

Hitched 1471

Chapter 1471

Tarquin Bradford was curious. "What do you mean?"

Elysia Thorne explained, "Back in Silver City, Hollis mentioned once that Lancelot Spencer chose to major in archaeology just to make them happy. Folly and Hollis always wanted Blossom to study archaeology, but her grades weren't great, and she just wasn't interested in it. The fact that Lancelot majored in archaeology to please them... it has to be for Blossom's sake."

Tarquin's eyes narrowed. "Getting on his future in-laws' good side early?"

Elysia said, "That's probably the idea. He's been following Folly and Hollis around on their expeditions for years, like he's their own son. I heard that on one dig, they went into a very dangerous tomb, and Folly and Hollis almost died in there. It was Lancelot who, against everyone's advice, rushed back in to rescue the two of them while they were unconscious. He almost didn't make it out himself."

Tarquin was silent. Lancelot was that close with Blossom Blythe's parents... This was going to be tough for Axel.

Tarquin sighed. "Does our Axel still have a chance?"

Elysia sighed along with him. "His chances are in his own hands. It's up to him whether he seizes the opportunity or not. Blossom is completely devoted to him, her whole heart is his, but even the warmest heart can grow cold. If he genuinely doesn't like Blossom, that's one thing. She'd be heartbroken, but she'd eventually move on. What scares me is if he does have feelings for her but keeps pushing her away. By the time he realizes what he's lost, she might already be with Lancelot. And then it's just going to be a massive, painful mess for everyone involved."

Tarquin understood. "I'll have another good talk with him when he gets back." Now that he had experienced how wonderful a happy marriage could be, he wanted his brother-in-arms to have that, too. His own childhood was unhappy, and so was Axel's. If anything, Axel had it even worse than him. Tamsin and the others would whisper amongst themselves that Axel was colder than a statue, that they'd never even seen him crack a smile. They didn't know that Axel wasn't born that way; his past had made him like that. If there was anything in this world that could warm his heart, it would be love and a

happy, fulfilling marriage. That's why he kept encouraging Axel to give things a real try with Blossom. If he missed this chance with her, Axel might just end up alone for the rest of his life. After all, in all the years Tarquin had known him, she was the only one he didn't seem to completely push away. There was hope for him and Blossom...

Elysia asked, "When is Axel coming back?"

Tarquin snapped out of his thoughts. "If all goes well, he should be back before the holidays."

Elysia asked another question for Blossom's sake, "He won't be in any danger, will he?"

Tarquin replied, "Everything is going

smoothly for now have people

there, and they it contact me if

unexpected happens."

Elysia nodded and didn't press further. She added Lancelot's number to her contacts and put her phone away.

"By the way, do you have any plans for the Thanksgiving break?"

Tarquin countered, "Do you?"

Elysia said, "Mom and Dad want to take a trip back to Oceanopolis, and Emmett wants to see his sister and grandpa. If you don't have any other plans was thinking of taking the kids and going with them.

Tarquin didn't answer right away. His mind was on the situation in Border City. Now that he had confirmed the 8th generation virus was there, he needed to find an excuse to go himself-an excuse for the mysterious figure watching him. He couldn't let them know he was going to Border City to search for the virus.

Chapter 1472

Seeing him hesitate, Elysia added, "If you're free, you can come with us. If not, you can just focus on your work. We won't be gone for long anyway, just until the break is over."

Tarquin nodded. "I'll check my schedule later. When are your parents planning to leave?"

"Tomorrow."

"I'll arrange the private jet."

"Okay."

The couple chatted idly as they arrived at Blissful Uncle's Bar. Stepping inside was like opening a door to a whole new world. The inside of the bar was a completely different universe from the quiet, low-profile, and discreet exterior. Inside, it was a dazzling world of glamour and music, pulsing with energy and filled with handsome men and beautiful women.

Blissful Uncle's Bar was closed to the public tonight. Everyone inside was either a friend of Tarquin and Keaton Huber, or a friend of a friend. To celebrate Tarquin's birthday, Keaton was being incredibly generous and was covering the tab for everyone. He had even gone to his family's private wine cellar and brought some of their best bottles.

