

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 151[620 words]

Elysia was shoved into the skeleton of an unfinished high-rise by two burly men. Inside, a handful of others awaited her arrival.

Her heart raced, lodged firmly in her throat, as she realized she didn't recognize any of them. They sized her up, their gazes predatory and amused. One of them whistled and remarked, "Man, we hit the jackpot with this one. She's a looker. I'd pay good money to get cozy with her, no joke"

The bald man sitting on a makeshift throne of stacked crates, his eyes gleaming with malice, gestured for his cronies to rip the duct tape from her mouth.

As soon as she could speak, Elysia blurted out, "What do you want with me? Who the hell are you guys? Why did you bring me here?"

ignoring her questions as if she hadn't spoken, the bald man leaned forward. "Listen, doll, we're gonna ask you a few questions. Play nice, and this won't get ugly"

Gasping for air, her eyes darting around for an escape, she asked, "What questions?"

"You got anything to do with what happened to Gage Slater?"

"Gage?" Her mind reeled, fear made her forgetful. She couldn't place the name.

"Don't play dumb with me, sweetheart. You've crossed paths with him plenty," the bald man said, his voice low and dangerous.

After a moment to collect her thoughts, Elysia replied, "I know of him, but we're not exactly buddies."

"Oh, really? 'Cause word on the street is you had someone snip his manhood."

Elysia's eyes flared with indignation. "That's a damn lie! I can't stand the guy, but I never ordered someone to do that."

Skepticism creased the bald man's forehead. "Don't test my patience, or you'll find we're not so gentle."

"I'm telling you the truth!"

With a subtle nod, the bald man signaled his goons.

Without warning, two thugs grabbed Elysia by the hair and dunked her head into a barrel filled with ice- cold water. Every cell in her body screamed in shock, and her mind buzzed on the cusp of unconsciousness.

Her world was submerged, her lungs screaming for air. The suffocating pressure mounted until her consciousness began to fray at the edges...

Suddenly, she was yanked back to the harsh reality, drenched and sputtering, her senses returning as she took greedy, ragged breaths, shivering from the cold.

The man persisted, "Gonna talk straight now? Did you have anything to do with Gage's 'accident'?"

She shook her head with fierce determination. Admitting to such an accusation would have dire consequences.

The next moment, another bucket of ice water drenched her, soaking what little had remained dry.

"Spill it, or we go again. Did you do it?"

Elysia shouted, her voice hoarse, "I've told you a thousand times, it wasn't me! Even if you torture me to death, I won't confess to something I didn't do!"

The men frowned deeply, about to react, when suddenly a woman burst in from the shadows. "You're lying!" It was Oriana Sutton, Keaton Huber's ex-girlfriend!

The bald man turned to her, his demeanor shifting to one of respect. "Ms. Sutton."

It was clear that they knew each other.

Recalling the incident at the mall, Elysia's brows knitted in suspicion. "Did you set me up? Are these your goons?"

Oriana ignored her, stating coldly, "When Mr. Gage was assaulted, the attacker mentioned you, said it was all 'cause of you, and warned him to stay away. You still claim you have nothing to do with it?"

Elysia was dumbstruck.

Someone had sought revenge on Gage, mentioning her name?

Impossible.

She had just returned to Jindale City. Other than Blossom and Zane, she had no connections here.

Who would take such a risk for her?

11:02

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 152[523 words]

What did Gage's mess have to do with Oriana?

Elysia tried to keep her cool, locking eyes with Oriana for a moment. Then, something clicked, and her forehead creased.

"You want to come me into confessing, then use Gage's family to do your dirty work?"

Oriana, her thoughts exposed, furrowed her brow.

"Who's forcing you? It's obvious, Mr. Gage's accident is your doing!"

Elysia pressed her lips together. "In your dreams! If it wasn't me, it wasn't me. Don't try to pin this on me!"

Seeing Elysia wasn't playing ball, Oriana turned to the bald guy, "If she won't confess, show her what's what until she does. I don't care how, but she must admit it today!"

Only with Elysia's confession could Oriana crush her.

This whole setup wasn't Oriana's brainchild; someone had approached her. Without that someone's backing, Oriana wouldn't dare be so

brazen.

She loathed Elysia, sure, but without the 'ex-girlfriend of Keaton' tag, she was nothing.

