

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 121[639 words]

The Dentons had taken Corbin out to Jinpeach Restaurant today.

What did this mean?

It meant Corbin was getting better. His autism was receding, and he could now step out into the world like any other kid.

It was such a slap in the face to all those green with envy.

Tarquin was taken aback. He whipped out his phone to catch up on the latest news.

Sure enough, Corbin's outing to Jinpeach Restaurant was trending.

Even though Elysia's face was blurred out in the photos circulating online, Tarquin recognized her instantly.

No need to wonder—Elysia was the hero behind Corbin's brave new step!

After staring at his phone for a while, Tarquin retreated to his study and dialed Benjamin's number.

“So, Elysia visited Corbin at the hospital today?”

“Uh-huh. What's up? I thought you didn't want to hear about her anymore. Why the sudden interest?” Tarquin's face darkened, and he changed the subject, “Corbin's out and about, eating like the rest of us. Is he recovering that fast?”

“Yeah, all thanks to Ms. Thorne. I told you she was good, but you wouldn't believe me!”

Tarquin just grunted.

Benjamin went on, “Just you wait, the Dentons are going to offer Ms. Thorne a hefty salary to keep her on.”

Tarquín frowned and hung up. He mused with a grim expression, then grabbed his car keys and left the house.

After dinner, Elysia made her way back to Blossom's neighborhood.

Blossom had messaged her earlier to say she'd canceled the Airbnb and moved all her things over.

The little trio was already there in the neighborhood.

The Dentons had dropped her off, and after saying goodbye, Elysia walked towards the neighborhood entrance.

But she hadn't gone far when she spotted someone!

He was sitting in his car, smoking a cigarette with the window rolled down. She could see his handsome face and his hand resting on the window sill with a cigarette between his fingers.

And there, on his chin, were the marks she'd left.

Elysia's heart skipped a beat.

Why was he here?

What was he doing here?

Elliot and Evan were in this neighborhood. Could he-?

No, that wasn't right. If he'd found out about Elliot and Evan, he wouldn't be sitting out here alone. He would've taken the kids for a DNA test already.

So, he hadn't discovered Elliot and Evan.

Then why was he here? Looking for her?

She'd just moved in tonight; how could he know she lived here?

Maybe... he didn't know?

Maybe he was just visiting his friends, not her?

Elysia thought quickly. She whipped out a mask from her bag, put it on, and lowered her head as she continued walking, pretending not to see him.

The closer she got, the more nervous she became.

She was almost beside him when she pleaded inwardly that he wouldn't see her.

"Stop right there!"

Elysia was startled. She shrank into herself, pretending not to hear, and kept walking. But he sounded annoyed, “Do you want me to get out of the car and invite you personally? Elysia!”

Elysia clenched her teeth!

He had called her out by name. There was no escape now. She reluctantly stopped, turned around, and looked at him warily.

“What do you want?!” she asked.

“Get in the car!”

“Why? If you’ve got something to say, say it. If not, I’m heading home.”

Tarquin’s brows furrowed, and his gaze was as sharp as a knife.

Elysia’s heart skipped again. Knowing she was at a disadvantage in front of him, she reluctantly got into his car.

Once inside, she immediately said, “I’ve already warned you today. If you hassle me again, I swear I’ll fight back! And just so you know, there are two security guards at the entrance. The security here is no joke. If you try anything outrageous. I’ll scream.”

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Tarquin shot her a disdainful look, then got straight to the point, “Come over to my place tomorrow.” “Huh?”

“To look after Elijah.”

Elysia blinked and was a bit dazed, “What do you mean?”

Tarquin flicked the ash from his cigarette. The smell mingling with the air made Elysia cough a few times.

Tarquin frowned in annoyance, but he extinguished his cigarette nonetheless.

“Benjamin mentioned you’re versed in child psychology and have some medical skills. You’re already briefed on Elijah’s condition; he has bipolar disorder. From tomorrow, you’re going to start as a nanny and take care of him.”

Despite the many questions still swirling in his head, after using Emmett to interrogate her at the mall today, he no longer doubted her. And with Elijah's condition worsening, he couldn't afford to hesitate anymore.

That's why he had come.

Elysia was stunned upon hearing it.

Was he asking for a favor?

Was this how you ask someone for help?

She thought he was coming to tie up loose ends!

Once Elysia understood his purpose, she regained some boldness,

"I get where you're coming from. Any parent would do whatever it takes to help their kid, but I can't agree to your request. I..."

Before she could finish. Tarquin cut her off impatiently, "I'm not here to ask you for a favor; I'm here to give you an order."

Elysia glared, "An order? On what grounds do you order me around?!"

He said coolly, "Because you owe me money."

Elysia was deflated like a balloon, her bravado suddenly vanishing. The little bit of confidence she had mustered up dissipated.

Lips quivering, Elysia muttered, "About the fifty million... I... Didn't I mention that before? Your girlfriend started it by hitting my son, and he only scratched your car in retaliation. That debt should be settled, right? We're even."

A hint of mockery flashed in Tarquin's eyes. He didn't bother to clarify his relationship with Nola, simply stating, "If someone hit your son, take it up with them. Your son damaged my car, so I'm coming to you. If you have a problem with that, I'll see you in court."

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Elysia was fuming, her lips pressed tightly as she glared at him. She wanted to hit this man.

Tarquin, with his handsome face, looked at her and continued, "Either pay me back now, or start as a nanny at my place tomorrow. Your choice."

Elysia huffed, "You know I don't have the money and yet you're making me choose. Do I even have a choice?!"

“Good. Be at my place tomorrow to start as a nanny.”

“What if I refuse?”

“We’ll get the police involved.”

“You...”

“You have one minute to decide. If you can’t, I’m calling the cops.”

“Are you... Do you even realize you’re bullying me?”

“No clue. All I know is that debts are meant to be repaid. You’re not skipping out on me.”

Elysia was speechless.

Tarquin glanced at his watch, starting the countdown.

Elysia’s heart hammered in time with the ticking second hand. As the minute drew to a close, she blurted out, “I’ll go! I’ll be at your place tomorrow!”

Tarquin, expressionless, wasn’t surprised by the outcome. He started the car, issuing an eviction,

“I’ll send someone to pick you up in the morning. Get out.”

Elysia, cheeks puffed in anger, held onto her last shred of dignity. “I’m not a morning person, so don’t come looking for me at the crack of dawn. After eight-thirty!”

Tarquin rolled his eyes, ignoring her.

The moment Elysia’s feet hit the pavement, the car zoomed away, splashing her with slush.

Elysia, breathing erratically with anger, watched his taillights disappear and cursed under her breath for a long time before finally heading home.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 123[647 words]

Blossom caught sight of her and immediately called out, “Aren’t you home early? What took you so long?”

Elysia heaved a sigh, but chose not to explain just yet. Instead, she asked, “How are the kids?”

“Sound asleep.”

“Again?”

“Yeah, I took them down to the playground before you got home. They played on the and were crashed after coming back. How was your meeting with the Denton family?”

“It went well. The Dentons were really appreciative.”

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“Of course they are grateful to you. Corbin is the only heir to the Denton legacy. They were beside themselves with worry when he fell ill, what with all the rumors flying around. Now that he’s getting better, the Dentons must be over the moon. Heard you went out for dinner with them, and it event made the trending news.”

“What?”

Blossom chuckled, “Don’t worry. I know you like to keep a low profile. They pixelated your face in the photos.”

Elysia breathed a sigh of relief, “That’s good to hear.”

“You look beat. Go freshen up, we’re bunking together tonight.”

“Alright.”

After checking on the little ones and freshening up. Elysia lay down and asked, “Blossom, you’re

working tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah. Why? I can take a day off if you need something. Our boss is pretty easy-going.”

“I do have something tomorrow. Could you possibly take the triplets to daycare for a bit of a trial run?”

“Sure thing, no problem at all. What’s on your plate?”

Elysia felt the weight of her worries. She recounted the incident that had occurred at the entrance of their apartment complex.

Blossom’s eyes went wide as saucers, “He’s threatening you to work for him in secret? What’s his angle? He’s not got the hots for you, has he?”

“Hardly! Didn’t you see how he treated me? He was downright nasty!”

“So... he really wants you to nanny his son?”

“It looks like it. His son has bipolar disorder too, and I guess seeing me help Corbin stirred something in him. Honestly, I wouldn’t mind helping Elijah, I just don’t want to deal with his father. If he turns out to be Elliot and Evan’s biological dad, the more I interact with him, the more likely I’ll blow their cover.”

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Blossom nodded in understanding. “So what’s the plan now?”

“I don’t know...”

“The best thing would be to pay back that 50 million! Let me talk to Zane about it, I’ll ask my folks for a part of it, and maybe borrow some from Zane. We need to scrape together that 50 million to get him off your back!”

Elysia immediately shook her head. 50 million was a huge amount!

She knew Blossom’s parents and Zane were well off, but that kind of money was astronomical to anyone. She didn’t want her arrival to disrupt their peace.

“Let me first go see Elijah tomorrow. By the way, did you know Zane has a cousin?”

“The one who’s into dance?”

“Yeah?”

“I heard about her from Winona, but I haven’t met her. What about her?”

Elysia felt it was wrong to gossip, but she trusted Blossom, so she shared, “I saw Zane at the hospital today when I went to visit Corbin. He was there supporting his cousin through an abortion.”

“What?!” Blossom was shocked, “Isn’t she still in college? How did she end up pregnant and then having an abortion?”

“Zane said she got pregnant unexpectedly after dating a guy at school. She took a leave of absence, but then they broke up, and there were complications with the pregnancy. The doctors said the baby

couldn’t be saved and recommended termination.”

Blossom was taken aback, “Winona mentioned she was quite a gentle soul. I never imagined she’d be caught up in something like this. Getting pregnant, dropping out, cohabitating before marriage, abortion... Those are all pretty heavy for someone her age.”

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 124[633 words]

Elysia pondered for a moment before asking. “Does Winona know that girl?”

“I’m not sure. Winona rarely talks about her; she maybe mentioned her once or twice. Why do you ask?”

“I saw her at the hospital today, and I just got this vibe that her gaze was kind of... off when she looked at me.”

“Oh?”

Elysia didn’t outright say it was like a jealous lover’s look, but rather, “It felt hostile.”

“Did you guys know each other before?”

“No, I’m positive I’ve never seen her before.”

“Then why would she be hostile towards you?”

“I have no idea.”

“Did you talk to Zane about it?”

“No, but Zane noticed it too. He said she was just in a bad mood and told me not to mind her.”

“Well, that could be it. I mean, losing a baby is heartbreaking, but even so, that’s no reason to be hostile toward a stranger. Sounds kinda cuckoo!”

To be honest, if she was just being rude to her, Elysia could brush it off. The real issue was the way that girl looked at her with the eyes of a rival in love, which made Elysia’s heart flip-flop with anxiety.

“Hey, you never told me, what had you so chipper after you came back from the restroom at the mall today?” Blossom steered the conversation to a more intriguing topic.

Elysia snapped back to reality, her mood instantly lifting as she recalled the incident, “I heard my dear hubby is having a fling with Keaton.”

She dared not speak her husband Tarquin’s name directly.

“What?! No way!”

“For real!”

“But how? Keaton’s known for being a ladies’ man. The whole country knows he goes through girlfriends faster than he changes his socks.”

“He swings both ways, and my husband... he’s into guys.”

“Oh my....” Blossom still found it hard to believe.

Elysia explained, “I only found out today that the reason he won’t grant me a divorce isn’t to get back at me, but to use our marriage as a shield from gossip. You know, an influential CEO liking another man is quite the talk of the town.”

Blossom nodded, “I get that. It’s like something straight out of a TV drama, but it’s the first I’ve heard.