When Richard caught him raiding the private cellar, Keaton didn't miss a beat. "Winona asked me to grab these," he lied smoothly. "It's Tarquin's birthday, and Elysia's joining us. Winona wanted to make sure we had something decent to toast with."

At the mention of his potential future daughter-in-law, Richard's demeanor instantly changed. He immediately ordered a staff member to haul out an entire premium case. "Take these," his father ordered. "Make sure Winona looks good in front of her friends."

And so, using Winona's name, Keaton conned a case of fine wine out of his dad and made himself look like the man of the hour. Meanwhile, the completely clueless Winona had been used as an unwitting pawn!

On the stage on the first floor, a beautiful woman was performing a sensual dance. Her hot body, daring moves, and sultry gaze made even Elysia's cheeks flush. The men in the audience were cheering and whistling wildly.

Keaton and the main group were in a private room upstairs. Most of the people downstairs had been brought along by friends to fill the space and weren't in their immediate social circle. So, no one recognized Tarquin.

He led Elysia toward the stairs. "If it's too loud for you," Tarquin said, "we can just say hi and then leave." He knew Elysia wasn't fond of noisy bars.

Elysia immediately shook her head. She might not love it, but she certainly wasn't going to be a party pooper. "It's not often I get a night out without the kids. I was actually planning to have a few drinks with Winona and Blossom. Don't you dare ruin my fun."

Tarquin chuckled. Elysia glanced at the dancer on stage again, curious. "Is this what all men like?"

Without even looking, Tarquin said, "I only like you. Not just someone *like* you, but only you."

Elysia felt a sweet warmth spread through her. She looked at the

dancer one more time and complimented. "She's a real good dancer."

Tarquin immediately replied, "Not as good as you."

Elysia said, "You didn't even look!"

"I don't need to. I already know my wife is the best dancer."

Elysia pouted. "How can you compare without looking? You're just blindly praising me."

"In my heart, my wife is the most beautiful, the most exceptional, the pinnacle of everything. No one else can compare," Tarquin said.

Feeling as if she'd been fed a spoonful of honey, her heart

swelling, Elysia remarked. "You used to look down on me. You said I was dumb and foolish and that you'd never in your life make a move on me."

Tarquin's jaw dropped. "I said that?"

"Mhm, you did."

"Impossible! I'm not blind. How could I have said something like that? You must be misremembering."

Elysia pouted. "Not going to admit it? The readers all remember."

Tarquin grinned. "I'll bribe the readers with more sweet moments. We'll get them to pretend they have amnesia right along with me. I was young and reckless back then, didn't realize how powerful love is. If he knows I would fail this hard for you, you couldn't have paid me to say those things."

Chapter 1473

"Luckily, fate was on my side. Even though it made me suffer the pains of love, you didn't get scared away."

Hearing this, a phrase suddenly popped into Elysia's head: Love is the great equalizer; rich or poor, everyone has to suffer its trials.

She smiled teasingly. "What do you mean, 'young and reckless'? You were already thirty!"

Tarquin shot back without missing a beat, "A man at thirty is in his prime."

"Oh, really? So should I start calling you Mr. Prime Time, then?"

Keaton suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs. He was wearing black trousers and a striking peacock-blue shirt, a sly grin on his face and a twinkle in his charming eyes. Thanks to Winona, his stylish, medium-length hair had been chopped into a ridiculous, messy crop, but he was still as dashing and handsome as ever.

Elysia instinctively thought of his infamous 'alpaca hairstyle' while marveling to herself: They say hairstyle makes or breaks your look, but truly handsome people look good no matter what. Setting aside Keaton's playboy ways, his looks were flawless. You'd be hard-pressed to find anyone in all of Jindale City who could top him.

Tarquin shot Keaton a look. "Is everyone here?"

"They've been here for ages, just waiting for you two. Elysia, you look beautiful tonight."

Before Elysia could respond, Tarquin cut in, "Get lost! And get your eyes off my wife!"

Keaton made a 'tsk-tsk' sound. "See, Elysia? He's so possessive. You're the boss in this relationship, you should just rename him Tarquin the Jealous."

Tarquin retorted, "Then should we start calling you Keaton the Playboy?"

"Keaton the Adonis would suit me better."