The Suttons in Jindale City were well-off, tops, nowhere near the elite. But that someone, a real tycoon of Jindale City. That person had said they'd back her, quell any noise she made, no matter how loud.

But first, she had to get Elysia to admit to messing with Gage.

Oriana didn't know the point of the recording but saw it as a chance to vent.

The more she thought, the bolder she got, glowering at Elysia, “Just don’t off her. Leave her breathing. Anything else, have at it!”

The henchmen nodded eagerly. “Don’t worry, Ms. Sutton. We’ve been around the block; we know how to make people talk.”

Elysia’s heart raced as she shouted, “Oriana, did you even think about the consequences? Did you forget what Mrs. Denton and Keaton told you when they left? You mess with me, and the Huber family won’t let you off easy!”

Oriana’s eyes dripped with disdain. “If I were afraid, I wouldn’t have come for you. You should be the worried one, not me! Think about whether you’ll have the chance to tattle to the Hubers! Right now, you can talk big, stand tall, but who knows if you’ll be able to speak or stand after a bit?”

Oriana’s malice distorted even her pretty face.

Elysia frowned. “I hear you’re a college student. Educated, yet you can’t tell right from wrong? Blame me for what happened at the mall? Your niece started it with my son, and your sister admitted as much. If you hadn’t bullied us, none of that would’ve happened, and maybe you and Keaton would still be an item. You made your bed, now lie in it. Instead of reflecting, you’re digging your grave. Are you legally blind? Attacking me, you’re dragging yourself down too! At the mall, it was just a spat. But now, you’re crossing legal lines! Big trouble!”

“Heh,” Oriana scoffed, “I’m no legal eagle, but wanna know why I dare? Because my backer’s a rock! Even if you die, I’d walk free.”

Elysia shot back coldly. “No backer’s above the law.”

“Oh, really? What if I say my backer’s Tarquin Bradford, CEO of the Bradford Group?”

Elysia’s eyes widened, “Who?”

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Oriana gazed at the shocked expression on Elysia’s face and, assuming she was scared, repeated with a smug look, “Tarquin Bradford!”

Elysia frowned. “What’s your deal with Tarquin?”

“That’s none of your business, but rest assured it’s way closer than whatever you’ve got going with him. I bet you couldn’t even get a seat at Mr. Bradford’s Thanksgiving table.”

Elysia’s his wife, for Pete’s sake!

Elysia mentally snapped back, fuming, but didn’t dare voice her thoughts out loud. After all, their marriage was a secret, bound by a confidentiality agreement.

“Did Tarquin send you to confront me, and to make me confess to framing Gage?” Elysia asked.

Oriana’s brow furrowed; she didn’t dare admit it outright. Although Tarquin’s ties with Nola Slater were special, it was Nola who had sought her out, not Tarquin.

“You don’t need the details. All you need to know is that if you don’t confess, you won’t be leaving here without a scratch today”

Elysia retorted, “So even if I confess, I can’t leave unharmed, right?”

Of course not! Once Elysia confessed, she would suffer even more! This was just the beginning; Oriana hadn’t even started playing hardball yet.

“So you’re saying, even if I confess, you won’t let me go. Why should I confess then?”

Oriana glared at her and said, “At least if you confess, you might get off a bit easier.”

Elysia glared back, unsure whether Oriana was bluffing. If she wasn’t, what was Tarquin’s angle? Was he making trouble for her just because she’d pushed for a divorce?

If that was the case, Tarquin was nothing but a scoundrel!

Elysia clenched her jaw, deciding not to dwell on Tarquin’s motives for now. She eyed Oriana, her gaze calculating, and said, “You’re so eager for me to confess because you’ve got a mission, right? Well then, we might have some common ground.”

“Oh?” Oriana was suspicious.

“If you really want me to confess, it’s not impossible. But I have my conditions.”

Oriana was wary, “What conditions?”

“I can cooperate with a recording, a video, whatever you want, as long as you let me go afterward.”

“Heh.” Oriana scoffed. “Let you go? No way!”

Elysia replied calmly, “What if I bring Keaton Huber into this? What’s more important for you, hurting me or getting back together with Keaton?”

Currently, with her hands tied, Elysia had no chance of fighting back. She would only lose out if she tried to force her way through. She needed to outsmart them. First, she had to free her hands.