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of it in real life. And shouldn’t you be upset knowing this? If he’s really using you to silence the chatter, he’ll never agree to a divorce, which will it even harder for you to leave.”

“But I can use Keaton to pressure him, can’t I? If they’re involved, Keaton surely wouldn’t want him tied to me, right? Me and Keaton, we’re love rivals!”

Blossom mulled it over, “That sorta makes sense.”

Elysia was excited, “And I happen to have a connection with Keaton’s sister, which means I have a way to get close to him!”

“What’s your plan?”

“I haven’t worked out the details yet, but at least I see a path forward. Today he called and blocked every exit I had, but now, there’s light at the end of the tunnel.”

“Mmm, just be careful. Keaton’s no easy mark. Whether you’re going against him or using him, it’s risky.”

“No worries, I’ve got his sister backing me up.”

“Oh, right. He’s scared of his sister.”

Elysia chuckled, “That’s why I’m on cloud nine today.”

“Well, so it does sound like good news.”

“Yeah, I need you to babysit the trio for me tomorrow. I’m going to check on Elijah and then work out my next steps.”

“Sure thing.”

The besties chatted back and forth for ages before finally drifting off to sleep.

The next day, before the crack of dawn, Elysia’s phone started ringing.

The persistent sound of the alarm was like a thunderclap that not only jolted Elysia awake and nearly scared her hell out.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 125[650 words]

Elysia snatched up her phone with a huff, only to see an unfamiliar number flashing on the screen. Annoyed, she promptly hung up.

But the caller was persistent and dialed again immediately.

With a scowl, Elysia answered, “What?! Who is this?”

“Get downstairs! You’ve got ten minutes!” a frigid voice commanded from the other end before the call abruptly ended.

Elysia was instantly wide awake. That jerk made the call!

“Who was that?” Blossom mumbled groggily. She was barely lifting her eyelids and still yawning as she asked.

Elysia fought to keep her temper in check, “Nobody. Go back to sleep, it’s only five in the morning.”

“Oh,” Blossom yawned and drifted back off.

Elysia, clutching her phone, stomped into the living room and onto the balcony to call back, her voice a hushed roar. “Are you out of your mind? Didn’t I tell you not to come around this early? Look at the time! You’re gonna get what’s coming to you for waking people up. Things will all come back to you!”

“You’ve got eight minutes. If you’re not down, I’m coming up to get you.

Gritting her teeth, Elysia spat back, “You win!”

She angrily ended the call and dashed to freshen up. After checking on the kids and planting a kiss on each forehead, she scrambled out the door.

Reaching the complex’s entrance, she saw no sign of a luxury car.

As she scanned the area, a car horn beeped. It was coming from a nondescript Volkswagen parked on the street, which she glanced at and quickly dismissed.

That guy was loaded; he wouldn’t be caught dead in anything less than a high-end ride.

“Over here!” Tarquin’s voice snapped as he rolled down the window, sounding none too pleased.

Elysia did a double-take. He actually showed up in a Volkswagen?

Since when did Mr. Moneybags roll up in such a car?

Elysia approached and slid into the back seat, immediately launching into a tirade, “What’s your game by torturing me at this ungodly hour? Even the roosters are still snoozing.”

Tarquin ignored her and pulled away from the curb.

Elysia pouted at the back of his head and continued, “We didn’t finish our talk last night. Let’s lay it out now. I can look after your son, but I won’t make any promises about my schedule. I’m not planning to stick around Jindale City for long and not sure when I’ll leave. When I’m ready to leave, you can’t stop me.

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Also, I’m not some live-in nanny. I have my own kids and life to deal with, so I can’t be at your beck and call 24/7. You need to let me head home by six every evening. And if something comes up during the day, I need to be able to leave at a moment’s notice.”

Tarquin just drove in silence.

Elysia clenched her jaw, “If you don’t say anything, I’ll take it as you agree. Plus, I won’t work for free. You’ll have to pay me a fair wage, at least-”

“Do a good job, and it’s ten grand a day.” Tarquin cut in suddenly.

Elysia choked, blinking at him in disbelief, “How much?”

“Ten thousand.”

“Ten thousand? A day?”

He didn’t respond.

Swallowing hard, Elysia took another look at him and suddenly found him less punchable.

If she hadn’t suspected him of being that rogue from her past and getting her pregnant, she might have clung to this high roller and never let go.

This guy was her golden goose!

Elysia cleared her throat delicately and reiterated, “You said it—ten grand a day!”

“There’s a bonus if you do well,”

“A bonus?” Elysia’s eyes widened.

“Yeah. If you can last ten minutes with Elijah today, you get another ten grand, in cash, not as a salary deduction.”

Ten minutes for another ten grand? It felt like finding money on the street.

“You’re sure about this?”

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“Hmm.” Tarquin replied.

“A man’s word is his bond. If you back out now, you’re nothing but a lowlife.”

Tarquin pursed his lips and ignored the comment.

Elysia, not convinced, pressed him again, “By saying ten grand in cash, you mean you’ll hand it to me directly with no strings attached?”

“Hmm.”

“Ha!” Elysia laughed out loud, unable to contain her delight.

Tarquin gave her a look of distaste. Her mood was sour as a lemon until money came into the picture. And when she heard that, she perked up like it was Christmas morning.

Typical money-grubber.

Realizing she might have shown too much enthusiasm, Elysia cleared her throat with a subtle cough, softening her gaze towards Tarquin.

But Tarquin's brow furrowed in response, "I sought you out for Elijah's sake, not to cozy up to me. I can't stand women who lack self-awareness."

Elysia, taken aback, asked, "What do you mean?"

He glanced at her through the rear-view mirror, "Don't even think about seducing me. I've already got someone on my mind."

Elysia's good mood vanished in an instant. She retorted sharply, "Are you out of your mind? Who's trying to seduce you? Do you think you're the golden boy everyone's after? Get over yourself! Don't forget that it was you who came to me, not the other way around. In fact, I should be asking if you're using your son to lure me in!"

Tarquin let out a cold snort, his words laced with mockery, "Me, lure you? That's rich."

"..."

The car pulled into a rundown neighborhood, stopping in front of the last building in the row.

Tarquin killed the engine and, seeing that she was still fuming, reminded her. "That was just a heads-up."

Elysia shot back irately, "I was giving you a heads-up too. If you hadn't brought it up, I would've forgotten. Let's get one thing straight: if you even think about playing me, I'll make you regret it."

"Don't worry, I wouldn't dream of it in this lifetime!"

"Better stick to it!"

Huffing with anger, Elysia reached for the car door, but Tarquin suddenly locked it and turned to her.

"I'm entrusting Elijah to you because I want you to be there for him. If you dare hurt him, I will make you suffer." His tone was even, but each word cut like a blade of ice..

His gaze was even more chilling and worse than a ghoul. It was so intense it seemed like something sinister could leap out of his eyes at any moment.

Elysia, frightened, quickly looked away.

Swallowing hard, she said, “I have no quarrel with him so why would I want to hurt him? Besides, you approached me. If you’re worried, just tell me to leave.”

Tarquin scrutinized her for a moment, then his gaze softened, “I’ll take your word for it now. If you do, well, there will be something in it for you.”

With that, he opened the car door and got out.

Elysia breathed heavily, shaken. That damn Tarquin could be really intimidating when he was upset. For a moment, she wondered if he was even human or some kind of ghoul! It was probably best to keep her distance from such a person.

But as much as she wanted to stay away, she couldn’t escape.

Taking a deep breath, Elysia steeled herself and got out of the car.

The scene before her was baffling.

She had assumed that such a loaded man as Tarquin would surely live in some grand mansion, not in a place that was falling apart at the seams.

The neighborhood was even less inviting than the one in Blossom. It was full of battered tricycles, bicycles, and cars that were worth maybe a few hundreds dollars at best.

Tarquin’s car, a model popular among the masses, seemed downright luxurious by comparison.

“This is where you live?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

“No, I mean, why would you live in a place like this?”

“Why shouldn’t I?”

Tarquin, with his long strides, entered the building and started climbing the stairs.

There wasn’t even an elevator.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 127[695 words]

Elysia couldn't quite wrap her head around the situation.

"U thought you were loaded? I mean, your car alone is worth a fortune, so surely you can afford a decent place. But this... this is pretty rough."

Tarquin's expression remained blank as he replied, "I'm broke and going belly up."

"What? You're broke?" Elysia gasped in disbelief.

"Got a problem with that?"

"No, it's just... how does someone just go broke overnight? When did this happen?"

"Last night."

Elysia was speechless.

To avoid exposing his true identity, Tarquin had brought Elysia to this old family home after his son Elijah was discharged from the hospital the previous evening. This was the house his mother had lived in before she moved abroad.-

"How come I can't see any sign of you being upset about this huge ordeal?" Elysia asked cautiously. Most people would be down in the dumps for a while after such a blow. Some might never get over it.

But looking at him, there was no trace of the grief you'd expect from someone who had just lost everything.

"How do you know I'm not upset?" Tarquin countered.

"I can't see it."

"You're not my close ones, so should I parade my sad feelings in front of you?"

Elysia paused, thinking there was some sense in his words. But something inside her twisted, and she found herself offering comfort, "Life's a roller coaster, you know. Ups and downs are part of the game. You've gotta keep your chin up."

"Chatterbox."

"I'm just trying to show some concern."

"Don't need it."

Elysia's internal monologue was less than charitable. He was such an ungrateful jerk and it just served him right for going bankrupt!

Tarquin climbed to the sixth floor and stopped at room 601.

The old building was a walk-up with six floors, and the sixth was the top. There was no elevator, and each landing had two apartments. Across from him was 602.

Elysia glanced at 602; its door was marked with a cheery "Welcome" sign, and the doormat showed

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signs of frequent use. Clearly, someone was living in thi

Not like Tarquin's place, which had no such warm greetings and a mat that looked brand spanking new. He must be a newcomer.

"By the way, what's your son's name?" Elysia asked.

"Elijah Bradford, but we just call him Elijah."

"Bradford? So, your last name is Bradford?"

Tarquin turned to her, his eyes narrowing with a look that hinted at deeper meanings.

Elysia's eyes widened in shock.

Others called him Tarquin, and now Bradford.

Tarquin Bradford?!!

As her eyes grew larger, Tarquin looked at her with a hint of disdain, "If you've got something to say, spit it out."

He wanted to avoid any idle chatter before meeting Elijah.

Elysia swallowed hard, "What... what is your name?"

Tarquin squinted and didn't reply.

Elysia scratched her head, "It's not too much to ask what your name is if you let me take care of your son, is it?"

Tarquin replied tersely, "Tarin."

He had revised his name a little for he didn't want Elysia to know his identity. Now that he was sure she wasn't trying to get close to him on purpose, he continued to conceal who he was. He didn't want her to harbor any ulterior motives.

After all, the name “Tarquin” carried an allure that was hard to resist. The public didn’t know what he looked like, but there wasn’t a soul who hadn’t heard the name “Tarquin.”

Most women couldn’t resist the lure of wealth and power that name suggested. If she knew, she might try every trick in the book to seduce him.

Meanwhile, Elysia was still processing.

Tarin?

Not Tarquin?

It couldn’t be. Tarquin was a paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair, while this man’s long legs were the picture of health. She must have been overthinking it.

A few letters in names could change everything.

“If your folks had chucked ‘q’ and ‘u’ in your name, you’d share it with one of the richest tycoons around,” she quipped.

Tarquin just shot her a glance and didn’t bite.

Elysia prodded further, “You and Tarquin wouldn’t happen to be related, would you?”

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 128[658 words]

“My name’s Tarin, and that fella is Tarquin. We have no more relationships.”