Elysia was speechless. One called 'Prime Time', the other 'Playboy'. They sounded like a matched set. It suited them both!

Ignoring their banter, she asked Keaton, "Are Winona and Blossom in the private room?"

"They are. Knowing they're your best friends, I've been taking excellent care of them. Come on, let's go find them."

The three of them headed towards the top-floor suite. It was Keaton's personal VIP room, exclusively for gatherings with his friends and not open to the public. As they reached the door Keaton personally opened it for them, then quickly stepped back.

Before Elysia could figure out what he was up to, party poppers exploded above their heads. A crowd of people ambushed them at the doorway, setting off a storm of colorful streamers amidst laughter and cheers.

Tarquin instinctively pulled Elysia into his arms, shielding her head with his hand. After the party poppers were all spent, the group of laughing friends shouted in unison, "Happy Birthday!"

Gale Windham's voice rose above

the rest, "It's our house rule! Whoever's late has to take three shots! The birthday boy gets three shots! And if you bring your girlfriend to meet the guys for the first time, that's another three shots!

Booker Murphy chimed in, "But Ms. Thorne isn't just a girlfriend, she's his honest-to- God wife! So three shots aren't enough. It's gotta be ten! A perfect ten for the perfect couple!"

"Right, right, nine shots!" Gale agreed.

"And that's not all!" Booker continued. "Three shots for having both a son and a daughter, and another three for having twins! How many is that in total?"

"Fifteen shots!" Gale yelled.

"Fifteen, you idiot! It's eighteen!" Booker shot back.

Keaton looked at them with utter disdain. "Did your gym teacher teach you math? Good thing you two are only children, or you'd never be able to split an inheritance correctly! It's twenty-one shots!"

Gale and Booker counted on their fingers. "Oh yeah, Keaton's right, twenty-one! So, Tarquin, are you going to take the shots, or are you going to give your wife a public kiss? You can choose between 21 shots or a 21-minute kiss!"

The men started chanting, "Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!"

Chapter 1474

It was the first time Elysia had really attended a party with Tarquin's friends, and she blushed bright red. Not knowing they were just teasing, she looked at Tarquin nervously. Kissing in public was embarrassing, but twenty-one shots? That was enough to put someone in the hospital.

Tarquin knew Elysia was shy. He wrapped an arm around her waist and said for all

to hear, "Just ignore them. They're just jealous because I have a wife and they don't. They're just trying to stir up trouble. We're not kissing and we're not drinking. There's nothing they can do about it."

Booker protested, "Tarquin, you can't break the rules! That's not cool, man. Hurry up and pick one!"

"Since when did we have so many rules?" Tarquin asked.

"We just made them today. All the guys agreed, right?" Booker said.

Seeing that Tarquin was in a good mood, the crowd of men chimed in, "Yeah, yeah, those are the new rules!"

"Drinking is bad for you, Tarquin, just choose the kiss!"

"Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!"

The group hooted and hollered, enjoying the show. After all, Tarquin used to avoid women like the plague, and now that he suddenly had a wife, everyone was eager to see this new side of him.

Gale raised an eyebrow. "Tarquin, don't tell me you're afraid of your wife? You won't kiss her unless she gives the okay?"

With a handsome, straight face, Tarquin announced, "I'm proud to answer to my wife. I actually have a wife to answer to. You guys don't." His tone was incredibly smug and proud. The crowd was stunned into silence. He was actually proud of it! Since when was being totally whipped something to brag about?

Tarquin waved over a server and downed three shots to pay for his tardiness. He refused to acknowledge any of the other punishments. Just then, another server wheeled in an enormous birthday cake, and everyone's attention shifted. They albsang "Happy Birthday" and offered their best wishes to Tarquin.

When it came time to make a wish, Elysia was standing beside Tarquin, but he pulled her into his arms. In front of everyone, he stood behind her, wrapped her in an embrace, took her hands and clasped them together, and stood before the cake to make a wish. Elysia

as already

blushing, but in the next second, she realized she had blushed too soon. The shameless Tarquin started making his wish out loud.

"I wish that my wife can celebrate every birthday with me from now on, that I can hold her every night when we sleep, and that she'll give me a 'special present' every day..."