Oriana took the bait, a flicker of interest crossing her eyes before she mocked, “You think you can get me back with Mr. Huber? Who do you think you are?”

to reunite you

two!”

“I’m just an ordinary person. Mr. Huber might not even remember who I am now, but I have a way

Elysia sounded confident, and after a moment of hesitation, Oriana seemed tempted. The lure of returning to Keaton’s side was too strong to ignore.

“How would you manage that?”

“Untie me first!”

Oriana frowned.

Elysia pressed on, “I’m asking you to untie me, not to let me go. What, you and your crew can’t handle one woman?”

After another moment’s hesitation, Oriana turned to a bald henchman and ordered, “Untie her!”

Two men complied and released the ropes.

Once freed, Elysia quickly flexed her wrists, feeling immensely relieved. When she was bound, she could only be bullied. But now, it was anyone’s game. If they dared to rough her up, they’d better be prepared for her ruthless retaliation.

“Spill it, how are you going to get me back to Mr. Huber?” Oriana pressed eagerly.

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Elysia steadied herself, her resolve as firm as steel.

If it weren’t for Oriana bringing up Tarquin, she wouldn’t waste another breath on their petty squabbles. She wasn’t afraid of crossing Oriana, but she did fear the backlash from Tarquin.

After all, she was itching for a divorce!

Elysia said, her voice carrying a nonchalant confidence, “Purely by chance, I saved the son of Jessamine Huber, and now, I’m hailed as the Huber family’s savior. Jessamine’s gratitude knows no bounds. That’s why she was so darn nice to me at the mall and took a stand for me and even publicly chastised Keaton. If you don’t believe me, go ahead and investigate.”

Oriana furrowed her brow and asked, “And then what?”

“And then? Well, you know how much Mr. Huber dreads his sister, right? If I go to Jessamine and play up the favor I did for her son, asking her to put in a good word with her brother to give you a chance, do you think she’d refuse?”

“But... Mr. Huber doesn’t like me anymore, and he’s never gotten back with an ex.”

In Keaton’s own words, that’s beating a dead horse.

Once it’s over, it’s over for good. No second chances!

Elysia couldn’t care less about Keaton’s habits. She simply stated, “With Jessamine in your corner, even if he loathes you, he’ll agree to give it a shot. I’m certain Jessamine can twist her brother’s arm. As for how things pan out between you two, that’s on you. Maybe you’ve got the charm to win his heart, and who knows, you might just snag the title of Mrs. Huber.”

Mrs. Huber?

Oriana’s eyes went wide as saucers, her mind reeling with the possibility.

For her, it was a dream so out of reach, yet so desperately coveted.

If she became Mrs. Huber, well then, who in all of Jindale City could outrank her, save for Tarquin’s lady?

Tarquin was the city’s golden boy, and Keaton the runner-up. She’d be the second most esteemed woman in town!

Seeing Oriana take the bait, Elysia continued to feed her delusions, “Worst case scenario, even if you can’t capture Mr. Huber’s heart and don’t end up as Mrs. Huber, at least you’ll have had a second run. And if things end, they’ll end amicably. Word has it Keaton’s quite the gentleman when breaking things off. Whatever parting gifts he offers won’t be meager, and your reputation will be restored, your stock rising exponentially. Because, let’s face it, you’ll be the only one who got back with him after a breakup, something none of his exes can claim.”

Oriana’s expression had transformed, now filled with breathless anticipation.

Elysia had hit her where it hurt. The reason she loathed Elysia so was that, aside from losing Keaton, she'd become the laughingstock of their circle! She was the only one who got nothing out of a breakup with Keaton! The only one he truly despised!

Others were let go because Keaton grew bored, his interest waning. But her? She was dumped under the worst of circumstances!

Now, any mention of her name elicited ridicule.

Ever since the split, she'd been holed up at home, too ashamed to even glance at her social media notifications.

If she could salvage her good name and snag some benefits on the side, well, that would be the ultimate vindication!

Oriana's thoughts raced with excitement, and after a long pause, she finally said, "How can I trust you? What if I let you go and you don't approach Jessamine on my behalf?"

"I wouldn't dare! I'm just an ordinary woman. If you can catch me once, you can catch me again. If I don't plead your case, you'll never let me off the hook. You'd hound me to the ends of the earth. I'm not that foolish."