Elysia just blinked.

Tarquin fished out an old-fashioned key and unlocked the front door, pausing before stepping inside. to issue a reminder, “Look, I brought you here to cheer him up, not to wind him up. If he throws a tantrum, just ride it out, will you? And don’t go poking around about his mother. It’s a sore spot.”

Why, oh why, should she take flak from this guy? Why couldn’t she give as good as she got?

But what could she do? She was outmatched, and her kids were only five. She had to cope.

somehow.

Elysia psyched herself up and pushed down the irritation to ask, “So what’s the deal with his mother? Why did she take off? You two weren’t getting along?”

Tarquin’s frown was immediate and telling. “Don’t ask what you shouldn’t. That’s off-limits!”

Elysia was taken aback.

Wasn’t it standard procedure to get the lay of the land before attempting to treat a patient?

“I just...”

“Get in here!” Tarquin cut her off.

Elysia entered, speechless with frustration. She was starting to realize that having a normal conversation with this man was like talking to a brick wall.

Once inside, she took a quick inventory of the place.

It was a cozy, not-too-shabby three-bedroom with a living room, kitchen, and bathroom—looked to be around 120 square meters.

The decor was rustic charm all the way: hardwood floors, matching cabinets, a dining set, and even a coffee table that all screamed vintage.

The only modern touch was the large flat-screen TV on the wall.

place was spotless and homely, with the wooden furniture complemented by white lace curtains and a couple of tall, leafy houseplants making the room feel warm and inviting.

She never would have pegged Tarin, Mr. Cold-Shoulder himself, for a guy who’d spruce up his home like this. She’d thought his world was all shades of gray, never the warm hues of wood.

Tarquin had already slipped into his house shoes and was heading toward a guest room. He opened the door just a crack and peered inside.

Elysia guessed he was checking on his son and bent down to switch her shoes too. There was a new pair of lady’s slippers on the rack, obviously set out for her. She slipped into them without a word.

But as she was about to follow, Tarquin closed the door to the room.

Elysia’s curiosity was piqued. “Where’s Elijah?” she asked.

“Still asleep.”

“He hasn’t woken up yet?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Then why the heck did you drag me here at the crack of dawn?”

She had assumed Elijah was awake, and that’s why Tarquin had driven to pick her up. But if the kid was still asleep, what was she doing there? Staring contest with the man?

“There’s food in the fridge. Make breakfast,” he said, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, then closed the door behind him.

Elysia didn’t know if it was her imagination, but she thought she heard the click of his lock inside his

room.

She was stunned.

No ‘please’ or ‘thank you’? Just a command to whip up breakfast, like she owed him?

Well, she did owe him—fifty million.

With the money in mind, Elysia bit back her indignation and stormed into the kitchen.

When in Rome, right? She opened the fridge and surveyed its contents. It was impeccably organized, and the ingredients were fresh and plentiful.

What to make?

Elysia pondered briefly before knocking on Tarquin’s door. She wanted to cater to Elijah’s tastes. She might despise the man, but the kid was innocent.

After a single knock, no response came.

She knocked again, but still nothing.

Elysia rapped on the door a few more times more assertively, “Hey, open up. We need to talk.”

The next second. Tarquin opened the door, now dressed in pajamas instead of his suit and shirt.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 129[618 words]

Tarquin furrowed his brow, his face a mask of impatience. “What now?”

Elysia stood frozen, disbelief etching her features. “You drag me out of bed at the crack of dawn to cook, and now you want to sleep?”

Without a word, Tarquin’s frown deepened.

Last night, after meeting Elysia, he had brought Elijah over, then spent the entire night perched on the living room couch.

His mind was a whirlwind of thoughts about his mother, Elijah’s illness, and the woman who haunted his heart.

Sleep had eluded him all night.

That’s why he had sought out Elysia so early.

Elysia, unaware of his turmoil, felt a surge of indignation. He had deprived her of sleep, only to now claim it for himself. “Is this how you treat people? If you’re tired, sleep in and then call for me. Instead, you drag me here and decide to snooze off. What am I to you, huh? I...”

“A debt peon.”

Her brewing speech was cut short by his rebuke, silencing her mid-vent.

“Fine! You’re the big shot! You’re the boss! Happy now?” she shot back, unable to contain her irritation.

“If you’re not happy, pay off your debt,” Tarquin retorted coolly.

Elysia was livid.

“Who said I’m not happy? Which eye of yours saw me unhappy? I’m totally content, and I’ll have your

know!”

“If you’re content, watch your attitude.”

“You...” She was itching to slap him into next week.

“What do you want?” he finally asked.

Elysia swallowed her anger. “What do you want for breakfast? What should I make?”

“You’re the cook, not me. Figure it out yourself.”

“How am I supposed to know what you like?”

“I don’t need flattery; it’s pointless and annoying.”

“I’m not trying to flatter you! I want to know what Elijah likes!”

Tarquin’s brow creased. Elijah wasn’t particular about anything except his mother. He showed little

interest in anything else.

“Just make whatever!”

With a loud bang. Tarquin closed the bedroom door.

Elysia was about to retort when the door swung open again, and he warned, “I’ve got an hour left to sleep. Don’t disturb me.”

Elysia was left gritting her teeth in rage.

How do you deal with the urge to hit someone? Right now, she wanted to throttle him!

Who knows a way to get rid of him without facing the consequences? Looking for advice, ASAP!

Stuck at the doorway, she couldn’t come up with a plan.

Resigned, she consoled herself internally. Don’t let anger get the best of you... Stay cool, a princess. doesn’t lose her temper.

Unsure of Elijah’s preferences, Elysia decided on making pancakes—a safe bet.

The batter was taking a beating, as if she was channeling her frustration at someone through the mix.

An hour later.

Just as Elysia finished preparing breakfast, two adjacent bedroom doors opened simultaneously.

Tarquin and Elijah appeared in their respective doorways.

Elijah resembled an emotionless machine. Except for the odd mishap due to his condition, he woke up at 6:30 every morning like clockwork. Tarquin had adapted to this routine.

“Morning, Elijah,” Tarquin greeted him, his eyes softening.

Elijah remained silent, his expression blank, aloof, and detached.

The little guy headed towards the bathroom but paused mid-step as he noticed the activity in the kitchen.

His brow furrowed, and his expression shifted rapidly. Glancing at Elysia's back, then back at Tarquin with a surge of anger...

"Elijah, this is the new housekeeper Uncle Benjamin found for us," Tarquin explained. "Daddy's got a lot of work and can't be with you all the time. We need someone to help with the cooking and We need someone to help with the cooking and chores."

"Let her go!" Elijah's rage flared instantly, his body shaking violently.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 130[640 words]

Tarquin quickly squatted down and took hold of his son's shoulders.

"Elijah, buddy, you need to chill. Listen to daddy..."

"Get out! Get out! Get out-

"Elijah..."

"Ah!"

Before Tarquin could say another word, a piercing scream cut through the silence of the house.

Both father and son whipped their heads around.

Elysia stood there, eyes as wide as saucers, a look of utter shock plastered across her face.

Tarquin, worried she might set Elijah off further, snapped at her with a frosty command, "What are you freaking out about?"

Elysia's gaze was fixed on Elijah, petrified with fear. She charged over, shoved Tarquin aside, scooped up Elijah, and made a beeline for the bedroom!

The door slammed shut and was locked in one smooth motion!

Before Elijah could utter a word, Elysia hissed at him in a low voice, "Evan, what on Earth are you doing here?"

Elijah was just confused.

“Talk to me! Why are you here? Did you follow me here?”

Elijah remained silent.

“Didn’t I tell you last night that you’d be going to daycare with Blossom today? Who let you come here, huh?”

Elijah frowned.

Elysia was practically hopping mad, “Do you want to drive me crazy?”

Her heart was in her throat!

Evan’s cover was blown!

That jerk of a man would surely fight for custody now!

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Even if he he still had more than she did—a car, a house... She had nothing.

And she was still legally married. If Elliot and Evan stayed with her, that would mean having a stepdad, and the courts would definitely favor him for custody.

What to do, what to do?

How could she compete with Tarquin?

Elysia was beside herself, pacing back and forth, on the verge of panic.

09:43

“Elysia, open the door!” Tarquin’s voice demanded from outside.

In her flurry, Elysia darted to the window, flung it open, and was greeted by a blast of cold air that made her shiver and brought her partially back to her senses.

She poked her head out the window, shivered again.

She had thought about escaping with the child through the window, but it was too high—jumping was out of the question.

“What to do? What to do? What to do?”

“Get out!” Elijah suddenly spoke up.

Elysia was taken aback, “What? Get out? Evan Thorne, you’ve got some nerve speaking to me like that, young man. Just you wait, when we get home, I’m gonna punish you!”

“Get out-

Elijah, face dark as thunder, repeated himself. He was only a few years old, but those eyes were like chips of ice, chilling to the bone, and identical to Tarquin’s in a fury.

“Evan....”

Wait.

That’s not right.

Elysia locked eyes with Elijah, and that’s when it hit her.

Something was off.

Evan might have been a handful, but he’d never looked at her with such coldness.

Evan was the master of making her smile, his face always lit with laughter, always grinning.

And his clothes...

And Elijah wasn’t in this room.

No, no, no. This wasn’t Evan. This was Elijah!

Elijah looked just like Evan?

While Elysia was still reeling from the shock, Elijah had already flung open the “bedroom door, shot a deadly glare at Tarquin who was standing at the door, and stormed into the dining room.

“Make her leave!”

He grabbed a bowl from the table and hurled it to the floor!

Tarquin’s brow furrowed with alarm, and he dashed forward, “Elijah!”

It took a moment for Elysia to snap out of her daze and follow suit. Seeing Elijah in the midst of his destructive spree, she caught her breath, her pupils dilating. “Elijah.”

“Get away!” Elijah shouted, flinging a plate that shattered near her feet.

Elysia held her breath, inching closer to Elijah. “Elijah, honey, let’s take a deep breath, okay? Just

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 131[640 words]

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Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 132[626 words]

“I... I just can’t explain,” Elysia stammered, her voice trailing off. She was flustered because of the uncanny resemblance between Elijah and Evan, which threw her off balance and made her care more than she should have.

When you care too much, it throws you into chaos. She had been completely out of sorts just a moment ago.

“So, what? You’re taking out your anger on the kid because you’ve got an issue with me? You don’t want to deal with him, you’d rather see him get into trouble?” The accusation stung.

Elysia rolled her eyes, exasperated. “Are you out of your mind? That’s not how you suspect someone. If I didn’t care about him, why would I stay out in the cold after he kicked me out? I would’ve just left!”

“And why can you calm down Corbin, but not Elijah?”

“I... When I found Corbin, he was in the midst of a crisis; it was like he was a patient and I was the doctor. But Elijah wasn’t having a crisis today. He was just angry, and anger is an emotion everyone feels. It can trigger health issues, but it’s not an illness, so a doctor can’t treat it. Doctors aren’t miracle workers, and besides... I’m not even a doctor.”

Tarquin glared at her, a deep frown etched on his face, before he eventually turned away. He reached into the glove compartment, pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and took a long, sullen drag.

The smoke made Elysia cough; she disliked the smell of cigarettes. but she knew she couldn’t control him, so she just tolerated it.

“If you really want me to help Elijah, you’d better tell me everything there is to know about him. If you don’t want to share, then sorry, but I’m not equipped to take care of your son!”

Tarquin glanced at Elysia again. She met his gaze unflinchingly.

“You’re an adult. You must understand how much a family environment affects a child’s development. Discord between parents, constant quarreling, domestic violence... these things impact a child’s mental and emotional growth.”

Tarquin remained silent.