Horrified, Elysia quickly pulled her hands away, turned around, and clamped a hand over his mouth, glaring at him. "What 'special present'? Be quiet! If you say a birthday wish out loud, it won't come true. Keep it to yourself."

Tarquin's eyes crinkled as he asked, "Will it come true if I wish for it in my head?" Elysia shot him a look. "Yes!"

Tarquin smiled. "Alright, then. I'll wish for it in my head." He took her hands again, returning them to their clasped position, and made a wish with her. Elysia's heart pounded and she cursed him in her head, calling him a dog. If she had known he was this wicked, she wouldn't have given him a birthday surprise! How could he say something so private in public? How could he be so shameless!

After the wish, Tarquin prompted her to blow out the candles with him, and then held her hand as they cut the first slice of cake. After a while, the large group began to break off into smaller activities. Some played cards, some played pool, and others sang and danced. The private suite had everything.

Gale and Booker called Tarquin over for a game of cards. Tarquin refused, his reason being that he had to stay with his wife.

Keaton said, "You've been showing off your PDA all night, haven't you had enough? Come on, stop the lovey-dovey act. The whole world knows you have a wife and you two are deeply in love."

Tarquin corrected him, "I'm madly in love!"

Even Elysia got goosebumps listening to him. Blushing, she shooed him away. "Go on, go play with them. I want to have a private chat with Winona and Blossom."

Chapter 1475

Tarquin asked reluctantly, "Can't I listen?"

"No."

"Then can I go play cards with them?" Tarquin asked.

Elysia was speechless. Had he been possessed by a comedian? Other men, when they were out, were terrified of anyone finding out they were whipped. He, on the other hand, seemed terrified that people *wouldn't* know his status in the family!

Helplessly, Elysia tried to act nonchalant. "Go, go. I support whatever you want to do."

Only then did Tarquin get up with a smile. "Call me if you need anything."

"I know." *Just go, please just go.*

After Tarquin left, Blossom commented, "I never realized Mr. Bradford had an extroverted side. Who was it that said he was a man of few words? He seems pretty talkative to me. No, not talkative, a show-off! Good heavens, he might as well have tattooed your name on his forehead. Is he afraid someone's going to steal you away? Or that someone's going to steal *him* away?"

Elysia retorted, "They say women get 'pregnancy brain' for a while, but men lose their minds for life once they fall in love. They turn into absolute babies."

Elysia)

Just as Elysia finished speaking, a group of women came over to chat. Because everyone knew Elysia would be there, they had all been on their best behavior, bringing either their actual wives, official girlfriends, or fiancées. They were all from the elite circle, with prominent family backgrounds. But compared to Elysia, they were in a different league entirely. In terms of their own family's status, they couldn't compare. In terms of their

husband's family, they couldn't

compa

either

Without a

a doubt,

Elysia was the undeniable queen bee

of their generation's high-society wives. What's more, most of the young women here tonight weren't even married yet, so they didn't quite have the 'wife' status.

Giving compliments is an art form. The savvy ones praised Tarquin's love for Elysia, her favored position how she married for love, and what good fortune she had. The smarter ones showered Elysia with praise for her own merits-her beauty, her figure, her well-maintained skin, and her positive influence on her husband. They talked about her adoring husband, her healthy children, and her blissful family, calling her the envy of all women. They also took the opportunity to ask for Elysia's contact information, suggesting they go shopping or have tea together sometime.

Elysia wasn't particularly interested in them, but out of politeness, she added them all. Someone pulled her into the 'Jindale City Wives' group chat, introducing her as Mrs. Bradford. The group instantly came alive, and even members who hadn't been active in ages popped up to greet her.

The social dynamics of the elite were far more complex than those of ordinary people. Even among the wealthy wives, there was a pecking order. The higher the status of their husband's family or their own, the higher their position. And when family statuses were equal, a cherished wife ranked higher than one who was not. Elysia, whose husband's family and her own were both powerful, and who was adored by both, was at the very top of the hierarchy. Moreover, when they were out in public, they often represented more than just themselves; they represented their family's upbringing and their husband's reputation. As people often say, every social circle has its pros and cons. Women from wealthy families have material comforts, but also many restrictions and concerns. Women from ordinary families might not afford designer brands, but their lives are simpler and freer.

