

Hitched 1461

Chapter 1461

Tarquin: "...Who told you?"

Elysia said, "Keaton told Winona, and Winona told us... Did you already know?"

Knowing he was on thin ice, Tarquin quickly tried to defend himself. "I only found out yesterday. I just forgot to tell you."

Elysia was not pleased. "From now on, anything involving Winona and Blossom, you tell me ahead of time!"

"Okay! I'll be more careful next time."

Elysia then asked, "Also, I heard Keaton is secretly seeing a girlfriend. Do you know who it is?"

Tarquin: "He's secretly seeing someone? No way. He goes public with every single girlfriend. Who told you that?"

Elysia knew from his reaction that even he was in the dark. "Jess told me..."

Tarquin's lips thinned. Keaton had totally fooled Janelle and Richard!

He decided not to expose Keaton just yet. "Does this have something to do with Winona?"

Not wanting Winona's efforts to be in vain and worried for her safety, Elysia told him about seeing Beatrix at the hospital that day. She emphasized how Winona had stepped forward to shield her and how Beatrix had threatened her.

"You need to talk to Keaton. I know he's helped Winona a lot in the past, but he can't let her be put in danger. He needs to handle his business with Beatrix properly."

Tarquin's expression was serious. "Okay, I understand."

Elysia pressed, "So you really don't know what's going on between Keaton and Beatrix?"

Tarquin: "No idea. He's never mentioned it."

Elysia muttered, "I don't get it. Keaton doesn't even like Beatrix, so why is he her backer? Does he owe her something?"

Tarquin: "...I'm not sure."

Elysia sighed. "It's his private life, and it's not our business, but I won't stand for it if Beatrix uses his protection to hurt Winona."

Tarquin said, "Don't worry. If he lets Winona get hurt again, I'll beat him up myself. Nobody hurts my wife, and nobody hurts my wife's best friend!"

A sweet feeling spread through Elysia's heart, and a smile touched her lips. "In that case, come home early tonight. I want to be the first to wish you a happy birthday."

Tarquin asked, "...Besides 'happy birthday,' is there a surprise?"

Elysia's cheeks flushed. "Are you saying you won't come home if there isn't?"

Tarquin laughed. "No, of course not. I'm coming home either way. I miss my wife."

His words, "I miss my wife," made her heart skip a beat.

Elysia didn't mention the 'surprise' again, saying softly, "I miss you too. Hurry home as soon as you're done."

"I will."

The young couple flirted for a while longer, only reluctantly hanging up when Evan came looking for her. To anyone listening, you'd think they

hadn't

known each other in ages

when in fact, they had just been

together yesterday morning.

When Elysia went downstairs, Clayton asked her, "Is Tarquin coming back for dinner tonight?"

"No, he'll be late. We can eat without him."

"Alright, we won't wait for him then."

The family enjoyed a lively dinner together.

After the meal, Clayton said, "The kids don't have school tomorrow. Let them stay

over at our place. You and Tarquin can pick them up tomorrow and have lunch with us then."

He was, of course, creating an opportunity for Elysia and Tarquin to have some time alone. Having been through it themselves, they knew that young couples in love cherished every moment together. Tarquin hadn't been home for several nights, and tomorrow was his birthday. As they say, absence makes the heart grow fonder. By taking the kids, they were giving the two a chance to nurture their relationship.

Elysia appreciated the gesture. "That's so nice of you, Mom and Dad. Thank you."

Clayton smiled warmly. "Don't be so formal with your own parents. Your mom and I love having the little ones around. She's always hoping they'll come stay over."

Clayton's house was in the same villa community, not far away. When they bought it they had already set up rooms for Elysia and the children complete with bedrooms and study areas.

Chapter 1462

"You all be good tonight, and listen to Grandpa and Grandma, okay?"

Baby, hugging Lan, nodded enthusiastically. "Don't worry, Mommy. Tonight, we promise we won't ask Grandpa for onion rings, or fried chicken and fries, and we won't drink any soda."

Clayton quickly clapped a hand over Baby's mouth, shooting an awkward grin at Elysia. "..."

Her four brothers face-palmed in unison. *Silly sister, that's a dead giveaway.* Elysia saw right through it but didn't say anything, just smiling. "Alright, off you go." She usually didn't let the kids eat those things, but a little treat now and then was fine.

After Clayton and Pamela left with the children, Elysia tied on an apron and went to the kitchen to bake a cake for Tarquin. As she worked, she started a video call with Winona and Blossom.

Winona asked, "So what's the final plan for Mr. Bradford's birthday tomorrow?"

Elysia said, "During the day, we'll celebrate at home with my parents and the kids. At night, we'll all go out and party."