After a few tense seconds of staring each other down, Tarquin was the first to look away. He took another puff of his cigarette and then said, “Elijah has never met his mother. She disappeared shortly after he was born. So, the family conflicts you mentioned weren’t part of his upbringing. What he’s missing is maternal love, an obsession with finding out about his mother.”

“But plenty of kids grow up in single-parent homes and turn out fine. Why is his fixation so intense?” Elysia was genuinely puzzled.

Not every child is fortunate enough to be raised in the warmth of both parents' love. Some lack a father, others a mother, and some are orphans from birth. Yet, most children manage to grow up healthy and happy.

The environment a child grows up in is crucial. Tarquin seemed like a good father in Elijah's presence. It didn't add up that Elijah would end up this way.

00:15

Just like her own sons, Elliot, Evan, and Emmett, who had never known the affection of a father, yet were still growing up happy and well-adjusted.

"Are you sure his psychological issues are just because of his obsession with his mother?"

Tarquin flicked the ash from his cigarette and said, "He's not much of a talker. The only

conversation he's willing to have is about his mother. He even dreams of her. We've seen numerous psychologists, and they all agree that Elijah's mental health issues stem from his deep fixation on his mother."

Elysia furrowed her brow in thought. Something didn't quite add up.

"Has he ever had a full medical check-up?"

"Twice a year."

"Can I see the reports?"

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 133[623 words]

Tarquin suddenly lifted his lashes to look at Elysia.

"...I heard you were studying design at Jindale University before, nothing to do with medicine. How come you suddenly know about medical stuff?"

Elysia was taken aback. "You've been looking into me?"

Tarquin held her gaze, blatantly admitting it without a hint of guilt.

Elysia's heart leaped to her throat.

“What all did you find out?”

“Got something to hide?”

Of course, she did! She feared he would discover the truth about the kids!

“You... you checked on my kids, too?”

Tarquin knew she was nervous about her children. This time, he didn’t use them to provoke her.
“No.”

“For real?”

Tarquin gave her a look. “Do you want me to check?”

“No! They’re just kids. Why would you look into them? I... I’m just afraid you might hurt them, given your history!”

She purposefully brought up yesterday’s incident at the mall to divert his attention.

Tarquin frowned. “Yesterday was an accident. I was after you, not your son. I didn’t hurt him.”

The fact that he could be so frank about targeting her!

Elysia glared at him, taking a silent, deep breath, relieved that he hadn’t looked into the kids.

The next second, she complained, “Do you have a problem? Why are you snooping around me? You know that’s an invasion of privacy, right?”

Tarquin retorted, “If you’ve got nothing to hide, you wouldn’t fear an investigation.”

“What’s there to hide? I’ve never broken the law!”

“Dropping out of school to get married, for one. And then there’s the infidelity during marriage.”

Elysia’s breathing halted, her cheeks flushed.

And a second later, her eyes brimmed with tears. She stared at Tarquin, her gaze burning into him, tears rolling in her eyes, her breath becoming heavier.

Was she crazy? Was getting married by her own choice?

Was the infidelity by her own choice?

Being forced into marriage wasn’t his fault, but whose fault was the infidelity?

00-15

Elysia clenched her fists, biting her lip, glaring at Tarquin...rage boiling up within her...

Tarquin noticed her emotional shift, his face darkening.

“I only answered because you asked. Your past messes are none of my business, but while you’re taking care of Elijah, you need to stay clean. Don’t corrupt him.”

Elysia looked at him, feeling swallowed up by her own misery.

Anyone could blame her, but he had no right!

He had shattered her virtue and ruined her life!

And now he had the audacity to warn her to stay clean!

“You’re not human!”

After hurling the accusation, Elysia stormed out of the car, slamming the door behind her, and marched towards the neighborhood entrance against the biting wind.

Tarquin sat in the car watching her, his expression dark as thunder.

She dared to insult him?

What had he said that was wrong?

She herself had a track record of disgrace, and now she couldn’t stand being called out for it?

Not wanting to be talked about, then why commit those shameless acts?

Getting into Jindale University was like winning half the game of life. Landing a good job post-graduation, even if not earning a fortune, could at least make her live comfortably.

And look at her current predicament, a good hand played utterly poorly!

A seemingly neat and pretty woman, but upon investigation, covered in stains.

She should be cursing herself, not others!

Tarquin thought Elysia’s anger was because he had dug into her past, and after internally grumbling, he smoked a few cigarettes and went back to spend time with Elijah.

He didn’t take her to heart.

Elysia walked several blocks in the freezing cold, tears streaming down her cheeks, each gust of wind like a knife slicing her face, hurting terribly with every cut.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 134[668 words]

Memories can be a real thorn in the side.

If anyone else had uttered those words today, Elysia might have coped a little better.

But of course, it had to be that rogue!

Ariger and resentment churned within her as she fumed internally—what right did he have to judge her? By what right could he point fingers when he was the architect of her misery?

Yet, her rage was tempered by the nagging doubt that he might not be the rogue who fathered her children. If she was wrong about him, then hurling insults his way would only make her the guilty party.

She was tormented by this lose-lose mental struggle, feeling utterly wretched.

It seemed as though, no matter what, she was always in the wrong.

Her life had been a tragedy from the start, and now, six years later, the tragic narrative, persisted.

Her marriage to Tarquin was a shambles, never finalized.

And then there was this man who very well could be the father of her children, with no proof but suspicions galore. To make matters worse, she had somehow ended up owing him a staggering fifty million dollars.

Years had passed, and upon their reunion, she should have been the one to slap some sense into him. But what happened? She ended up being the one firmly in his grasp! Being manipulated was bad enough, but he had the nerve to mock her for being unfaithful.

Oh, the irony!

Others in her shoes would return triumphantly, script in hand, ready to face down their past with secret skills and wealth aplenty. They'd be the rich, powerful ladies, the femme

fatales!

But look at her, also returning with children in tow, yet still clutching the script of the downtrodden.

The powerful narratives seemed to have been claimed by the men in her life, turning into tales of male dominance. Her husband had morphed into the mighty CEO of the Bradford Group, a king in his high castle.

And that rogue? Despite his alleged bankruptcy, he still overshadowed her.

Her life was a mess, unchanged and unchallenged. Six years wasted in a failed attempt to turn the tables.

09-565

Elysia's tears turned to laughter as she sat alone in a hidden corner, alternating between sobs and chuckles like a fool.

Her phone buzzed. It was a video call from Evan.

Elysia quickly wiped her tears and composed herself before answering.

"Mommy, mommy!" Three cherubic, rosy-cheeked faces squeezed in front of the camera, each clamoring for her attention.

Her heart instantly softened. "What are you munchkins up to?"

"We just had breakfast, and Blossom said she's taking us to preschool."

"Alright then, you listen to Blossom, okay?"

"Mommy, where are you? Are you sitting outside by yourself?" Elliot was always so perceptive.

Elysia quickly improvised, "Yeah, I'm just waiting for the bus."

"Is it cold out? Your face is all red, and your eyes too..."

Elysia mustered a weak smile.

"Oh, I've just got watery eyes, and they tear up with the wind, and then I rubbed them, so they got red. Don't worry, my darlings. The bus is almost here, so I can't talk long. You go on to preschool and listen to Blossom. Once I'm done with my errands, I'll come to see you. Be good, okay?"

"Okay, Mommy. And don't worry about us, I'll take care of Evan and Emmett."

"Good boy, Elliot."

"I'm good too!" Evan interjected.

Emmett, unable to get a word in, puffed up his little red face as he said, “Me me me... and me me me...”

Elysia’s smile bloomed. “You’re all my good boys. Elliot, Evan, Emmett, you’re all mommy’s precious angels.”

Their laughter was as bright as three little suns, warming Elysia’s heart through and through.

After hanging up the phone, her anger had dissipated.

What did it matter if fate was cruel?

So what if life was a tragedy?

Who needed a heroic lead’s script anyway?

She had her three wonderful boys, and that was her pride and joy.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 135[633 words]

Elysia’s day took a turn for the better after a video call with her sons, recharging her spirits. Her mind immediately drifted to Tarquin.

The encounter with the rugged stranger was just a hiccup; Tarquin was the prize she had returned for. Sure, he had told her not to bother him, but a phone call wasn’t exactly bothering, was it? She hadn’t shown up on his doorstep unannounced or anything.

With her mood in check, Elysia dialed the number for the Royal Community.

She swallowed her pride, asking meekly, “Excuse me, is Mr. Bradford available for a quickie divorce today?”

The response was polite enough, “No, if he happens to free up, Mr. Bradford will reach out to you. Just wait for his call, no need to ring us up.”

With that, the line went dead.

Elysia pouted. Wait for his call? Till when, the twelfth of never?

She still thought that pressuring Tarquin through Keaton was the best play. But Keaton was no pushover, and he definitely wasn't a fool. How to leverage him was the real puzzle.

"Ring, ring, ring..."

Lost in thought, Elysia was pulled back by the sound of her ringing phone. It was Zane.

She answered, "Hello?"

"Elysia, you free today?" Zane sounded downcast.

"What's up?"

"If you're available, could you swing by the hospital and talk some sense into Sarah?"

"Sarah? Your cousin?"

"Yeah."

"What happened?"

"She's... given up on life. Tried to slit her wrists. Thank God the nurses found her in time, or she'd be gone."

Elysia gasped, "Over the baby?"

"Maybe. I'm just her cousin and a guy to boot. I'm not cut out for this, and my mind doesn't always catch the subtleties. Don't really know how to comfort her, and Winona's out of town. I'm clueless about who else to turn to."

00-56

"Have you not reached out to her folks?"

"She forbade it, threatened to jump out the window if I so much as contacted her mother.

Elysia sighed, "I'm free today. I'll head over in a bit."

Zane sounded relieved, "Great, great. Need me to pick you up?"

"No, stay with her. I'll grab a cab."

After hanging up, Elysia's brow furrowed in thought. She had always been curious about Zane's cousin, and today seemed like a fitting chance to meet her.

Half an hour later, Elysia arrived at Heart Hospital.

Zane was waiting at the entrance. Upon seeing her, he rushed over and asked, “Aren’t you cold dressed like that?”

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In her haste that morning, Elysia had thrown on a thin down jacket, which seemed insufficient now.*

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While talking, Zane had already started to shrug off his trench coat to drape over her.

Elysia caught a flicker of something odd in his gesture and quickly declined, “I’m fine, keep it on. How’s your cousin doing?”

Zane realized he might have been a tad too enthusiastic, even for a good friend. There should be boundaries, after all. He put his coat back on, his face creased with worry. “She’s been refusing food and drink since the surgery, and this is her second suicide attempt. The aides are keeping a close eye on her, can’t leave her alone for a second.”

“Is she...depressed?” Elysia speculated.

Postpartum depression was common, and though Sarah hadn’t given birth, her trouble seemed even more severe.

Terminating a pregnancy early on usually has less impact, as the emotional bond isn’t as strong. But at five months, the psychological blow could be devastating.

Zane shook his head and said, “Not sure yet. We’ll get a doctor to assess her later.”

“Okay.”

They proceeded to Sarah’s room together, entering a spotless, brightly lit private ward.

Sarah was in a hospital gown, staring out the window, with an aide sitting quietly by her side.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 136[593 words]

When they entered the room, the caregiver quickly stood up to greet them, “Mr. Zane.”

Zane nodded and said, “Take a break. We’ll stay with her.”

“Sure thing.” The caregiver left the room.

Sarah turned her head, and upon seeing Elysia, her expression changed instantly, as if she had just spotted an adversary. Her lips pressed tightly together, brows furrowed, her breathing became more rapid.

“Sarah!” Zane, noticing her hostility, chided her with displeasure in his voice.