Elysia disliked socializing, but now that she held the position of Mrs. Bradford, it was unavoidable. She was Elysia, but she was also Tarquin's wife, Mrs. Bradford. In the future, interacting with these women

in the group was inevitable. She politely and graciously typed a message in the group before exiting the chat.

Just as she finished dealing with the women, Gale and Booker suddenly appeared, with several other rich guys in tow.

Chapter 1476

"Elysia! Great to see you." A group of young men from prominent families strolled over to greet her. With Tarquin absent, they were on their best behavior, a far cry from their usual playful and irreverent selves. Their smiles were as bright and sincere as a summer morning. "Can I help you with something?" Elysia replied politely. Gale chimed in with a grin. "Not at all. We just wanted to come over and say hi, get properly introduced. That way we don't startle you if we run into you on the street." "I'm Gale, by the way..." After Gale's introduction, the others followed suit. When they had all finished, they spoke as a group. "If you ever need anything, anything at all, just let us know." "We might not be as capable as Tarquin, but we're not useless. We can definitely help with the small stuff." "Tarquin is like a brother to us, which makes you family. To our first official meeting, we'd like to propose a toast!" "We'll drink, but you shouldn't. Tarquin would have our heads if he found out we let you drink." One by one, they tipped their heads back and drained their glasses. The other women in the private room glanced over, their eyes filled with envy.

These trust-fund elites, like Gale, were men that women usually tripped over themselves to get the attention of, often with little success. Yet here they were, acting like loyal followers, all vying for Elysia's favor. It was true what they said: a woman's standing among her husband's friends reflected her husband's own status. When a man of high standing clearly adored his partner, his friends naturally treated her with the utmost respect. It was similar to how a woman was treated by her in-laws; it all depended on her husband. If he cherished her and had a voice in the family, she would be respected, and no one would dare bully her. Any woman who was mistreated by her in-laws undoubtedly had a husband who wasn't pulling his weight. Seeing them all drink, Elysia felt it would be rude not to join. She raised a glass of red wine and took a sip with them. Gale buttered her up. "Elysia, you're basically a legend in our house. Whenever my mom talks about you, she can't stop singing your praises." Booker jumped in. "You're even more popular in my house. It's not just my mom-even my dad speaks about you with total reverence."

"And in my family," another added, "it's not just my parents. The whole extended family practically worships the ground you walk on. They keep telling me I need to find a woman with half your class and grace to settle down with!"

Elysia forced a slightly awkward smile. After the group left, Blossom asked, "When did you become the talk of the town for the older generation?" Elysia sighed. "I didn't. I just happen to be very fertile." "What?" Blossom's eyes widened. "These old-money families don't lack for cash," Elysia explained. "They don't have to worry about the cost of raising children, so they adore kids. But nowadays, young people are more open-minded, and a lot of women don't want any children at all. And then there's me, who had several at once. In the eyes of those elders, isn't that considered a huge accomplishment? Something to be proud of?" Blossom finally understood. "Oh, that's why. I was wondering when you suddenly started running in their circles." "Having multiple babies at once is rare, but it's also incredibly dangerous. You and the kids were just lucky nothing went wrong. Elysia, are you and Mr. Bradford planning on having more?" Elysia gave a wry smile. "More? We already have a whole crew." "Have you two talked about it?" "We have. Tarquin doesn't want me to get pregnant again. He said it's too painful and too risky, and he's absolutely against it." Blossom gave her a thumbs-up. "A big thumbs-up for Mr. Bradford. He knows how to take care of you."