This was what she and Tarquin had discussed earlier. It was his first birthday since their family of seven had been reunited, and it had to be special.

Winona said, "Keaton just called me. He told me to invite a bunch of our girlfriends to go hang out at The Blissful Pub tomorrow night. He said it's to liven up Mr. Bradford's party, but I think he's just holding auditions for his next girlfriend."

Blossom, ever the gossip, chimed in, "So that secret girlfriend he's been hiding doesn't actually exist?"

Elysia added, "I asked Tarquin about it today, and even he didn't know anything."

Winona said, "Looking at him, I'd bet she doesn't. I have no idea how he managed to fool Janelle and Mr. Huber."

Blossom snarked, "If he was lying, he's definitely going to get an earful later!"

Winona said, "An earful is the least of his worries. Check this out." She sent a photo

of Keaton's alpaca-like haircut to their group chat. Elysia and Blossom burst out laughing at the same time.

"Is that Keaton's new hairstyle?"

Winona giggled. "He would never go out in public like that. He's probably already had it cut. Janelle sent it to me. She said if Keaton ever bullies me again, I can use this to blackmail him. He's so concerned about his image, he'll do whatever I say to keep the photo from getting out."

Elysia understood Janelle's intentions and felt a brief pang of regret. Janelle was genuinely good to Winona; she would be a very

happy daughter-in-law. It was line

shame Keaton was such a lost cause. With his playboy ways, Elysia had no faith in them as a couple.

After gossiping about Keaton for a bit, the conversation shifted to the birthday surprise Elysia had prepared for Tarquin. As soon as the topic came up Elysia quickly hung up claiming she had a message" check. She was far too modest to handle Winona's raunchy suggestions. Just thinking about

what Winona had coached her to do

made her cheeks burn.

After finishing the small cake, she put it in the fridge and went to the bathroom to get

ready. Once she was all cleaned up, she slipped into bed to wait for him.

She waited until eleven o'clock at night, but Tarquin still wasn't back. She couldn't

help but text him. [Are you on your way home?]

Tarquin called her. "Getting impatient?"

"No, I was just bored and thought I'd ask."

Tarquin said, "On the road. I'll be home in about half an hour."

Elysia glanced at the time. Half an hour from now would still be before midnight. "Okay, drive safe."

"I will."

Knowing Lowell was also in the car, Elysia kept it brief. "I'll hang up then." "Mm."

After Elysia hung up, Tarquin put his phone away. He frowned, his eyes turning icy as he glanced in the rearview mirror.

Then he looked at the navigation. "Take a right at the next intersection," he told Lowell.

Lowell gripped the steering wheel, his expression tense. "That's a dead end."

"I know. Just do it!"

Chapter 1463

Lowell didn't dare hesitate, yanking the steering wheel hard. The car veered off the main road and onto a narrow lane.

Tarquin spoke again. "Go to the end, turn around, and stop!"

Lowell did as he was told. When he reached the end, he spun the car around and slammed on the brakes, bringing it to a steady halt.

Directly ahead, three cars that had been tailing them pulled up, their high beams blindingly bright as they blocked the entrance to the lane. They had been on their tail since they left the Bradford family estate, boxing them in, trying to ram their car. That's why he wasn't home yet, even though it should have been after ten.

Tarquin knew Elysia wanted him home by midnight, and he was anxious to get back to his wife. After playing cat and mouse with them on the road for over an hour, his patience had run out.

"Get out!"

Tarquin ordered Lowell as he pushed his own door open and stepped out. Lowell scrambled out of the driver's side and followed. Seeing Tarquin get into the driver's seat, Lowell quickly circled around to the passenger side and jumped in.

"Seatbelt."

After the sharp reminder, Tarquin shifted into gear and slammed the gas pedal to the floor. The car shot forward like a bullet. The black luxury sedan roared to life,

hurtling toward the cars ahead. Even as they were about to collide, Tarquin didn't slow down.

Lowell, terrified, gripped the handle, swallowing nervously. Tarquin's brow was furrowed, his eyes fixed ahead, resolute, with no intention of stopping.

The other driver, seeing he was serious, tried to back off. Tarquin gave them no chance, ramming straight into them.

The impact sent the other car flying several feet, rolling over a few times before it came to a dead stop. The remaining two cars tried to flee, but their escape was blocked by the wrecked vehicle.

A few minutes later, all three cars that had been following him were out of commission. Tarquin checked the time, told Lowell to stay and clean up the mess, and drove home.

On the way, he received a text message.

[Heard you've been under a lot of stress lately, so I arranged for some people to race with you. Give you a little excitement. Fun, right? You used to love racing when you were a kid.]