Oriana was silent, contemplating Elysia's words.

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She eyed Elysia for a moment, a flicker of something sinister in her gaze as she declared,

"Deal!"

Yet Elysia didn't feel a surge of joy. Her gaze was fixed on Oriana, sensing something off in her demeanor.

It was as if she had taken the bait, yet not quite.

Indeed, she had underestimated Oriana's ruthlessness!

Turning to the bald man, Oriana said, "I've now reached an agreement with Ms. Thome, so don't you guys hurt her. And all that stuff you've prepared? Don't bother using it. Instead, take good care of her. After all, a gentleman always shows kindness to a lady"

Elysia's heart skipped a beat.

The bald man instantly got the message, chuckling smugly, "Thanks to you for the generosity. The boys have been drooling for a while now, genuinely scared you'd tell us to just let her go, heh."

Oriana replied coolly, "We had an agreement, so of course, I won't let you come here for nothing. Remember to shoot plenty of videos."

"Uh-huh, Ms. Sutton, don't worry, you'll be satisfied!*

"Oriana! What do you mean by this?*" Elysia frowned.

Oriana squinted at her and said, "The terms you offered are indeed tempting, and I'm willing to work with you. But before I let you go, I need something to hold over you. What if you break your promise

once you're free? I don't trust your words, but I do trust leverage. You just cooperate with them, let them shoot some videos, leave some evidence, and I'll have no reason not to trust you. After all, if you dare renege on our deal, I'll release your videos for the whole world to see you delighting beneath men."

After instructing the bald man once more, "Remember to focus on the details. Capture Ms. Thome's moments of pleasure clearly, in case we need to share it publicly later, to give everyone an eyeful."

"Sure thing, you can count on us, heh heh." The bald man nodded obsequiously, his eyes leering at Elysia, saliva almost dripping from

his mouth.

"Oriana, you..." Elysia's breathing was heavy, her mind racing.

Oriana was planning to let these men abuse her and then use the videos as blackmail!

Indeed, looks can be deceiving! Beneath that innocent facade hid a heart of pure malice!

But Oriana countered, "Don't look at me with those eyes. I know your husband passed away early, leaving you with just your three sons. It's been years without a man, so don't you miss it? I'm actually doing you a favor. Just enjoy it.*

She then said to the bald man, "Be gentle with Ms. Thome."

"Hehe, don't worry, Ms. Sutton, we'll make sure Ms. Thome has a comfortable night. Us seven or eight big guys will definitely take her to cloud nine, heh.*

A smirk curled on Oriana's lips as she headed towards the door.

Elysia called out, “Oriana, stop right there!”

She attempted to follow, but two of the bald man’s cronies blocked her path. “Come on, sweetheart, let’s have some fun, heh heh.*

“Oriana!” She watched helplessly as Oriana disappeared, anger boiling inside her.

Suddenly, a man grabbed her, going in for a kiss. Elysia’s hand flew up, delivering a stinging slap as she yelled, “Back off!”

“Damn it!” the man cursed.

The bald man stepped in and shouted to the man, “Get lost. Didn’t I say to treat her gently? What are you doing, getting rough?”

The man, still holding his face, snickered, “I just got a little excited, man. You see, my little brother here’s been eager for a while now, all stiff and ready. This woman’s just too damn fine.”

“Well, it’s not your turn, get in line,” the bald man said, then turned to Elysia with a sleazy grin, “Don’t be scared, sweetheart, I’ll treat you right.”

Elysia, panting, glared at him and backed away, “Stay away from me, get out!”

“Heh heh, playing hard to get? No need for games, darling. We all know you want it too. We’re all adults here, be honest. Come on.”

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The bald man was closing in, his every step heavy and menacing.

Elysia stumbled backward, her footing lost, and she crashed to the ground with a thud.

Seizing the opportunity, the bald man pounced on her, pinning her down with his weight.

Up close, the proximity seemed to trigger something primal within him. He shuddered with a feral intensity, his predatory gaze fixed on Elysia’s neck as he began to gnaw at her.

“Damn, I can’t hold it anymore. I’m about to burst!” he growled, inhaling deeply as if intoxicated by her scent. “This gal is something else!

Roughly, he yanked at the hem of Elysia's blouse, his hand snaking under her clothes with a crude urgency.