Chapter 1477

"Your mother's side has a history of multiple births, which means your chances of having multiples are high. For most women, childbirth is like a trip to hell and back. For you, it's like taking that trip multiple times." "Even with modern medicine, it was a miracle you survived." Hearing this, Elysia let out a long sigh, her heart filled with a wave of emotion. If it weren't for the old couple who took her in up in the mountains, she and the children would have been long gone. She'd never have had the chance to be here today, cherished by Tarquin, chatting with her best friend under the envious gazes of others. The thought of the elderly couple filled Elysia's eyes with warmth. She had to talk to them at their next meeting and convince them to move closer so she could help care for them. The mountain life was peaceful, but as people age, they lose their ability to care for themselves and need support. Now that she had found her happiness, she wanted everyone she cared about to be happy too. The couple from the mountains, Winona, Blossom... At that moment, Winona was surrounded by a crowd of women asking for her autograph. Elysia glanced at her before turning her attention back to Blossom. "Lancelot called me on my way here." Blossom was surprised. "Why would he call you? Wait, how did he get your number?" "He said he got it from Hollis. He asked me to keep an eye on you and make sure you don't drink too much. He said you haven't been feeling well lately, with stomach pains and insomnia." Blossom pursed her lips, sighed, and shook her head. "Thank God I didn't let that guy tag along, or I wouldn't be having any fun tonight. He's so overbearing. I pray he finds a girlfriend soon and shifts his focus off of me." Elysia asked tentatively, "Do you think Lancelot might be trying to pursue you?" "What are you thinking?" Blossom laughed and shook her head. "We're just really good friends. The two of us dating would be like my left hand dating my right. Could you even feel anything?" "But your parents seem to really want you two to be together," Elysia pointed out. Blossom pouted. "They're just trying to play matchmaker where there's no match." "Have you and Lancelot ever talked about what your parents want?" Elysia asked. "We have. Lancelot told me not to just brush it off, to live my own life and tune them out entirely."

He knows I like Axel." Elysia fell silent. Lancelot obviously liked Blossom. For him to say that..... it meant he was treading carefully, afraid to reveal his true feelings. It was true what they said: the spectator sees

the game more clearly than the players. Blossom was too close to the situation to see through Lancelot's affections. Elysia decided not to burst her bubble for now. Doing so would only ruin her mood. It was better to wait until Axel returned. "Have you told your parents about Axel?" she asked. Blossom shook her head in frustration. "I haven't dared. He already gets annoyed with me chasing him. If my parents started breathing down his neck, he'd just get more annoyed. I need to win him over first. Hey, speaking of, could you ask Mr. Bradford for me how he's doing over there? And when he might be coming back? I text and call him every day, but he never replies. He must have changed his number when he got there." "I asked on the way here," Elysia said. "Tarquin said everything is going smoothly so far. If there are no surprises, he should be back before the end of the year." Blossom's reaction was a mix of joy and sorrow. Joy that Axel was safe and well. Sorrow that "before the end of the year" meant he wouldn't be back anytime soon. But God, she missed him. If she wasn't so afraid of causing trouble for him, she would have already flown to Mariana Land to find him.

Chapter 1478

Elysia couldn't help but ask, "What if Axel's attitude towards you never changes?" Blossom's face fell instantly. "What can I do? If he doesn't like me, I can't force him to. And it's not like I can pull a 'if I can't have you, no one can move. I'll just have to be miserable by myself.'" Just hearing her say it made Elysia's heart ache. "I hope it never comes to that. But if it does, Winona and I will be right there to cry with you." "Deal. I'm definitely dragging you two in." After a moment, Blossom suddenly leaned in close to Elysia's ear, her voice a conspiratorial whisper. "So, that birthday surprise you got for Mr. Bradford... did he like it?" A blush crept up Elysia's face as she pursed her lips and stared at her friend, saying nothing. "Don't be shy," Blossom whispered. "I just want to know if it was effective. If it was, I'm going to use the same trick to seduce Axel when he gets back." Elysia's eyes widened. "?!" Blossom looked completely serious.

"Winona was right. Desperate times call for desperate measures. To win the heart of a man like that, I've got to lay it all on the line!" Elysia was at a loss for words, unsure whether to encourage or dissuade her.

If Axel were a player, she would have immediately shut the idea down. But Axel wasn't like that. If they crossed that line, he wouldn't take it lightly-he'd either put a stop to it before it started, or he'd be all in.

Just as Elysia was struggling for a response, Winona walked over. She flopped onto the sofa, downed half a glass of red wine, and let out a long breath. "God, I am exhausted. My hand is about to fall off from signing so many autographs." "One for each person? How did it take so long?" Elysia asked. Winona dabbed at the corner of her mouth and glanced towards a young woman on the phone in the corner. "She had me sign over a hundred for her." Elysia was shocked. "What does she need that many for?" "She said all her friends and family are huge fans and she wanted to give them out as gifts." "She's got some nerve!" Elysia exclaimed. Blossom chimed in, "We don't even know her, we just met tonight!