Tarquin's expression hardened into a facade of cold granite. He didn't bother

replying; he didn't need to. Despite the unknown phone's number, the venom in the words was unmistakable. He knew exactly who was rattling the cage.

Two video files followed. The

second he tapped play,

bloodcurdling screams shattered the silence of the car. The footage was fow and brutal- Gideo Bradford being mercilessly tortured in the first, and the Thorne family enduring the same gruesome fate in the second. The images were gruesome, bloody, and violent, an

assault on the eyes.

The sender texted again: [We have a history of both love and hate, Tarquin. Happy early birthday.]

Seeing that name, Tarquin's brow tightened, the fury in his eyes deepening. Only two people in the world had ever called him 'Tarquin.' His mother, and... All the clues pointed to that person. Tarquin frowned and lit a cigarette. He stopped at a red light, smoking as he watched the bustling traffic outside his window, a wave of despair

washing over his anger.

Half an hour later, Tarquin arrived home, having composed himself. Elysia wasn't in

the bedroom. He texted her. [Not home?]

Elysia replied instantly. [Go take a shower first. I'll be back in the bedroom in a minute.]

Tarquin assumed she was still in

Baby's room and didn't think much of it. He sent a hug emoji and

headed for the bathroom. Just as he stepped out of the shower, the bedroom lights suddenly went out. The next second music started playing. Elysia appeared, holding a cake, walking slowly toward him...

to,

Tarquin's handsome eyes narrowed. He had guessed Elysia would celebrate his birthday at midnight, but... he hadn't guessed she would play his parents' favorite song. Who plays a slow, classical ballad for a birthday?

The candlelight illuminated her small, fair face. Seeing her standing there, dressed neatly and humming along so seriously, he didn't laugh. His expression became as solemn as hers.

Chapter 1464

The music stopped. Elysia said, "First, for your parents, happy birthday. You can make a wish and blow out the candles now."

Tarquin was stunned. She was playing the song because of his parents... Overwhelmed with emotion, he closed his eyes, made a wish as she'd asked, and blew out the candles.

As soon as he did, Elysia lit them again. "Next is from me, my parents, and the kids."

The music started again, but this time it was a proper happy birthday song. It was a chorus of Elysia, Clayton, Pamela, and the little ones. "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you..."

The moment the music began, Tarquin couldn't help but smile, his mood completely different from a moment ago. The melody was solemn and serious. This chorus was joyful and boisterous—more chaotic than a bus full of kindergarteners on a sugar high. Elysia and the kids belted out the song in a wonderfully chaotic chorus— voices overlapping, completely out of sync, and happily entirely off-key.

When the song ended, they each chimed in with a 'happy birthday.'

Elysia held the small cake and smiled. "Happy birthday, honey. Quick, make another wish and blow out the candles."

Tarquin was speechless. It was the first time he'd ever had to make two wishes and blow out candles twice for one birthday. But if she was teasing him, he was happy to play along.

Tarquin closed his eyes again, made another wish, and blew out the candles. The instant they were out, Elysia said, "Close your eyes."

Tarquin narrowed his eyes. "What for?"

Elysia: "Just listen to me."

He smiled and obediently closed his eyes. Elysia waved a hand in front of his face. Tarquin chuckled. "Even with my eyes closed, I can feel your hand there. Don't worry, I can't see you. It's so dark in here I can't see you even with my eyes open." Elysia pulled her hand back. "Turn around."

Tarquin sighed and complied, turning his back to her. He heard some rustling behind him and sensed that Elysia had gone into the walk-in closet, but he had no idea what she was doing.

Minutes ticked by... Tarquin lost track of how long he'd been waiting, and Elysia still hadn't come out.

He couldn't help but ask, "Honey?"

Elysia's voice came out flustered. "C-Coming! I'm... I'm almost ready."

Tarquin was puzzled. *What's she so nervous about?*

A moment later, he heard movement behind him again and knew she was back

"Honey."

"...Yeah."

"Can I open my eyes now?"

"No! But you... you can turn around."

Her voice wasn't normal. It was tinged with shyness and a breathless urgency. Tarquin didn't know what she was up to, but as soon as he turned, Elysia warned, "If you dare open your eyes I'll get mad at you!"

Tarquin: "I won't. What next?"

Elysia paused before saying, "Raise your hands and cover your eyes."

Tarquin: "They're already closed. I can't see a thing."

Elysia: "That's not good enough. Cover them anyway."

Tarquin obeyed. Only then was Elysia satisfied. "I... I want to dance for you."

Tarquin froze, then asked, "Shouldn't I open my eyes for that?"

Elysia immediately stopped him. "No!"

Tarquin: "How am I supposed to watch if my eyes are closed?"