Sarah looked at Zane, biting her lip, her face a picture of hurt feelings.

Zane said, “I invited Elysia over, and she’s here to keep you company.”

Sarah glanced at Elysia again, the animosity not as intense as before, but still far from friendly.

This time, she only gave Elysia a quick look before shifting her gaze away.

Elysia grew even more suspicious.

Women are sensitive, and Sarah’s hostility towards her, unrelated to her mood, seemed ingrained in her very bones.

But Elysia had no recollection of meeting Sarah before. Where was this animosity coming from?

Elysia decided to clear the air.

“Zane, could you step out for a moment? I’d like to have a word with her alone.”

Zane immediately nodded. "Alright, you haven't had breakfast yet, right? I'll go grab something for you."

"Thanks."

Before leaving, Zane gave Sarah another inscrutable look.

Elysia pulled up a chair beside the hospital bed and got straight to the point, "Do I know you from before?"

"No!"

"Did I ever offend you in any way?"

Sarah's lips quivered as she looked at Elysia, her eyes brimming with tears.

"Your expression says I did something to upset you, but I'm sorry, I really can't recall. I don't know you, and I've never seen you before. Is there a mix-up, or is there some kind of

09:56

misunderstanding?"

Sarah bit her lip and then blurted out, "I would recognize you even if you turned to ash.

Elysia was taken aback. "So, it's not a case of mistaken identity. But I can't remember any incident between us. Can you be more specific?"

Sarah fe!! silent again.

Elysia kept her cool, saying, "I'm close friends with your cousin's wife Winona and went to school with your cousin. They know what kind of person I am. I wouldn't hurt someone for no reason..."

"Are you implying that I'm accusing you falsely?" Sarah snapped back angrily.

Elysia shook her head. "I'm saying, let's talk it out. If I'm really at fault, I'll apologize."

"Apologize? Ha, who cares about your apology? Do you think it's that valuable? Do you think a simple sorry can fix the hurt you've caused me? I despise you! I loathe you! Why don't you just die? You're such good friends with Winona, right? You should have died with her! I wish you all were dead!"

Suddenly, Sarah began to scream and thrash, pounding on the bed sheets.

The commotion was so intense that it alerted the doctors and nurses.

A flurry of medical staff rushed in, and without letting Elysia utter a word, they injected

Sarah with a sedative.

“Hello, are you a relative of the patient?” the doctor asked.

Elysia sat in shock at the bedside, her mind reeling from Sarah’s outburst.

“Hello, you...”

As the doctor tried to speak further, Elysia stood up abruptly, gripping Sarah’s arm tightly, and asked, “Explain yourself, what do you mean I should have died with Winona? What happened to her? Speak up! Talk!”

Now it was Elysia’s turn to unravel. Sarah’s words had left her pale, her heart pounding furiously in her chest.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 137[584 words]

09:56

The doctors and nurses were at their wits’ end, one patient’s episode after another breaking the early morning calm.

Two young nurses clung to Elysia, trying to pacify her.

“Lady, please calm down. She’s been sedated and is out cold; you won’t be able to wake her.”

“Wake her up! She has to wake up! I need to talk to her! I have urgent things to ask her!”

“She won’t be waking up anytime soon. If you’ve got questions, you’ll have to wait. Cool off, or we’ll have no choice but to sedate you too.”

Elysia finally settled down, collapsing into a chair, staring blankly at Sarah, her face ghostly pale.

Zane rushed back as soon as he got the news, a breakfast sandwich and coffee in hand for Elysia.

Seeing Elysia’s expression and the medical staff in the room, he was taken aback.

“What happened? What’s going on?”

The attending physician stepped forward. “Mr. Zane, is this young lady a friend of yours?”

“Yes, she’s a friend. She came to visit my cousin. What’s wrong–what happened?”

“We’re not entirely sure. We came running when we heard the argument. Your cousin was very agitated, screaming and shouting. We had to sedate her to prevent her from hurting herself. But just as your cousin settled down, this young lady started...”

Zane frowned deeply, looking at Elysia. “I understand. Thanks for your efforts. I’ll talk to her and see what’s going on.”

“Alright, once you’ve handled this, swing by my office. I suspect your cousin might be suffering from depression; we need to conduct a thorough evaluation.”

“Got it.”

After the staff left, Zane put the breakfast on the nightstand without even glancing at Sarah and hurried over to Elysia. He squatted down beside her, not asking about the situation but instead reassuring her.

“Elysia, don’t be scared. I’m here for you.”

Elysia snapped back to reality, her brows knitted tightly, gasping for breath. “What’s wrong with Winona?”

“Winona? What do you mean?” He looked genuinely confused.

00-67

Tears welled up in Elysia’s eyes as she pointed at Sarah. “She said... she said I’m such good friends with Winona that i should have died with her!”

Zane’s face darkened instantly, a mix of anger and disgust as he glanced at Sarah before comforting Elysia.

“Don’t listen to her nonsense. You heard the doctor–she’s likely depressed,”

“Even if she’s depressed, that’s no excuse for such words! Tell me the truth, Zane. Did

Winona really go overseas for a film, or did something happen to her?”

“...”

“Tell me the truth! I want the truth! Don’t you lie to me!”

Elysia’s voice broke as she trembled, tears streaming down her face.

Zane panicked, reaching out to wipe her tears.

Elysia swatted his hand away, stamping her foot in frustration. “Talk to me! Say something!”

NENE

Zane took a deep breath. “She really went to shoot a movie. She’s fine! If you don’t believe me, you can ask her parents. She’s the only daughter of the Newsom family—if anything had happened to her, her parents would definitely know!”

Elysia, still gasping for breath, looked at him, searching for reassurance.

Zane continued, his voice firm and resolute, “Elysia, I swear to you, if I’m lying, may I be struck down this very day. Winona is fine, she’s just away for a shoot.”

“But why would Sarah say that then?”

Zane furrowed his brow and sighed. “Before Winona left for the shoot, they had a falling out. It wasn’t pretty.”

1512

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 138[618 words]

09:57

“Hmm?”

“Winona just doesn’t trust Sarah’s boyfriend, thinks he’s bad news, so she’s been trying to get Sarah to dump him. But Sarah’s got love on the brain, you know? So now she’s all mad at Winona. Then, to open Sarah’s eyes to the guy’s true colors, Winona staged this whole scene to get him to show his sleazy side. But when the dude showed his true face, Sarah didn’t get mad at him—nope, she went straight to Winona and threw a fit. She accused Winona of sticking her nose where it didn’t belong, of being petty and not wanting to see her happy, even called Winona a disgraceful drama queen...”

Elysia frowned. “She’s that clueless? You didn’t step in?”

“I did. I was so close to losing it, almost slapped her right there. If Winona hadn’t stopped me, I would have. I told her she was being ungrateful, and she just cried, saying, ‘But I love him, what can I do? It’s not that he can’t leave me, it’s that I can’t leave him...’”

Elysia was speechless.

Zane continued, “She’s a classic case of being lovestruck. My aunt’s family isn’t exactly living the dream, you know? They’re on welfare, and Sarah’s got a younger brother who dropped out early, old enough to get married but they’re still living in that old clapboard house. Winona and I know about their financial struggles, so we’ve been covering Sarah’s college tuition and living expenses... But after this mess, I cut her off. She got mad and didn’t dare confront me, so she took it out on Winona instead. No matter what I said, she wouldn’t listen. She just kept blaming Winona...

That’s why she cursed Winona, why she was so hostile when she saw you, ‘cause she knows you’re Winona’s bestie, guilt by association.”

Elysia was silent.

Zane continued, “Winona’s a big star, always in the public eye. If something really happened to her, just think about the media frenzy, huh?”

Elysia let out a deep breath, believing Zane’s words.

It made sense; if anything happened to Winona, there was no way to keep it under wraps.

Feeling relieved, Elysia steadied herself and looked at Sarah again, her brow furrowed, “If what you’re saying is true, then isn’t she just an ingrate?”

Putting it nicely, she’s an ingrate. But frankly, she’s a dog that bites the hand that feeds it!

Zane didn’t object. Seeing Elysia’s complexion returning to normal, he felt a bit more at ease.

“I’m pissed at her too. I’m only looking after her for my aunt’s sake, as I’ve told you. My aunt paid for my high school, and I’m grateful to her, so I’m taking care of Sarah.”

09:57

TH

Elysia said with a frown, “Your aunt took care of you, and you should be grateful to her, but she never did anything for Winona. Winona doesn’t owe them anything and doesn’t deserve their curses.”

Elysia was indignant on behalf of her friend.

What a mess!

Zane nodded and said, “I’ll have a serious talk with Sarah when she wakes up.”

Elysia added, “And you knew about her beef with Winona and still asked me to come see her? From her perspective, isn’t that just rubbing salt in the wound?”

“I didn’t realize she’d be so hostile towards anyone close to Winona.”

“If you really want to comfort her, it’d be better to call her friends. She’s studying in Jindale City, so she must have classmates and friends. Let them come talk to her. They’d be

better than me.”

“I suggested that, but she wouldn’t have it. She’s scared of being the laughingstock. She doesn’t want her classmates to know about her pregnancy and the miscarriage.”

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 139[671 words]

Elysia said, her voice filled with cancer. “Let her family handle this, Zane. Keeping it a secret ren’t helping anyone. She’s showing suicidal tendencies now. If something happens, how will you explain it to her folks?

y aunt later.

frane nodded in agreement. Tll find a time to discuss it with my

After a pause, he turned to Elysia with a look of sincere apology, “I’m really sorry, Elysia, for dragging you into this mess. I didn’t mean to Cause you any trouble”

Elysia was indeed upset, primarily because of Sarah’s harsh words about Winona. She was still fuming. If Sarah weren’t in such a fragile state, Elysta would have been tempted to confront her—either physically or at the very least, yell at her to vent her frustration.

I’m okay. I didn’t really help much, and now I can’t do anything more. Take good care of her. I should get going.”

As Elysia stood up to leave, Zane quickly rose to his feet. “Haven’t you skipped breakfast? The food I bought must be cold by now. Let me take you out for a bite to eat.”

“No, it’s fine. Stay with her. I’m not hungry.”

‘At least let me walk you downstairs. The doctor gave her a sedative, she won’t be waking up anytime soon.’

Elysia, seeing his insistence, didn’t refuse.

They went out together, and along the way, Zane kept repeating his apologies.

Elysia was annoyed, but not at him; her anger was directed at Sarah. So she didn’t complain to Zane.

Not wanting to dwell on Sarah, she changed the subject, “When exactly is Winona coming back?”

Zane shrugged helplessly and said, “I wish I knew. When she left, she told me to brace myself. It could be as short as a year or as long as two or three.”

“That long, huh?”

“Well, you know Winona. She’s a powerhouse—very career-driven, always gives her all to her acting.”

“Can’t you try to reach out to her agent? Even if there’s a confidentiality agreement, as her husband, you have the right to be kept in the loop about her personal life, don’t you?”

Zane pondered for a moment and then said, “I’ve tried contacting her agent before, but I couldn’t get through. I’ll think of something else. As soon as I hear anything about Winona, I’ll let you know.”

“Alright.”

Zane then looked at Elysia with a gentle concern and asked, “Is your divorce finalized yet?”

Elysia shook her head in frustration. “Haven’t been able to reach him.”

Zane frowned. “Is he avoiding you on purpose?”

Elysia hesitated, unsure of how to explain. She used to think Tarquin was deliberately avoiding her, Blossom that he was using it as a way to spite her. But now she knew the truth—Tarquin liked her to silence the gossip. He was using her as a shield.

greeing with her friend

> clinging to their marriage

However, she couldn’t bring herself to share this with Zane, so she simply said, “His job keeps him too busy.”