How could she ask for that? And Winona, you're too nice!" "I was doing Keaton a favor," Winona said with a sigh. Elysia's eyes widened. "She came with Keaton?" "Yep. I'm guessing she'll be upgraded to girlfriend status in a few days. I saw them making eyes at each other all night. And the fact that she's even in this room means she's not insignificant in Mr. Huber's eyes." Hearing this gave Elysia a headache. She was so tired of hearing about Keaton's romantic exploits that she couldn't even be bothered to complain anymore. She seriously wondered if Keaton was actually Richard and Janelle's son. Richard and Janelle were perfectly normal people! Looking back through the Huber family tree, there wasn't a single person as promiscuous as him. If Winona had a crush on him and wanted to use her charms to win him over, Elysia would have jumped in to stop her. Keaton was nothing like Axel! Still, Elysia couldn't resist grumbling, "I really don't know what he's going to do if he ever actually falls in love with a girl. He's so promiscuous." "He doesn't believe in marriage," Winona said. "He's not planning on settling down. He's all about the physical, not the emotional." Elysia pursed her lips. "He can't control life like that. What if he meets his soulmate and wants to get married? What girl would dare marry him?" Winona shrugged. "If he really meets 'the one,' then he's just out of luck. He could get on his knees and cry his heart out, move heaven and earth, and it still might not be enough to win her over." "With his extensive dating history? Forget a girl looking to settle down—even someone with my baggage would find him repulsive." Friends? Fine. Dating? He can take a hike. Marriage? Get lost."

Chapter 1479

Winona then added, "But, you know, I would love to watch that train wreck. Keaton falling in love would be epic. We'd have so much gossip." Elysia and Blossom shared a wicked laugh. "I'd pay to see that," Elysia said. "Let's pray the universe grants Mr. Huber a 'true love' trial experience," Blossom added, "just so we can watch his world burn." Winona arched an eyebrow and mimicked Keaton's voice, "I don't owe you three anything, do I?" "Hahaha....." As the three friends were chatting, Lowell suddenly burst into the room. His brow was furrowed, his face grim. He was walking so fast that he didn't even notice Elysia as he passed. Sensing trouble, Elysia called out, "Lowell." Lowell stopped in his tracks and quickly composed himself. "Elysia. Ms. Newsom, Ms. Blythe." Elysia stood up. "Are you looking for Tarquin?" "Yes." "Did something happen?" Lowell hesitated for a moment, then forced a smile. "Just work stuff. There's a document that needs Tarquin's signature. The project manager tracked us down to the bar and is waiting downstairs." Elysia wasn't suspicious. "Is it that urgent?" "Yeah, I think he was worried Tarquin would be out of Jindale City for the holiday weekend, so he came over tonight. You ladies continue your chat, I'll just go find Tarquin." Elysia didn't think much of it. "He's in the back room playing cards. Go on in." "Okay." Lowell smiled and waved goodbye, but the moment he was out of Elysia's line of sight, his expression turned dark again. He walked to the inner room, knocked, and pushed the door open. There were no outsiders in the room. Lowell's face was grim as he said, "Tarquin, the Punikon family has issued a formal challenge." Tarquin's eyes narrowed as he took the challenge letter from Lowell and read it. Lowell was furious. "They could have sent this anytime, but they wait for your birthday! And they deliver it straight to the bar. They're obviously trying to crash the party and ruin things for us." Keaton, who was sitting nearby, narrowed his charismatic eyes. "Are they still downstairs?" "Yeah, at the entrance. They don't look like the local Punikon dojo guys. They seem to be from Thyania, and they're incredibly arrogant." Keaton let out a cold snort. "Causing a scene in my club? They've got some nerve. I'll go handle this."