Elysia's grip on his wrist was ironclad, her teeth clenched so tight they seemed to creak with the strain.

This moment was achingly familiar.

Six years ago, at the airport, she had endured a similar violation.

As the memories flooded back, Elysia trembled uncontrollably.

Back then, she had been pinned down just like this, her pleas for mercy ignored as he had his way with her.

Back then, he had thrust into her so forcefully that pain had knocked her unconscious. She had lain there, tormented into repeated blackouts, feeling as if her very bones were being crushed.

Back then, she had lost her innocence and been branded with names like tramp and harlot. Her life had spiraled down into the abyss, forcing her to flee her hometown. She had endured the hardship of washing dishes while carrying a child, all for the sake of a meager living...

She had never harmed anyone, never committed any atrocity.

All she wanted upon her return was to live a decent life with her children.

Was that too much to ask?

What sins had Elysia committed to deserve such a wretched existence?

"Damn it, she's strong for her size! You two, hold down her arms. Let's get her out of these clothes and see just how 'beautiful' this body really is," the bald man cursed as he struggled with Elysia.

At his command, his cronies moved in to pry at her arms, hands already reaching for her collar.

Elysia's eyes blazed red with rage, her appearance morphing into that of a bloodthirsty she-devil.

"You're forcing me! This is all on you!" she roared.

The men were taken aback, but before they could react, the bald man's eyes bulged, his hands clutching at his throat.

"You... you..."

His words were cut off by terror as he stared at Elysia, collapsing lifelessly on top

The others were in shock. “Boss! What’s happening?”

of

her.

Elysia shoved the man off her and was about to fight back when a cold snort came from behind.

“What the hell is going on here?”

The men turned at the sound, and upon seeing the newcomer, they instantly got to their feet.

“And who the hell are you?” one asked.

Tarquin ignored them, his gaze locked on Elysia lying disheveled on the ground, a surge of fury rising within him like a stormy sea.

His lips pressed into a thin line, his face dark with anger, his fists clenched as he moved toward Elysia.

The men furrowed their brows in confusion. “Are you one of Ms. Sutton’s boys?”

Tarquin remained silent, his expression frosty, an aura of chilling menace emanating from him.

Sensing a hostile presence, one of the men called out, “He’s here to mess things un

boys. Let’s take him!”

The two closest men lunged at Tarquin, only to have their wrists caught in an iron grip, and with a sickening snap, their bones broke.

The men were stunned for a second before they screamed in unison, “Aaah, aaah, aaah-”

The others paused, then charged in unison.

And then there was a chorus of cracks and thuds, followed by screams echoing through the abandoned building.

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11:02

By the time Lowell arrived, a scrum of people was already sprawled out on the ground, writhing and groaning.

Tarquin had just made his way to Elysia's side. With a furrowed brow and a complex look on his face, he draped his coat over her, shielding her from the cold floor.

Elysia lay there, gazing up at him. He was dressed in a black shirt with buttons made of polished black pearls that shimmered in the light.

It was identical to the one he wore six years ago on the night that had scarred her life.

Now, as she looked up at him, her emotions surged even more powerfully.

Tears welled in her eyes as she gasped for air, her body shaking uncontrollably, her gaze fixed on him, tears streaming down her cheeks...

Tarquin felt an inexplicable pain in his heart, a deep ache.

He was so focused on Elysia that he didn't acknowledge his own feelings. He thought she was frightened and, with trembling lips, he uttered, "It's okay, you're safe now."

With the echo of his words still hanging in the air, a slap landed fiercely on his face.

Tarquin was stunned. "What the...?"

Elysia raised her hand to strike again, but Tarquin quickly grabbed her wrist and asked, "What are you doing?"

"Let go of me! Let go! I'll kill you! I swear, I'll kill you!"

Elysia struggled frantically. When she couldn't free her hand, she turned to sobbing and cursing, "You're going to get what's coming to you! There will be retribution! The universe will punish you, you brute, you beast!"

Tarquin's breath became erratic with fury. He had saved her, yet instead of gratitude, she lashed out at him, cursed him, struck him in the face - twice!

Did his face look that cheap to her?

"Elysia! Don't bite the hand that feeds you. I just saved your life!"

"Saved me? Ha! You think you saved me? I never asked for your help! Get away from me! I can't stand the sight of you-just go away!"