Elysia mumbled, "You can just... feel it with your heart. No peeking, okay?"

Tarquin was baffled. *I'm going to dance

For

*

`you, but don't you

watch What kind of logic wast wife using?

Chapter 1465

Playful music began to fill the room, and a soft glow flickered past his eyes.

Curious, Tarquin peeked through his fingers. The dim room was now bathed in colorful, swirling polka-dot lights, creating a mysterious atmosphere. Elysia, wearing a red silk robe, stood by the bed where she had just lit some incense. The fragrance quickly spread, adding a sensual touch to the scene.

She turned around and walked toward him, her movements hesitant. Stopping about six feet away, she gave a little wave, as if to test whether he could really see her. On her head, she wore a fuzzy cat-ear headband. When she tilted her head, the ears wiggled, looking criminally cute. A matching cat mask covered her eyes, making her lips look even more red and inviting.

A cute and bewitching little wildcat.

Tarquin had never seen anything like this. He froze on the spot, not daring to move or make a sound, afraid of revealing that he was peeking.

Elysia, thinking he couldn't see, let out a long breath and began to untie her belt.

Tarquin's heart hammered in his chest. *!* But Elysia suddenly stopped. She stared at him for a few seconds, then turned her back to him. Suddenly, she whipped back around. "Tarquin, what am I doing?!"

Tarquin jumped, trying his best to keep his voice steady. "...I don't know. I can't see. What are you doing?"

He saw Elysia let out another sigh of relief before warning him sternly, "Nothing! If you dare peek, I'll hit you! I really will!"

Tarquin forced a laugh. "...Got it."

Elysia warned, "Keep your eyes shut tight. I... I'm going to dance for you. For your birthday!"

After another wave to confirm he wasn't looking, she turned around and let the silk robe fall from her shoulders...

Tarquin's breathing hitched. *!* His Elysia had always been so modest and shy; she had never been this bold before... This was a first, and he was getting an eyeful.

Elysia kept her eyes squeezed shut, her whole body trembling. Despite her efforts to stay calm, despite making him close his eyes, she was so mortified she wanted to flee. If it weren't to make him happy, if it weren't to give him a memorable birthday, she would never have been able to go through with this. Winona had told her that men were visual creatures, animals at heart, and that a dance like this would make Tarquin happier than a mountain of gold. She wanted to make him happy... He'd seemed so preoccupied lately, and she didn't know if it was just because of Elizabeth Gonzalez's ashes or something else. Whatever it was, she wanted to cheer him up. She loved him, and she was willing to be bold if it made him happy.....

But just wearing this and dancing in front of him was her absolute limit. She couldn't possibly do it while he was watching. The best she could manage was to dance for him with his eyes closed. Elysia summoned her courage, turned around, and, with her eyes still tightly shut, began to move...

Shyness mingled with a hint of seductive allure. Tarquin stood frozen. He admitted it: in that moment, Elysia was a siren, and he was a sailor ready to smash his ship on the rocks for her. If she had whispered 'die for me,' he would have done it without a second thought. He was only a man, after all, and he was powerless against this kind of enchantment.

The two-minute dance felt like two centuries for both of them. The performer was flustered and frantic. The spectator was burning up, barely able to contain himself.

When the dance ended, Elysia turned and bolted for the bed. According to Winona's plan, she was supposed to lie back in a seductive pose, letting the mood lighting wash over her for a perfect finale. But right now, all she wanted to do was dive under the covers and hide. Before she even reached the bed, Tarquin caught her by the wrist. With a gentle pull, he brought her into his arms. His hand rested on her waist, caressing her softly.

"This surprise... is really a surprise! This is the best gift I've received in my thirty years!"

Elysia's heart pounded, her body trembled, and her cheeks flushed crimson. "You... you saw?"

Tarquin murmured, "Elysia, you're going to be the death of me."

Before she could understand what he meant, he tilted her chin up, and his kiss was sudden and fierce... They lost track of time entirely, the hours melting away as they lost themselves in each other. Again and again, Tarquin worshipped her, pulling Elysia into a dizzying, intoxicating haze of pleasure until the first light of dawn began to creep through the curtains. She finally understood the saying you could hear about passion, but you'd never know what it truly felt like to die and be reborn in a lover's arms, again and again, until you experienced it yourself.

...

The next morning, Elysia woke up once. Tarquin hadn't gotten out of bed. He was leaning against the headboard, eating the small birthday cake she had made for him last night.

Elysia mumbled sleepily, "It's been out all night. Is it still good?"

Tarquin said, "It is."

Elysia asked, "Is it good?"

Tarquin dabbed a bit of cream on his lips and leaned in. "You tell me."

Elysia dodged him. "Stop messing around."