Zane shook his head and said, “No job is that demanding. There’s always time for a divorce. Or is it... does he still have feelings for you? Is that why he doesn’t want the divorce?”

“That’s even less likely. You know how he’s always treated me.”

Zane knew; Her husband’s accusations of infidelity had indeed made Elysia’s life miserable once upon a time.

“Maybe you should just tell me who he is, and I’ll talk to him for you.”

Since leaving Elysia’s place, Zane had tried to investigate Elysia’s husband, to no avail.

Elysia shook her head, “No, thanks. I’d rather handle it myself.”

Zane’s eyes flickered with an unreadable expression but he didn’t press further, switching the topic instead, “What are your plans now?”

“I haven’t figured it out yet. I’ll play it by ear. I won’t leave Jindale City until the divorce is settled.”

She had returned with the intent to divorce and to secure citizenship for her children. Elysia was determined not to leave things

unfinished.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 140[633 words]

Elysia couldn’t just walk away from her marriage – without a divorce, the kids couldn’t be registered under her name. Without that, everything would be a hassle.

School, health insurance, you name it – all required proper documentation.

“Look, if you’re hitting any rough patches these days, just holler at me. I might not be king of the hill, but after all my years in Jindale City, I’ve got a few tricks up my sleeve to lend a hand.

And don’t you play the stranger with me. We’re not just old school pals; given your bond with Winona, I can’t very well leave you in the lurch. She’d have my hide if she found out,” Zane assured her with a friendly nudge.

Elysia offered a polite smile in response, “Thanks.”

That smile, however, didn't go unnoticed by Tarquin.

After settling things with Elijah, he called the butler, Heath, over; he had to dash off to the office.

He happened to pass by the hospital entrance just then.

The traffic light ahead was red, over 40 seconds left.

Tarquin peered through the car window at the two figures chatting amiably at the entrance and snorted.

Lowell, behind the wheel, followed Tarquin's gaze and spotted Zane and Elysia.

"Why's Ms. Thomne at the hospital again?" he asked.

Tarquin's voice dripped with scorn, "Blind, are we? Can't you see she's here to see someone? Didn't they say she and Zane were just friends?"

"The talk around town is just that. Zane's her senior and son-in-law to the Newsom family. His wife's their only daughter, Winona, and she's best friend with Ms. Thorne. So naturally, Elysia and Zane are tight," Lowell explained.

Elysia,

"Best friend, indeed," Tarquin mocked, as though suggesting Elysia was cozying up to Zane behind Winona's back.

Lowell failed to sense any romance in the air, "They're friends, after all. What's the harm in meeting up privately? If Winona were in Jindale City, it'd probably be a threesome."

Tarquin shot back, "No sense of decency, some folks. Never changes."

Lowell was puzzled, "What's got you so riled up about Ms. Thorne? You seem to have it out for her. Is it because she kissed you?"

That remark only fanned the flames. Tarquin bristled, feeling... violated, in a sense!

As Lowell went on, "I mean, you didn't lose out when Ms. Thorne kissed you. After all, you're a man, and she's a woman."

Tarquin grabbed a newspaper and smacked it against Lowell's head, "Feeling too cocky these days? Fancy a stint out in the border town?"

Lowell felt a chill down his spine and quickly recanted, "Ignore me. I take it back."

Who'd want to go to a border town, facing nothing but rubble all day?

Just look at Charlie. Six months there and he's as dark as night, looking like a refugee. He'd be lucky to find a wife when he's back!

Tarquin gave Lowell a cold look, then turned back to look for Elysia. But she was no longer in sight at the hospital entrance.

"Keep tabs on her!"

"Oh, and I heard that Ms. Thorne suggested getting a cat for Corbin. Mrs. Denton obliged, and the kid's over the moon. Maybe we should get Elijah a cat too, cheer him up?"

"Elijah doesn't like cats!"

"Seems like Elijah isn't a fan of Ms. Thorne either."

Tarquin frowned, considering how much Corbin adored Elysia, he'd assumed Elijah would feel the same.

But apparently not...

Lowell sheepishly added, "You made Ms. Thorne cry today. Think she'd still be up for looking after Elijah?"

Tarquin's displeasure was palpable, "Whether she's willing is irrelevant. She doesn't call the shots!"

"Whether

Lowell tried a different angle, "So, do we still want Ms. Thorne to come over tomorrow?"

Tarquin didn't immediately respond. He hadn't quite figured it out yet.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 141[643 words]

After leaving the hospital, Elysia went to find her friend Blossom. She had two things on her mind. First, she wanted to check on the kids at the preschool. It was their first day and she couldn't help but worry.

Second, she was still shaken up by the whole ordeal with Sarah.

Blossom was both shocked and outraged when Elysia explained what had happened.

“That ungrateful snake! Winona was nothing but kind to Zane’s cousin, and to think she’d wish death upon her behind her back. And to top it off, she’s got it out for you, too. Seriously, some people just don’t appreciate a good thing when they have it. There’s a saying that fits perfectly here: ‘No good deed goes unpunished.’ I mean, sure, it’s sad she lost her child, but considering how she treated Winona, I hate to say it, but she had it coming!”

Elysia sighed, “What a peculiar person.”

“Peculiar? That’s putting it mildly. She’s heartless, that’s what she is.”

“Blossom, did Winona really go off to shoot a movie?” Elysia asked, furrowing her brows with concern.

Even though Zane had explained everything, she still couldn’t shake her unease.

“Yeah, she talked to me about it before she left. And Zane’s right, Winona’s a celebrity. If anything had actually happened to her, we’d have heard about it by now. It’s impossible to keep that kind of thing under wraps.”

Blossom’s certainty finally put Elysia’s mind at ease.

Still, Blossom couldn’t help but complain, “And Zane, dragging you into comforting Sarah when he knows you two aren’t close. He’s just adding to your stress.”

“Let’s not talk about them anymore. How are the kids doing?”

“They’re in their classroom. Look, they’re having a blast.”

Blossom pulled up the classroom’s live feed for Elysia to see.

Elysia watched the three little ones playing joyfully and felt a smile spread across her face, “Kids really do have the most fun with other kids.”

Blossom agreed, “At their age, preschool is the right move. They might not learn much in the way of book smarts, but it’s good for their development.”

“Yeah.”

Seeing that they were alone in the office, Elysia asked in a low voice, “The kids still don’t have their paperwork sorted. Can they still attend?”

“Sure, private preschools are much more flexible with their requirements.”

Elysia breathed a sigh of relief, “As long as they can attend, that’s what matters.”

“Hey, don’t worry about your boys and school. I’ve got your back! If you want, they can come with me

ay.”

“It’s great having a best friend who’s a preschool teacher,” Elysia said with a laugh.

Blossom made a face, “Proud of yourself, aren’t you? My parents are beside themselves. Both of them prominent intellectuals, they’d hoped for a postdoc, but got a preschool teacher instead.”

Elysia chuckled. This was the ongoing joke in Blossom’s family.

Two academic heavyweights had produced a daughter who was anything but. Blossom’s admission to Jindale University had been a special case; her grades alone wouldn’t have cut it. The fact that she passed her teaching certification was a surprise to everyone. But Elysia genuinely admired Blossom’s parents for their parenting success. She believed that a child’s worth wasn’t determined by a diploma. Values, personality, and nature were what truly mattered.

Blossom was free-spirited, endearing, and resilient. Never once did she look down on others because of her parents’ status, nor did she feel inferior because of her academic struggles. She had strong moral principles, a kind heart, and clear-cut likes and dislikes. She didn’t waste time wallowing in self-pity. She was simply herself, living a simple and happy life.

Elysia thought to herself, only after having children do you understand what it’s like to be a parent. The best thing isn’t how accomplished they are, but that they’re healthy and have good natures.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 142[592 words]

If the triplets grow up to approach life with the same zest as Blossom, she’d be over the moon.

Positive, optimistic, living life to the fullest.

“Almost nap time, you heading over to check on them?” Blossom asked.

Elysia pondered for a moment. “Nah, I’ll let them get used to school. No need for me to disturb their routine.”

“Alright then, wait for me. We’ll grab lunch together. It’s about that time.”

“You can go out for lunch?”

“Sure, today I don’t have to sit with the kids during nap time. We’ve got other teachers on duty. I just need to be back by 1:30,”

“Okay.”

They left the kindergarten and didn’t have to walk far to find a bustling food street nearby.

Skewers, a mutual favorite.

Chatting and eating, Blossom asked, “Did you leave early today to see that wild man?”

“Yeah, and let me tell you, if you saw Elijah, you’d be stunned. He’s the spitting image of Evan! If I hadn’t been away from Jindale City when I gave birth, and that my kids never would’ve ended up with him, I would think Elijah’s mine. To be honest, I can’t stand that wild man, but when I see Elijah, my heart aches, especially when he throws those tantrums and breaks things. It’s pitiful.”

Blossom suggested, “Maybe it’s ‘cause he looks like him. You see Elijah and you’re reminded of Evan.”

“Yeah, that’s what I think too.”

“Are you going to be hanging around their place for a while now?”

Elysia shook her head.

“Not sure. We didn’t part on great terms today, no telling if he’ll want to see me

“What happened? Did he give you a hard time?”

Elysia thought it over and said, “Elijah’s condition is more serious than Corbin’s. I told you last night. Both of them have bipolar disorder, but the causes are different. Corbin was kidnapped as a child and has psychological trauma, but Elijah’s condition stems from an excessive longing for his mother. Corbin’s easier to deal with. Every year there are similar cases, and the medical field has a pretty solid treatment plan for these kids. But Elijah’s different. A psychological disorder caused by an obsession with his mother? That’s new to

me.”

round it. So many

kids grow up in a single-parent Blossom remarked, “When you told me last night, I couldn’t wrap my head household, some even orphans, and you don’t hear about them getting sick from missing someone too much. But ‘Longing turned to sickness’ isn’t a saying for nothing. There must be similar cases, just not in our radar.”

“Yeah, rare, but that doesn’t mean they don’t exist.”

Blossom asked, "So the kid's fixated on his mother. Where is she?"

"No clue. The wild man said she vanished after giving birth to Elijah and hasn't been seen since."

"She took off after having the baby? Why? Don't tell me she was driven away by that wild man."

"Who knows? But with his icy demeanor, it's a wonder he can keep anyone around at all. Always looks like someone owes him a fortune. Elijah's mom must've been quite the woman-to date that guy and have his kid. Respect!"

Blossom said, "You tell me he's handsome and loaded, so why would a woman run off? There's gotta be something wrong with him!"

"I feel the same way. It's just Elijah I feel sorry for. I haven't had the chance to talk to him yet. I don't even know if his illness really comes from being too attached to his mother."

10

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 143[602 words]

"Didn't you just go see the kid this morning? How come you haven't had a chance to talk to him yet?"

Elysia sighs, "You probably wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Hmm?"

"Before we went there today, the wild man said that if I could spend enough ten minutes with his son, I'd be rewarded ten thousand dollars, in cash."

"Holy shit, isn't that a giveaway?"

"I thought so at that time, but not to mention ten minutes, I was kicked out by Elijah in just three minutes."

Blossom gasped, her wide-eyed shock unmistakable.

"Does he have a history of violence or something?"

*Bipolar disorder, so yeah, he can be impulsive. And when he has an episode... let's just say he doesn't just smash vases. He's been known to hurt himself, too."

Blossom paused, her voice tinged with concern. "You know, I've worked with a lot of kids, but they've all been healthy. I've never had to deal with anything like this."

"Well, of course you haven't," Elysia replied. "Kids with mental health issues don't usually go to regular schools. They're often introverted, unwilling to open up and connect with others."