As Keaton stood up to leave, Tarquin stopped him. "Don't bother. It's beneath us to meet them." More importantly, Elysia was here tonight, and he didn't want to cause a scene that would frighten her. In a surprisingly good mood, Tarquin accepted the challenge letter. He said to Lowell, "Go tell them I've accepted their challenge. And give them your contact information. Tell them to call you directly if they need anything, so they don't have to keep running around." Lowell was worried. "Tarquin, they're making such a big show of this. They must be confident they can win. By accepting, aren't you walking right into their trap?" Tarquin remained calm. He needed to investigate Master Bernard and his wife, and this would require a meeting with Punikon's grandfather. The challenge letter conveniently gave him a reason to go to Border City. Plus, a trip to Thyania would give him an opportunity to check on Axel in Mariana Land. Without offering much explanation, Tarquin simply said, "Just do as I say." Lowell was silent. He didn't know what Tarquin was thinking, and he really didn't want him to accept the challenge. Punikon's grandfather was a major figure in the martial arts world, a man with real skills. Moreover, the match was set in Thyania, on their home turf. Going there was like walking into the lion's den. But Tarquin had given his order, and Lowell had no choice but to obey.

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Outside the bar, the two Thyanian martial artists exchanged a look of surprise when they heard Tarquin had accepted the challenge. They had expected him to refuse. They were surprised he'd agreed so readily. After all, anyone who knew the Punikon family's internal drama knew that Punikon's father had only opened a dojo in Zhinora because of some trouble that had forced him out of Thyania. He was by far the weakest link in the family. So, when Tarquin defeated him, the rest of the family wasn't particularly shocked, nor did they think Tarquin was anything special. If the incident hadn't caused such a public stir and damaged the Punikon family's reputation, they wouldn't have gotten involved. The challenge was simply a matter of restoring family honor. If Tarquin had refused tonight, they were prepared to storm the bar and humiliate him in front of his friends, calling him a coward. Now that he had accepted, they had no reason to cause a scene. The two Thyanian martial artists felt a pang of regret. They looked down at Lowell, their voices dripping with sarcasm as they spoke in broken English. "Did Mr. Bradford read the challenge letter carefully? It is a deathmatch!" Lowell frowned. "You should be more worried about yourselves. Don't start what you can't finish."

"We aren't businessmen playing games with contracts," the other man sneered. "In the ring, your word is blood. Bradford accepted. If he tries to back out now, he'll be branded a coward, and his reputation will be dead long before he is."

Lowell couldn't be bothered with them. "Tarquin is in a good mood tonight, so he's not going to stoop to your level. Now get out of here. Oh, and here's my card. Call me if you need anything." He turned and walked back into the bar. The two Thyanian martial artists glanced at the business card, then shot a disdainful look at the entrance of The Blissful Bar before turning to leave. As they walked, one of them made a call to Punikon's grandfather. "Master, Tarquin has accepted our challenge." In a grand house in

Thyania, Punikon's grandfather, dressed in traditional sparring gear, sat in silent meditation on the floor, his eyes snapping open into a narrow glare. "He has some nerve! Did you see him in person?" "No," the martial artist replied. "We heard he was celebrating his birthday at a bar, so we delivered the challenge there. We met with his assistant." "His assistant conveyed his message. He accepted the challenge!" "I don't think he accepted because he's brave. I think he was just trying to save face. He couldn't refuse in front of his friends without being ridiculed." Punikon's grandfather said, "Regardless, it's good that he accepted. You two are skilled, but don't reveal your full strength in front of him yet. We don't want to scare him off. It would be a great loss if he didn't come to Thyania for the match." "He shamed our Punikon family on that stage, so we must reclaim our honor on that same stage! If he is to die, it will be in a Punikon ring!" "Understood," the martial artist said. "By the way, we saw Mantle. His injuries are severe. His hands and feet are crippled. He will never practice martial arts again." Punikon's grandfather scowled. "He has been useless for a long time. If I had known he would cause such a mess, I never would have let him out to embarrass us again! Did you see Punikon?" "We did," the martial artist replied. "He's had several teeth knocked out. He cried when he saw us, begging us to get revenge for him. He wants that kid, Evan Thorne, dead!" "Master, we won't touch Mr. Bradford, but can we deal with Evan? We want to get even for Punikon! We are warriors. How can we let the son of a businessman humiliate us? If we don't settle this score, Punikon and we will never be at peace."