Tarquin insisted, "This is my birthday cake. You're not going to have any?"

Elysia paused for a moment, then leaned in and licked the cream from his lips, tasting it herself. Tarquin's gaze darkened as he whispered against her mouth, "Is it good?"

Elysia nodded hazily. "It's good."

Tarquin asked, "Is it as good as me?"

Elysia's lashes fluttered. Before she could react, Tarquin had pulled the covers over

both of them, and the teasing began all over again.

Elysia didn't know how long he went on. When she next woke up, it was already two in the afternoon.

Elysia was stunned. "It's two in the afternoon?"

Tarquin looked at her with a doting smile. "Mmm-hmm."

"Oh no, no, no."

Elysia scrambled to get up, but Tarquin held her in his arms. "Don't worry. I already talked to Dad. We'll get together tonight instead. Mom and Dad took the kids to the park this morning, and they weren't ready to leave, so I rescheduled with Dad for dinner. Lunch is canceled."

Chapter 1466

Elysia let out a long sigh of relief. That was a load off her mind.

She snuggled into Tarquin's arms and asked, "If we're having dinner with my parents and the kids tonight, how are you going to see your friends?"

"I don't have to eat with them," Tarquin said. "I'll just swing by Keaton's place after dinner. And if I don't feel like it, I can just video call them. It's the thought that counts."

Elysia immediately shut that down. "No way. You're the birthday boy. It wouldn't be right if you weren't there."

Tarquin chuckled. "It's fine. I haven't celebrated in years. They're used to it."

"This year is different." Elysia stroked his cheek, her heart aching for him. "You only stopped celebrating because of Elijah. Now that we're all together again, we're celebrating every birthday from now on."

Elijah used to miss his mother so much that he refused to celebrate his birthday. The day always made him incredibly sad. And if Elijah wasn't celebrating, Tarquin wouldn't either. So for all these years, neither of them had ever had a birthday party.

Tarquin flashed a roguish grin. "If you feel so bad for me, you can make it up to me with more surprises. I happen to love it when you play dress-up, especially when you get a little wicked..."

Elysia clapped a hand over his mouth, her cheeks burning. "Don't you dare say another word!"

Tarquin's smile was radiant as he hugged her. "God, how can you be so cute?!" Elysia pinched him. "Still think I'm cute?"

"Cute. A fierce little kitten."

Elysia feigned anger. "Are you calling me a feisty?"

"Nope. You're my little cutie." Tarquin laughed, pulling her head into his chest. "I'm just teasing. I'm really touched that you'd go to such lengths just to make me happy."

Elysia huffed, "You... pervert!"

Tarquin chuckled. "I'm only a pervert for you. I wouldn't look twice if any other woman danced for me. Are you hungry? Let me get you something to eat. You should have a little something before you go back to sleep." She'd had a long night and was seriously lacking sleep.

"Just a piece of cake is fine," Elysia said.

"It's gone. I finished it."

Elysia's eyes widened. "You ate the whole thing?"

"Yep. My wife made it with her own hands, I couldn't let it go to waste. More importantly, it was delicious."

Elysia was a little skeptical at his praise. "Was it really that good?"

"Of course it was. When have you ever seen me eat sweets? If it wasn't good, I

would've had one bite and been done. I wouldn't have finished it."

That made Elysia happy. "Then I'll make it for you again next time."

"Deal." Tarquin ruffled her hair and kissed the top of her head before getting up to get her some food. He had made some chicken soup carlle and he ladled a bowl for Elysia, blowing on each spoonful

until it was cool enough before feeding it to her.

After finishing the soup, her

stomach felt settled, and she drifted back to sleep, not waking up until five-thirty in the afternoon. When she finally woke up again, she felt much more refreshed, her energy restored. Her body still felt a little weak, but it didn't hinder her normal movements, and she wasn't sore down there anymore.

Elysia stood by the bed, looking at Tarquin suspiciously. "?"

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Are you not feeling well?"

Elysia's lips parted. "Did... did you put some ointment on me?"

"Yeah. I was afraid you'd be uncomfortable today."

Elysia's cheeks reddened, and she quickly changed the subject. "Aren't you tired?"

Tarquin's handsome eyes narrowed. "I could go another round. Wanna try?"

"Get lost."

Elysia spun around and

headed for the bathroom, her face scalding hot. Every time after they were intimate she had an existential. crisis why was he the one doing all the work, but she was the one who ended up exhausted?

That evening, Elysia and Tarquin, dressed in matching outfits, went to Clayton's house for dinner. As soon as the children saw them, they rushed to the door.

"Daddy! Mommy!"

Tarquin smiled, and after changing his shoes, he swept his baby girl into his arms. "Did my little girl have fun today?"