"It's just heartbreaking, you know? You wish all kids could be happy and healthy."

Elysia let out a soft sigh. "With Elijah, it's a tough situation."

"So what's the wild man saying now? If his son won't even let you near him, does that mean he'll stop bothering you?"

"I think so. He hasn't reached out since I left. Probably realized I'm not the one who can help Elijah and has given up on me."

Blossom shrugged. "Maybe that's for the best. You didn't want to get too involved with him anyway."

Elysia nodded. "Yeah, that's true."

But as much as she said she didn't want to be involved, the lack of contact from him was strangely unsettling. She couldn't help but feel anxious about Elijah.

Blossom continued, "The design industry is cutthroat these days. There are more designers than jobs, and the competition is fierce. Honestly, you might be better off focusing on child education, maybe even specializing in special needs. There's a real demand for that."

Elysia was pulled back from her thoughts. "I've been looking into certification for special education. Gotta get that paper first."

ow, you're actually lucky.

speaking, leaving Jindale City

"Exactly, it's all about the credentials now. Without them, schools and parents won't trust you. But yo Bumping into Corbin and helping him has made you somewhat of a name in their circles. Profession might not be the smartest move. Corbin's family could lead to a lot of resources and referrals." Elysia understood what Blossom meant. There were many kids like Corbin and Elijah, struggling with mental health issues, and their families often networked.

With Corbin's improvement, her reputation had been bolstered. Elijah had sought her out based on Corbin's progress, and more parents

could follow.

As much as she wished for all children to be healthy, reality was different. Many needed help, and she could support herself by providing that help, much like a doctor treats patients.

Staying in Jindale City could mean a flourishing career, but... lacking certification was a major obstacle.

And deep down, she didn't want to raise her kids in this city, with all its painful memories.

Shaking her head, Elysia made up her mind/"I still want to leave Jindale City. Find a new place to call home."

Blossom nodded understandingly. "Whatever you decide, you've got my support. And hey, with the way things are connected these days, wherever you settle down, I'll be there in a heartbeat to visit."

10

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 144[554 words]

After sharing lunch together, Blossom headed back to school, and Elysia made her way home.

Once there, Elysia fired up Blossom's laptop, coaxed the password out of her, and logged in. She furiously began scouring the internet for information on Elijah's condition.

She just couldn't shake her concern for him.

Was it because he bore such a striking resemblance to Evan, or was it something else?

Every time she thought about his current plight, her heart raced.

The boy was impulsive, even going as far as holding a fork to his own neck in a threat. It was a clear sign that suicidal thoughts were taking a stronger hold within him. If he didn't get treatment soon, something terrible might happen.

She hoped to stabilize his condition before she left, if not fully cure him.

Sadly, despite her efforts from dawn till dusk, she couldn't find a shred of useful information.

With Blossom and the kids due to return, Elysia shut down the laptop.

She stood up and headed to the kitchen to prepare dinner.

By the time the boys arrived home, Elysia had dinner ready and waiting.

The kids bubbled over with stories from preschool, each more excited than the last.

Their happiness was contagious.

"Do you guys like preschool?" she asked,

"Yeah! The only bummer is that we can't see Mommy all day. It'd be awesome if Mommy was at preschool too."

Elysia playfully pinched Evan's nose. "You go to preschool to learn. What would Mommy do there? The teachers wouldn't want to teach Mommy?"

"Mommy could be a teacher, like Blossom!"

"Not everyone can be a teacher at preschool like your Blossom."

"Why not?"

"Because you need degrees and certificates to teach, and Mommy doesn't have those."

"Blossom has them?"

"Of course, she does. Otherwise, how could she work at the preschool!"

Evan and Emmett looked up to Blossom with admiration, chiming in unison, "Blossom is so brilliant!"

Blossom beamed as if she'd won the lottery—it was the first time anyone had called her brilliant!

"Keep it cool, kids. No biggie. I have plenty more cool things up her sleeve. Want to hear about my heroic deeds and my epic life?"

"Yeah! Tell us!"

Evan and Emmett were instantly captivated by Blossom, their eyes wide with anticipation.

So, Blossom found her moment and began to regale them with her tall tales.

Elliot, being more mature for his age, wasn't as interested in Blossom's 'epic life. He turned to Elysia and asked, "Mommy, are you worried about something?"

'Hmm?"

"You seem distracted, like you're hiding something."

With loving eyes, Elysia replied, "Elliot, you're so observant. I do have something on my mind. Today, I met a little boy who looks a lot like you and Evan. He's about your age, but he's not happy at all."

"Why not?"

"Because he doesn't have a Mommy. He misses her so much it's making him sick. He's angry, irritable, withdrawn, and he even hurts himself."

Elliot furrowed his brow, "Where's his mommy?"

"I'm not sure. When I met him, I wanted to help, to see him happy like you boys. But he didn't like strangers and pushed me away, so I

couldn't help him."

10-00

"Is Mommy thinking about how to help him?"

"Yes, but I haven't found the right way yet."

"I have an idea"

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 145[650 words]

Elysia gasped in surprise, 'What kind of idea?"

Elliot replied. "Since he's so temperamental and withdrawn, and really restate etrangers, you shouldn't just barge into his life first, let him know you're a good person whe won't hurt lam, samenns he can take a liking to Then you can get closer to ham?"

Elysia pondered Elliot's wonda seriously He had a point

But stil

it i don't meet with him, how can I let him know I'm a good person?"

telp him out on the down low, or show some goodwill. Make something he loves to eat or play with, and have his family pass it stong to him'

'But I don't know what he likes to eat, or what he likes to play with. From what his family says, he's not interested in anything but stuff about his mom"

"No womes, the point of showing goodwill is to let him know you mean no harm, that you won't hurt him. That's how you'll eventually get closer to him"

"I think your plan might work. I think about how to put it into action."

"Mhmm, but remember, getting close to someone isn't just about putting in the effort, it also takes time. Are you planning on settling down here for good? Are we not leaving?"

Elysia said, "We'll definitely leave, but we can't just yet"

"Why? Have you not finished your business here?"

"Yeah."

Elliot knew the unfinished business was because the divorce hadn't gone through. "So... Are you in a hurry to leave?"

If Elysia was really anxious, he would have to intervene.

Elysia neither nodded nor shook her head.

"I am quite anxious, but... there are other things I need to take care of now, and with all three of you settled in school, I'm not in a particular rush."

Elliot breathed a sigh of relief. If there was no rush, he wouldn't need to step in for now.

"Do you want to leave soon?" Elysia suddenly asked.

Elliot shook his head. "I can be anywhere, as long as I'm with you, Mommy."

Elysia chuckled, her eyes brimming with happiness as she gently tousled Elliot's hair.

"I feel the same. As long as I'm with you guys, I'm happy anywhere."

Across the room, Blossom was boasting to Evan and Emmett, eliciting gasps and cheers from the two little guys, completely turning into adoring fans.

Elysia watched the trio with a smile playing on her lips.

Three treasures, indeed. One dares to tell tales, the other two dare to believe, and they're all quite the audience.

Elliot glanced at the three of them and then back at Elysia, asking, "Do you envy Blossom's job?"

"Hm? No, not really. I don't have a teaching credential, and I'm not particularly interested in teaching preschool. So no, I'm not envious. But I do envy that Blossom has a job."

"Do you really want to work?"

"Yes, having a job means making money, and money is needed to take care of you."

Elliot looked serious. "We can take care of ourselves."

Elysia laughed again, "You guys are still little. You can't go out and make money, so how will you take care of yourselves?"

"We can make money."

"How so?" she chuckled.

They could try the stock market, invest, or even start a business. All of those were ways to make money.

But Elliot didn't dare say that out loud, afraid it might startle his mother.

After thinking for a moment, Elliot said, "We could be child stars. I've seen some kids online, not even a year old, making money. People say I look like a little star, so I think I could be one too."

10:09

Elysia asked "Do you want to be a child star

Not at allt

Ellot was only interested in business, but he still said, "I could be a child ster, make money and take rate of Womeny a my

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 146[544 words]

Elysia's smile broadened, her heart swelling with pride at her son's thoughtfulness. It was impossible not to grin when faced with such

care

She affectionately pinched Elliot's cheek, her voice tender with love.

"You know, you didn't seek the spotlight, but if you did, you'd outshine every kid in town. You could become the next big thing in Hollywood in no time at all. But looking after you kids is my job. I brought you into this world, and I'll be damned if I don't see you all grown up. Don't worry, sweetheart. Times are tough now, but I will work my socks off, earn more dough, and make sure we live that sweet middle-class dream!"

Chasing that dream with her three little ones was Elysia's grand mission in life.

Elliot sighed silently, wishing he could magically produce money from his piggy bank to help out Elysia, but she never gave him a

chance.

"What's with the face? Don't believe in me?" she teased.

Elliot quickly shook his head, "No way, Mommy. You're like a superhero to us. You're amazing, and I know you'll make our lives better."

Elysia beamed with confidence, "You bet, kiddo. Mommy won't let you down!"

She firmly believed that hard work always paid off. She might lack formal education, but she was far from foolish. Achieving a comfortable life with her three kids was a hopeful prospect.

Elliot, watching her closely, suddenly lit up with an idea.

"Mommy, Blossom said you're awesome at special education and even saved a kid by accident."

"I wouldn't say 'awesome,' just experienced. What about it?"

"At preschool today, a kid said her mom writes articles from home and makes good money. Maybe you could write about special education and earn some cash?"

Elysia blinked, considering the idea she had never thought of before. If it were possible, it would be more than ideal.

Working from home meant flexibility, and she could take care of her kids. It was a perfect job opportunity.

“I’ll look into it,” she said with newfound hope.

“Okay!”

Elliot had just shown Elysia a promising path. He excused himself to the bathroom, took a seat, and began to search for writing opportunities on his kiddie smartwatch. He was determined to find a well-paying gig for his mom.

Settling into bed that evening, Blossom sighed contentedly, “Today was a blast, felt like a real celebrity.”

Elysia chuckled, “Congrats on gaining two little fans.”

“Die-hard fans! You should’ve seen Evan and Emmett’s adoring gazes. If it weren’t for Elliot’s cool demeanor, I’d start believing I was some kind of superstar!”

Elysia laughed, “Elliot’s mature for his age. He admires you too.”

Blossom was over the moon as she quizzed Elysia, “Any word from that wild man?”

Elysia shrugged, “Nope.”

“He’s really giving up on you?”

“Looks like it.*

“I’m shocked he discarded you so quickly. Congrats, though! No more dodging his advances, and you’re finally free.”

Elysia murmured an agreement, but inwardly/she wasn’t as thrilled, even a bit resentful.

What was that about? He’s really just gonna toss her aside after one day?

She genuinely wanted nothing to do with the man, yet she couldn’t help but worry about Elijah.

That boy, a mirror image of Evan, tugged at her heartstrings.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 147[605 words]

At the same time, over In Sunshine Community...

Tarquin was perched on the edge of Elijah's bed, trying to have a heart-to-heart.

"So, the lady you met this morning, you're not a fan?"

"Nope!"

"But she was handpicked by your Uncle Benjamin, and you know how much he adores you. For his sake, if not for hers, could you maybe give her a chance for a few more days?"

"No way!"

"You realize Uncle Benjamin will be upset if you send her packing so soon."

Elijah furrowed his little brow and looked up. "Is it Uncle Benjamin who'll be upset, or is it you?"

"Huh?"

"Did Uncle Benjamin really find her, or was it you?"

Tarquin was silent.

Then suddenly, Elijah asked, "Do you like her or something?"

Tarquin's face darkened. "No, I do not!"

"Then why are you so nice to her?"

"Me? Nice to her?"

