means the world to us," they said, their voices thick with emotion.

"Claire was essentially a good person who just fell in with the wrong crowd, especially Cecil, that good-for-nothing," they lamented, their sorrow palpable. Through their stories, Elysia learned of Claire's troubling journey. Claire had fallen hard for Cecil, a charming bad boy, from the first moment she laid eyes on him.

But Cecil, surrounded by admirers, never noticed Claire. She pursued him relentlessly, from high school crush to open courtship, for nearly a decade before they finally became a couple.

Their union, however, was not born of love but of convenience. Cecil's family had fallen into disgrace and debt, turning him into a pariah among his peers and leaving him desperate.

The girls who once adored him disappeared, and his friends turned their backs, leaving only Claire by his side, tirelessly working to clear his debts.

The Yeagers, a well-to-do family with a successful local business, had welcomed Cecil with open arms, treating him as their own. But Cecil saw this not as a gesture of acceptance but an opportunity to

exploit.

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His relationship with Claire was a means to an end, a way to secure a comfortable

life without lifting a finger.

Cecil's lack of ambition and responsibility placed all financial

burdens on Claire, and by extension

her parents, Barnaby and Nora. Despite their generosity, Cecil remained a leech, manipulating Claire for money to cover his gambling debts.

In a desperate bid to settle his dues, Cecil convinced Claire to persuade her parents to sell their business, a decision that would strip the Yeager family of their livelihood for his sake.

Chapter 1148

Barnaby and Nora were beside themselves when Cecil and Claire orchestrated their own kidnapping drama.

There was no way Barnaby and Nora could just stand by when it came to their daughter. They sold their house, their little corner store, everything they owned, just to gather enough cash to pay the ransom for their daughter.

But when they found out the whole ordeal was a sham, cooked up by their own daughter and son-in-law, they were livid. It was a devastation that they couldn't recover from.

Without the income from the Yeager family business, the couple was left without any means to support themselves.

They started reaching out to Claire's extended family for help, which only stirred up more trouble. The relatives were already furious, advising Claire to leave Cecil, but she wouldn't listen, pushing them away to the point of cutting ties.

Life became even harder, and Cecil's frustration often resulted in him lashing out at Claire, even when she was pregnant.

Then Maria was born, and tragically, she had a congenital illness. Cecil blamed Claire, and just days after giving birth, she found herself on the receiving end of his wrath once again.

Claire's relatives couldn't understand it. Was she bewitched? They knew she wasn't foolish, she must see how Cecil treated her!

Why then, would she not leave him?

Listening to the story, Elysia thought she had the answer.

Claire was the textbook definition of being blinded by love. Once she fell, she revolved her entire existence around Cecil, losing herself and everyone else in the process. Her world narrowed down to pleasing Cecil, whatever the cost.

Over time, her sacrifices for Cecil only grew.

Elysia guessed, Claire wasn't dumb. She must have seen the reality of their relationship the moment Cecil turned violent. Her refusal to leave him likely stemmed from a deep-seated unwillingness to accept defeat.

After investing so much into the relationship, accepting it ended in divorce was something she couldn't stomach. It was an unhealthy obsession.

In an attempt to convince herself to stay, she might even delude herself into believing Cecil truly loved her.

Love had become her prison, and she chose to remain in that suffering rather than step out.

It was a bitter pill for Barnaby and Nora. To put it harshly, they might have been better off not having a daughter at all.

Elysia sighed deeply, a wave of melancholy washing over her.

Girls can be gentle, but they must also be clear-headed.

Think more for oneself and those who truly love you. Be decisive, reject being blinded by love!

Don't let obsession harm yourself and others.

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After Claire's funeral, the family tried

to regain some semblance of normalcy before heading back to Jindale City without Bertram, who stayed in Silver City with Maria until her health stabilized enough for travel.

Blossom decided to stay a few more days in Silver City with Hollis and didn't return with them either.

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The family of eight set off at night and arrived back in Jindale City the next morning. It had been a while since they were home, and the household staff to see them return, especially the kids, whom they greeted with the warmth of seeing their own grandchildren.

The children, feeling the love, affectionately called them 'Heath' and 'Iris', making everyone's hearts swell with joy.

Pamela, too, was happy and unfazed by the new environment. The staff, well aware of Pamela's relationship with Elysia, treated her with warm hospitality and had already prepared a room for her.

Elysia couldn't help but reflect: There's no place like home!

Upon arriving in Jindale City, Tarquin was preoccupied with worry. He barely settled in before claiming work obligations and rushing out, skipping breakfast.

He didn't head to the office, though. His destination was the hospital where Verity's secret child was being treated.

Chapter 1149

After arriving at the hospital, Tarquin immediately sought out Benjamin to inquire about Verity's illegitimate son's condition.

However, Benjamin hadn't been able to see him in person and had to relay the details over the phone.

"His condition is deteriorating rapidly, more severe with each passing day. He's infected with an unknown virus we've never encountered before," Benjamin explained with a tone of urgency.

"And this virus is mutating quickly; we haven't managed to develop a cure yet."

"What's certain, though, is that the virus is contagious, and while it doesn't infect everyone, it's highly transmissible. Several nurses who've been in contact with him have already shown identical symptoms."

"I haven't been infected yet, but as a precaution, we've quarantined everyone who's been in close contact with him."