"I did! Happy birthday, Daddy! I got you a birthday present!"

Tarquin was delighted. "Really? You got me a present?"

"Uh-huh! Grandpa, Grandma, and my brothers got you presents too! We all want to

wish you a happy birthday."

Chapter 1467

The little girl chirped each word in her sweet, melodic voice.

Tarquin couldn't resist kissing his daughter's forehead. "Thank you, Baby."

Evan chimed in, "Us too! I want to wish Daddy a happy birthday too!"

Tarquin smiled and patted Evan's head. "Thank you, Elliot, Evan, Emmett, Elijah. And thank you, Mom and Dad."

Clayton was in high spirits. "Don't just stand there at the door. Come on in. Wash your hands, it's time for dinner."

The family walked into the house and headed for the dining room. The table was already laden with delicious dishes, all personally cooked by Clayton. He had started planning the menu days ago for Tarquin's birthday, carefully balancing the flavors. He loved his daughter, and because Tarquin treated his daughter well, he was happy to treat Tarquin well. The love of a father for his son-in-law is often a reflection of his love for his daughter. When a son-in-law gives his heart and soul to his wife, the father-in-law naturally reciprocates. It would be awkward for them to speak of love, so they showed it through their actions.

In the center of the table was a multi-layered birthday cake, a beautiful avocado green. At first glance, it looked like a tall tree. On closer inspection, you could even see the veins on the 'leaves.' The cake's design was unique and clearly took a lot of time, effort, and incredible skill.

Tarquin knew it must be Emmett's handiwork and praised it. "Where did you buy this cake? I've never seen one like it. It's so beautiful."

Emmett eagerly piped up, "Do you like it, Daddy?"

Tarquin nodded. "I love it. It looks like a big tree. It's so realistic, the baker must be amazing!"

Emmett beamed. "I made it, Daddy."

Tarquin feigned surprise. "Really? Emmett, you're that talented? Why did you make a big tree for Daddy?"

Emmett said excitedly, "In my heart, Daddy is like a big, tall tree that shelters us from the wind and rain and protects us."

The simple words were a heartfelt endorsement. Tarquin was deeply moved and ruffled Emmett's hair. "Thank you for the gift, Emmett. Daddy loves it very much."

Baby rushed over, holding her gift out to Tarquin. "Daddy, Daddy, this is my present for you."

Baby's gift was a drawing she had

made herself. The artistic skill... was nonexistent. It was clearly the work of a kindergartener. She had drawn a meadow, bunay, and several

people.

Baby pointed at the drawing and explained, "This is Grandpa and

Grandma, this is Daddy and

Mommy, these are my brothers and

this is me. This is my Godfather

Keith, and this is Lan."

The sudden mention of Keith Garcia brought a wave of sadness over everyone. Only Baby was unaware that her beloved Godfather Keith was gone. She still believed Keith was just away for work, just like when he had left her in Spirit Village. She thought they would see each other again after being apart. She didn't know that Keith would never come back never appear before her again, never open his arms and call her 'Baby' in that adoring voice. He would never again lift her high in the air and spin her around...

Clayton lightened the mood. "Baby, tell Daddy what everyone is looking at."

In Baby's drawing, everyone was looking up at the sky, as if searching for something.

Baby immediately told Tarquin, "We're looking for Grandpa and Grandma. Look, Daddy, this is Grandpa, and this is Grandma."

"Grandpa is the little blue star, and Grandma is the little red star. They live in heaven, and at night they light up to say hello to us."

That simple drawing contained all of Baby's love. Tarquin felt a lump in his throat. "Daddy needs a hug."

Baby ran over and sat on his lap, giving him a kiss. Her voice was as sweet as could be. "Baby loves Daddy."

Tarquin held his daughter tightly, too moved to speak.

Chapter 1468

Evan presented Tarquin with a model fighter jet. "This is the first fighter jet I designed all by myself. It can drive on land, fly in the sky, and even go underwater! It's also my favorite model. Grandpa Walter says it's destined to be a god of war! I'm giving it to you, and I hope you can be as invincible and unstoppable as it is, Daddy!" Evan's words were full of bravado.

Elijah's, on the other hand, were filled with affection. "This is for you, Daddy. From now on, you have to be like Grandpa and do jigsaw puzzles with us." Elijah had personally made a jigsaw puzzle of the world map. The color scheme and material were identical to the one they had found in Kendrick's coffin. It was a gift filled with memories and a continuation of love.

Tarquin looked at the model and the puzzle, then hugged Evan and Elijah tightly. "Thank you, Evan and Elijah. I love them! I really, really love them! Your gifts are all amazing!"