"This morning, you even walked her out. Nola's been my lifesaver, but she always leaves on her own. You never walk her out."

Tarquin was at a loss for words. After he'd calmed Elijah down this morning, and the kid had gone to freshen up, he'd taken the opportunity to escort Elysia downstairs to discuss Elijah's issues.

Clearly, there had been a misunderstanding.

"I wasn't seeing her out, I was discussing... your situation with her."

"What's wrong with me?"

Tarquin frowned, careful not to directly say the word 'sick'.

Elijah never admitted to having any illness, and mentioning it would only anger him.

"I just wanted to explain that you didn't mean any harm when you threw out the breakfast she made. You scared her, and I had to clarify things."

"And what did you tell her?"

"That... you didn't do it on purpose."

"You're lying. It was totally on purpose."

Tarquin was speechless.

Elijah's brows knitted further as he said, "You once said, you only loved my mom."

"I did!"

"Then you need to keep it clean and stay away from other women."

"Elijah, you've got it all wrong. She's not here because I like her, but because I worry about you being alone. I need someone to keep you company and handle the chores. Heath's got his own things to handle; he can't be here, so I arranged for her."

"Who chose her, you or Uncle Benjamin?"

"Your Uncle Benjamin."

"Call him then. I'll explain that I don't like that woman and don't need her."

Tarquin felt a wave of irritation, "No need, I'll talk to him."

Again, Elijah asked, "How's my mom doing? Have you worked things out with her? When can I see her?"

Tarquin's lips moved, but no sound came out.

After a while, he said, "Still working on it."

Elijah frowned and turned away, dismissing him.

10:10

Torquin heaved a mental sigh and left the bedroom. Back in his study, he immediately lit a cigarette, his mood at rock bottom.

Elysia's first encounter with Elijah had been a letdown, but he wasn't ready to throw in the towel.

Elijah's condition might differ from Corbin's, but there were similarities. If Elysia could help Corbin, surely she could do the same for Elijah

Perhaps with a little more time, things would start looking up.

But Elijah was adamant about not seeing her again.

Tarquin had even suspected that Elysia might be Elijah's birth mother. What a harebrained idea. If that were true, their reunion would have looked nothing like this.

He glanced at Elysia's number over and over, tempted to command her to come over the next morning, but the memory of Elijah's determined gaze made him hesitate.

In the end, he didn't make the call.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 148[661 words]

The next day

At the crack of dawn, around 6 30 AM, Tarquin's phone erupted into a cacophony of chimes, dragging him from the depths of sleep.

Groggily, Tarquin grabbed his phone from the nightstand, assuming it was some work-related emergency. But when he glanced at the screen, he was stunned to find it was Elysia calling.

Instantly, his grogginess vanished

Sitting up, he leaned against the headboard, eyeing the phone with suspicion.

His brain kicked into high gear, wondering if she was sleepwalking or had dialed by mistake.

As he pondered, the ringing ceased only to start up again.

Back 16 back calls meant it was neither a mistake nor sleepwalking.

With a slight frown, Tarquin answered the call. He didn't speak first, but Elysia did, "Could you come down here?"

"Huh?"

“I said, come down. I’m outside your place.”

“What are you doing down there?”

“Just get down here, and don’t let Elijah catch on.”

Tarquin threw off his covers, got out of bed, and peered out the window.

He had a clear view of the scene below.

Elysia, swaddled in a puffy winter coat, stamped her feet in the snow, occasionally glancing up at the building, her face red from the cold.

Tarquin didn’t know what she was up to, but after a few seconds of hesitation, he still left his apartment.

As he stepped outside the building, Elysia hurried over to him, noticing his sleepwear, she couldn’t help but comment, “You’re out in this freezing weather dressed like that? Aren’t you cold?”

Her unexpected concern caused Tarquin a moment of discomfort, and he asked with a dark expression, “What do you want?”

Elysia took out a thermos from within her coat. “Take this to Elijah.”

Tarquin looked puzzled, “What is it?”

“I made breakfast for Elijah. Give it to him, but don’t tell him I made it. If you do, he probably won’t eat it.”

Tarquin looked confused.

She explained, “After I left yesterday, I thought things over. Elijah’s reaction was intense, probably because my appearance was so abrupt that it scared him. He’s got this mood disorder, makes him extra sensitive. Plus, I’m a woman. The deeper his obsession with his mother, the more he rejects other women. My sudden appearance probably made him overthink. He might even assume you’re trying to find him a stepmom, so I can’t just show up unannounced again. If I appear today, his reaction will likely be even more intense than yesterday. So, it’s better if you give him the food. Just see if he likes it, okay?”

Tarquin “Why the sudden kindness?”

“Yeah, just trying to make a good impression.”

Tarquin’s expression shifted, and Elysia quickly added, “Don’t get the wrong idea, I mean a good impression, not seduction! And it’s not directed at you, it’s for Elijah. This meal is for him!”

“Yesterday you were so reluctant, why are you suddenly seeking him out today?”

Elysia’s lips moved slightly as she admitted the truth, “I feel sorry for him.”

Tarquin “He has nothing to do with you, so why do you feel sorry for him? Are you some kind of saint who feels sorry for every child?”

“It’s not like that... Look, don’t ask anymore. Basically, I just really want to help him, I’ve got no ulterior motives. If you don’t trust me, there’s nothing I can do. If you think I have other intentions, then just throw the food away. Anyway, I need to tell you, your son’s condition is already pretty serious. If you don’t find a way to treat him soon, it’s going to lead to trouble!”

With a stem look, Elysia faced him for a moment, then turned and walked away.

Watching her slender figure disappear into the distance, Tarquin’s expression was a mix of emotions.

Only when she was out of sight did he look down at the thermos in his hands. After a moment of silence, he carried it back inside the building

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 149[581 words]

What’s with her friendly overture? Is there a difference between being kind and outright flirting?

What is this woman up to?

Tarquin returned home, his mind a tangled web of confusion. He opened the thermos and was greeted by an inviting aroma.

Inside, she had prepared two side dishes, a fluffy omelet, six delicate pastries, and a serving of mixed fruit compote.

The sides were fresh and vibrant, the omelet a perfect golden brown, the pastries tender and pale, and the compote sweet and sticky....

It looked downright appetizing.

Tarquin hesitated for a moment, but then decided to sample each dish a personal poison test of sorts.

No poison detected, but his appetite certainly was. Before he knew it, he had polished off most of the meal.

If he hadn't pulled the brakes in time, he might have devoured Elijah's share too.

Glancing at the clock, it wasn't even 6 AM yet. Tarquin carefully packed the remaining breakfast back into the thermos and retreated to his bedroom.

Sleep was now a distant dream.

He lay on his back, hands clasped behind his head, staring at the ceiling in a daze.

All he could think about was Elysia.

He couldn't help but wonder what she was up to.

At 6:30 AM sharp, Elijah got up, ready to start his day with his usual grooming routine.

Tarquin had already set the remaining breakfast on the dining table, waiting for Elijah to finish up so he could invite him to eat.

Elijah looked at the spread on the table, then at Tarquin, his gaze inquisitive.

His breakfasts were usually made with expensive ingredients, a variety of lavish dishes. By comparison, today's meal looked modest, which had never graced Elijah's table before.

Tarquin knew what Elijah was wondering and explained, "I made it."

Elijah was skeptical, "You've never made these before."

"It's because I've never made them that I wanted to give it a try, to see if you'd like the taste," Tarquin said, picking up a pastry and placing it on Elijah's plate.

"Try it, see if it suits your taste."

Without overthinking, Elijah eyed the pastry for a moment, took a bite, and chewed thoughtfully.

Tarquin sat across from him, watching intently.

After a while, Elijah uttered two words, "It's good."

Tarquin's eyes flickered with unbidden joy, and a weight lifted from his heart.

"Good to hear. Have some more, these are also for you, and try the omelet," he said with a smile.

Elijah said nothing more, just quietly ate his breakfast.

Watching him clean his plate, Tarquin was deeply touched. His son was finally eating well!

But then, unexpectedly, “Is there more?”

Elijah looked up at him, eyes full of hope.

Tarquin was taken aback, “Hmm?”

“I’m not full. I’d like some more,” said Elijah!

If Tarquin had truly been the cook, he would have dashed into the kitchen by now. Nothing pleased him more than to see his son enjoying his food; he’d even cook in the middle of the night if asked.

But the truth was, he hadn’t made the breakfast, and he couldn’t replicate it.

Even if he tried, the taste would surely not match Elysia’s handiwork.

All he could say was, “Not now, kiddo. Daddy’s got some urgent business. I’ll make some more for you later.”

A shadow of disappointment crossed Elijah’s face. He didn’t speak, just got up to wash his hands and returned to his room.

Tarquin’s emotions were a complex mix, both elated and regretful.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 150 [561 words]

Elijah was finally taking an interest in something other than his mother, and the fact that he’d asked for the food proved he liked it. Regrettably, there was a missed opportunity to delve into Elijah’s interests and treat him to a hearty breakfast.

The meal wasn’t his own handiwork, and he felt he hadn’t fully satisfied Elijah’s appetite.

But overall, it was a good sign that Elijah enjoyed Elysia’s cooking.

He quickly called Heath to look after Elijah and then headed out the door.

Meanwhile, Elysia was saying goodbye to the three little ones.

The kids didn’t need breakfast at home as they’d eat at school, so they’d left early with Blossom.

Elysia was tidying up the house, glancing at her phone now and then. She wanted to call Tarquin to see if Elijah liked her cooking and if he had eaten, but worried about interrupting father and son time, she waited anxiously.

Her phone chimed.

She dashed to the coffee table, hoping it was the man. When she saw it was him, she felt a rush of excitement.

Her heart pounding, she answered, "Hello?"

"Make some more pastries when you get a chance. Elijah loves them," Tarquin said, almost like he was giving orders.

Despite his cool tone, his excitement was barely contained. He was in a good mood, somewhat happy.

Elysia was thrilled. "Really? Did he say anything else?"

"He's still hungry."

"Huh? Still hungry? Does Elijah eat that much? I thought I made plenty: an omelet, six pastries, a large serving of oatmeal with mixed fruits, plus two side dishes. He ate all that and wasn't full?"

Tarquin, embarrassed that he'd eaten more than his share, grunted an acknowledgment.

"Make some extra next time."

Elysia, not overthinking it, agreed, "Sure, when does he want more?"

"Tonight, or maybe tomorrow morning."

"Okay! I'll make it this afternoon, have it ready for his dinner. I'll contact you once it's done."

As Elysia was about to hang up, Tarquin added, "Come out for a chat."

"Oh?"

*Meet me downstairs in ten minutes, I'll come to you."

"What do you want to talk about?"

"About Elijah."

Relieved, Elysia agreed, "Alright, see you downstairs in a bit."

“Okay.”

After the call, Elysia was elated. She didn't know why, but the fact that Elijah enjoyed her cooking made her incredibly happy.

It felt like the first step of a thousand-mile journey had been taken!

Movement meant progress, didn't it?

She didn't know when she would leave Jindale City, but before she did, she genuinely hoped Elijah would get better.

Elysia put down her phone and went to change into her outdoor clothes. Just as she finished changing, the doorbell rang.

Expecting Tarquin, she opened the door without hesitation.

But instead of him, two unfamiliar men stood there.

Elysia was wary, “Who are you...?”

In the next instant, one of the men lunged, covering her mouth and dragging her into the elevator forcefully.

Muffled cries escaped her as she struggled, but she was no match for the two men.

They took her to the parking garage, shoved her into a car, and quickly drove out of the complex.

11:02

The car drove for what felt like ages, finally stopping in an unfinished building or

Stepping out of the car Elysia panicked even more. Brought to such a desolate place, she feared the worst were they going