Tarquin frowned, his thoughts drifting back to the pandemic from a couple of years ago.

"Did he contract this before returning, or did it develop after he came back?" Tarquin asked, trying to piece everything together.

"It seems he was already infected before his return. The virus has an incubation period where the infected show no symptoms," Benjamin clarified.

The illegitimate son had returned from Karl Town, a move orchestrated by a mysterious figure to distract Tarquin from wreaking havoc in Oceanopolis. The fact that he was sent back indicated that, like Verity, he was now considered expendable.

The virus in his system was almost certainly linked to the mysterious figure!

"Can I see him?" Tarquin asked, a mixture of concern and curiosity in his voice.

"Yes, but I advise against direct contact. You can communicate with him through a glass partition using an intercom," Benjamin suggested.

"Alright." With that, Tarquin disconnected the call and went to see Verity's illegitimate son.

The young man was isolated in an intensive care unit, his body weakened but his mental state

fluctuating between lucidity and net

confusion. At times, he didn't even recognize himself, reminiscent of early-stage dementia, though his symptoms - fever, coughing, and coughing up blood - were far more severe.

Noticing someone approaching, he turned his head and saw Tarquin through the glass. Recognition flashed in his eyes, his expression cycling through a range of emotions.

"It's you! You! You're the one who ruined my life, destroyed everything!" he accused, voice tinged with bitterness, before gasping for air from the effort.

Tarquin, hands in his pockets, watched him impassively. Despite the young man's haggard appearance, his resemblance to

a trait he inherited from his mother, Verity. The sight of his face filled

Gideon Bradford was unmistakable

Tarquin with distaste.

The Bradfords, none of them were worth his time.

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Ignoring the baseless accusations, Tarquin cut to the chase, "Right now, I'm your only chance at survival."

The illegitimate son paused, skepticism evident on his face. "You? Save me? Do you even know what this virus is? How can you possibly save me?"

"I don't know what it is, but I'm your only hope. Without my help, you're as good as dead. I can have the hospital cut off your medication right now," Tarquin stated bluntly, his voice devoid of emotion.

The young man scowled, unable to argue with the cold, hard truth.

Tarquin continued, making his stance clear, "I'm not interested in wasting time on empty talk. You're well aware of your current predicament."

"By sending you back to Jindale City, he's already abandoned you. The virus he's infected you with is proof enough."

"I bear no personal grudge against you; our issues stem from the previous generation. So, I'm willing to make an effort to save you, or I could just as easily walk away."

"And even without your cooperation, I'll eventually uncover his identity, sooner or later."

Chapter 1150

The young man glared at him for a few tense seconds before speaking up, "So, what do you want from me?"

"I'm here to make a deal. You spill what you know, and I'll get people on trying to save your hide. Whether they manage to or not, well, that's on you."

"And if I don't wanna talk?" the young man challenged.

"Simple. I leave, and you can kiss your ass goodbye," Tarquin replied with an indifferent shrug.

The young man ground his teeth in frustration.

He had anticipated Tarquin coming to him, but not like this. So calm, so detached. He had expected Tarquin to do everything in his power to pry information out of him, not act like he didn't give a damn.

The young man couldn't get a read on Tarquin's psyche and didn't dare push too hard. After all, staying alive was his top priority, and right now, Tarquin was his only lifeline.

"I don't know his real identity. All I know is there's a massive research facility beneath the newspaper office. They've been conducting experiments in secrecy, using the staff as their guinea pigs," the young man reluctantly shared.

"Guinea pigs?"

"Yeah, they'd inject us with stuff periodically, keep us under constant surveillance, taking notes on every possible metric."

"What are they researching?" Tarquin pressed.

"Details? I'm in the dark as much as you are. All I know is that we were their lab rats."

Tarquin frowned, his mother had worked at that newspaper too. Was she one of their lab rats?

After a brief silence, Tarquin asked, "What exactly does he want from me?"

The young man exhaled deeply, "Something vital to their research, incredibly important to them. Apparently, it's the result of over twenty years of work, and your mother somehow managed to get her hands on it."

"After your parents died, they turned

their focus on you. Initially, they thought you had it, but then realized you were clueless about its

existence. They figured such an important item would only be hidden somewhere connected to you, somewhere only you could find."

"So, they've been watching you, from childhood up till now!"

Tarquin immediately asked, "But he's been trying to kill me too, why? How would he find the item if I were dead?"

"At first, he didn't want you dead. But

then, believing they could replicate the results without needing what your mother took, they thought about@liminating you. However, when their efforts failed, they were glad you were still alive," the young man explained.

Tarquin remained silent, processing.

"This is hearsay, I can't guarantee its truth," He added after a moment.

Tarquin gave him a longer look, then asked, "Have you ever been to that research facility?"

"No, us surface-level folks aren't

allowed down there. And frankly, wouldn't want to go. Everyone who

own, except their own

scientists, never comes back up."

Tarquin fell silent again, his mind racing with thoughts.

"Is he a foreigner or a local?" Tarquin finally inquired.

"A local," the young man answered.

Tarquin's expression tightened visibly, a clear sign of distress.

The young man frowned, "You seem like you might know who it is?"

Without a word, Tarquin turned and left.

Sitting alone in his car, Tarquin lit a cigarette, taking long, deep drags in silence,

one after another.