"Daddy, this is my birthday present for you," Elliot said, handing him a picture frame. Instead of a photo, the frame held four award certificates.

'Best Son Award', presented by: Kendrick and Elizabeth

'Best Son-in-Law Award', presented by: Clayton and Pamela

'Best Husband Award', presented by: Elysia

'Best Father Award', presented by: Elliot, Evan, Emmett, Elijah, and Baby

Except for Kendrick and Elizabeth's, all the signatures were handwritten.

Elliot, wearing a white shirt and a bow tie, looked like a more serious version of Tarquin. He held the frame and explained, "I cut Grandpa and Grandma's signatures from their old notebooks, so in a way, they're authentic. I'm sure they would have been happy to give you this award."

Tarquin's eyes welled up as he looked at the four certificates. Each of the children's gifts represented their deep love, but Elliot's gift encapsulated everyone's love for him. To be recognized as a son, a son-in-law, a husband, and a father—that was the highest honor.

Elliot spoke very seriously. "In the past, because of everything Mommy went through, and because we didn't understand you, we had a lot of issues with you. Big issues."

"We used to deliberately provoke you, pick fights, and cause trouble just to make you unhappy! We would talk back to you and even told you, straight up that we didn't love you and didn't want you!"

"Now, on behalf of my siblings, I want to tell you that we're very happy with you. We have no more complaints."

"In our hearts, you are a great father, our most beloved father! Happy birthday, Daddy."

"Happy birthday, Daddy," the other four children chorused.

Tarquin was speechless. Perhaps only a father could truly understand how precious Elliot's gift was. It was his family's approval, their love!

Tarquin hugged his children, his eyes red. Elysia and Pamela also teared up, touched by the moment Elysia and Tarquin's love story had been @rocky one, and so had the relationship between him and his children.

Clayton turned away to wipe his eyes, then handed Tarquin a manila envelope. "This is from your mother and me for your birthday."

Tarquin quickly took it and opened it. Inside were shares of Hawkins Sea-freight. Tarquin was stunned. "?!"

"I know you don't need the money," Clayton said, "but it's a token of our

appreciation. Please accept it."

To anyone else, a 20% stake in

Hawkins Sea-freight was a mountain of gold. For Tarquin, it was true that he didn't need the money. But he knew that Hawkins Sea-freight was Clayton's life's work. For Clayton to give him a piece of his life's work as a birthday present-the sentiment behind it was worth more than a thousand mountains of gold.

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"I accept. Thank you, Dad."

Clayton smiled warmly. "Alright, alright, the food's getting cold. Why don't we do the cake first so Tarquin can make a wish and blow out the candles, then we can eat?"

The family composed themselves and sang "Happy Birthday" to Tarquin. They watched him make a wish, blew out the candles with him, and then dug into the cake.

"This cake is delicious! Emmett, you're amazing!" everyone exclaimed in unison. Emmett's cheeks flushed with excitement, his eyes sparkling. "Then I'll be in charge of cakes for everyone's birthdays from now on!"

"Okay! For my birthday, I want a bunny-shaped cake."

"For mine, I want a fighter jet-shaped one," Evan said, then suddenly looked at Elysia. "Mommy, what did you get Daddy for a present?"

Elysia froze. Thinking about what they'd gotten up to last night, her face instantly turned red. Her lips moved for a moment before she managed to say, "It's a secret. My gift is a secret."

Fearing her son would press further, she quickly changed the subject. "Are you all happy that it's Daddy's birthday?"

"Yes! There's so much good food, and we get to eat cake!"

"I'm happy too! I wish it was Daddy's birthday every day, so I wouldn't have to go to school."

Baby's comment made everyone roar with laughter.

After the cake, they had dinner. The birthday pasta was a team effort: Clayton prepped the grill, Pamela marinated the steaks, the kids helped set the table, and Elysia brought the final dish to the table. The room was filled with laughter and joy, the very air thick with happiness and bliss.

After dinner, the children stayed with Clayton and Pamela, while Elysia and Tarquin headed to The Blissful Pub. Just as they left the house, Tarquin suddenly pulled Elysia into his arms, cupped the back of her head, and crushed his lips against hers. The kiss was sudden, deep, and lingering.

Terrified that her parents and the children might see, Elysia tried to push him away, but she couldn't budge him. After a full seven or eight minutes, Tarquin finally released her.

Elysia was breathing heavily, about to scold him, when Tarquin cupped her face, his eyes red and his voice choked with emotion. "Thank you for bringing so much beauty into my life. All my happiness, it's because of you."

Before Elysia, his life had been a mess. His parents died young, and he spent his childhood enduring all sorts of dangers and hardships. After Elijah was born, the two of

them relied on each other, but Elijah's psychological issues put him under constant strain, living every day on edge. Then Elysia appeared, and happiness suddenly flooded into his life! So much happiness he could hardly believe it.

"Maybe fate knew it was too harsh on me in the first half of my life, so it sent you to me. You're my angel."

Elysia's lips parted. She couldn't bring herself to scold him anymore; her heart just ached for him. She placed her hand over his. "The first half of my life was full of misfortune, too. I'm so lucky I met you. You're my knight."

They stood under the streetlight, smiling at each other, their eyes filled with nothing but one another. Looking at each other was like looking at their own happiness.

After a long moment, Tarquin cupped Elysia's face again, gave her a soft kiss, then took her hand and

tucked it into his pocket as they walked to the car. A blissful smile played on his lips. He now fully understood the importance of having a good wife. Coming home to a woman like her... it was worth more than anything in the world.

And because he understood that, he wanted his brothers to experience that same happiness. That's

when Lancelot Spencer suddy

appeared, he was immediately on high alert. This guy wasn't his rival-he was Axel's! He was being vigilant on Axel's behalf. Blossom was the only girl who was bold enough to show her feelings for Axel without him pushing her away, and he was afraid someone else would snatch her up.

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On their way to The Blissful Pub, Elysia suddenly received a call from Lancelot. "Hello Elysia, it's me, Lancelot, Blossom's childhood friend."

Elysia was surprised. "?" She knew who Lancelot was but didn't expect him to call her. They'd never really interacted, and they didn't even have each other's contact information. The last time she saw him was in Silver City. Blossom had been kidnapped, and Lancelot, in an attempt to save her, had been taken by the kidnappers as well and beaten badly. He was still unconscious when they left Silver City.

"Hi," Elysia responded. "Are you looking for Blossom?"

Lancelot's tone was gentle. "No, we just parted ways. I'm outside The Blissful Pub now. I dropped her off. I heard it's your husband's birthday today, so please wish him a happy birthday for me."

Elysia was a bit confused. "...Okay, I will. Thanks. When did you get back from Silver City?"

Lancelot said, "I got back at the beginning of the month. I've been busy, just got my job situation sorted out, so I'm finally free. We should get together sometime when you're free. I'll treat you and Winona to dinner, bring your partners along."

Elysia politely agreed. "Sure, just let us know in advance. Did you... need something from me?"

"Yes, I was hoping you could keep an eye on Blossom. She hasn't been doing too well lately — stomachaches, and she's not sleeping well. I'm worried she'll drink too much and her body won't be able to handle it."

Elysia asked, "...Why don't you go in with her?"

Lancelot sounded a bit embarrassed. "Blossom won't let me. She says I'm in the way and that I nag her too much. Besides, I have some things to take care of, so I can't go in."

"I had to ask Hollis for your number. Just keep an eye on her for me."

"Okay, I will," Elysia promised.

"Thanks. I won't keep you then. We'll talk again soon."

"Okay, bye."

After hanging up, Elysia frowned and sighed. She and Lancelot had never had any real contact, and now he was suddenly asking Hollis for her number and wanting to treat her and Winona to dinner. He was probably

getting ready to

freely pursue Blossom. But Blossom didn't like him that way. If he tried and failed, they might not even be able to remain childhood friends. Losing that friendship would be a shame for Blossom. Ugh...

Tarquin glanced at Elysia as he drove. "The one who likes Blossom?"

"Yeah, Lancelot. Her childhood friend."

"I think Blossom's parents really like him," Tarquin commented.

Elysia nodded. "They do. Lancelot grew up with Blossom, so Folly and Hollis know

him inside and out. They'd feel at ease entrusting Blossom to him."

"And it's not just that Lancelot has a good character and is handsome; he's also very capable. He was always a top student, and at a young age, he's already made

a name for himself in the world of archaeology. A real prodigy."

"Now that he's back working in Jindale City, he's probably a professor at Jindale University. With a stable job, he can stay in Jindale City and be with Blossom."

"Plus, Lancelot's parents are colleagues of Folly and Hollis. Folly and Hollis know what kind of people they are and that they adore

Blossom. All things considered Folly and Hollis would be a hundred

percent satisfied, and relieved. Blossom married into the Spencer family."

Tarquin's tone soured. "So he's a good match for her family."

Elysia didn't deny it. "They are well-matched, family-wise. Even though Blossom doesn't have a high level of education, their families are compatible, and the Spencer family doesn't look down on Blossom for her education level."

Tarquin asked, "Lancelot's not young, and he's so outstanding. Hasn't anyone pursued him?"

"He was always on the move, following Folly and Hollis around. And I suspect he's had feelings for Blossom for a long time. Maybe that's why he's so obsessed with history."