“Elysia!” Tarquin’s voice thundered as he gripped her wrist tighter. His face was dark, his jaw clenched, a storm brewing in his eyes. It looked like he might explode at any second.

Elysia felt a chill of fear.

She didn’t dare fight back or scream, just looked at him with a mix of hatred, anger, and fear, completely powerless.

She wished she could end him, but she was no match for his strength.

The frustration and helplessness brought her to the brink of collapse.

With a piercing scream, she fainted in his arms.

In the abandoned building, her angry echoes were the only sound left, stirring a blend of pity and fear.

Lowell came running over. “Tar...!”

Tarquin’s face was a storm cloud, his breathing heavy with anger.

Lowell immediately tried to smooth things over, “Ms. Thorne is just shaken up. You... you shouldn’t take it to heart.”

He had heard everything – the slap and the curses Elysia had hurled at Tarquin.

Before Tarquin could respond, Lowell quickly added, “We’ve figured it out. Oriana was behind Ms. Thorne’s kidnapping, but we’ve got her under control now. I’ve also contacted Mr. Huber, and I believe he’ll be arriving shortly.”

Tarquin didn’t reply, his gaze fixed on Elysia for a long moment.

“Take her to the hospital!”

“Yes!” Lowell reached out to lift Elysia.

But before his hands could touch her, Tarquin bent down, scooping her up.

Elysia was still unconscious, her small face nuzzled against his chest.

Tarquin frowned, causing Lowell to flinch, ready to take over.

Tarquin was known for disliking contact, especially with women, and Lowell half-expected him to drop her.

11:02

Instead, Tarquin just darkened his expression and did not cast Elysia aside. Holding her, he strode towards the wait

Right as they reached the entrance The ditedilated structure, Kenton rushed towards them

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Keaton's hair was a tousled mess, a clear sign that he'd just rolled out of bed in a hurry. His usually perfect hair was in wild disarray as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes and tried to make sense of the commotion.

"What the hell is going on here?"

Oriana was on the floor, her body shaking like a leaf in a storm, tears streaming down her face. When she saw Keaton, it was as if she had seen an angel. She finally allowed herself to cry out, "Mr. Huber, please, save me! Oh God, save me."

Keaton glanced at her briefly before his eyes found Elysia cradled in Tarquin's arms. His heart raced with panic. "What in the world happened?"

Lowell looked at him with pity

"Your ex-girlfriend's a real piece of work! Keep her in line, will ya? I never want to see her face again!" Tarquin's roar was so fierce it could have blown the roof off the building.

Anyone who knew Tarquin knew that he was seriously pissed off. This wasn't just anger, this was fury.

Keaton stood there, dazed, watching Tarquin's retreating back. Lowell leaned in and whispered, "That ex of yours kidnapped Ms. Thorne and brought a gang to... well, you know. Tarquin was supposed to meet Ms. Thorne for coffee and couldn't get ahold of her. He went to her place and found out what happened. Man, you need to sort this mess out. Tarquin's really furious. Your ex... she's really something else"

Lowell cast a glance at Oriana, shook his head in disgust, and walked away. He didn't even mention that Tarquin had been slapped, not wanting to embarrass him further.

Once everyone had left, Keaton turned to Oriana, his normally warm brown eyes now icy cold. "So, did they get it wrong? Are you innocent?"

Oriana was too frightened to lie, her tears unstoppable as she shook her head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Huber, I just... I was just so mad, I..."

"Mad? What gives you the right to be mad? You blame others for your own failures in the market?"

“L... I just....”

“Oriana, I underestimated you. You had the gall to mess with Tarquin’s lady.”

“Tarquin? Tarquin Bradford?”

“Who else?”

The fear in Oriana’s eyes intensified as realization dawned on her. She had never met Tarquin, so she didn’t recognize him earlier. Now, understanding who she had crossed, she was terrified, bowing her head repeatedly in desperation.

“Mr. Huber, please, I didn’t mean to, I swear. I didn’t know she was with Mr. Bradford. Please, have mercy!”

Keaton looked at her, devoid of any sympathy, “Ever hear the saying ‘Play stupid games, win stupid prizes’?”

Oriana gasped.

“And another one, ‘You reap what you sow.’”

The murderous intent in Keaton’s gaze was unmistakable.

“Mr. Huber, I’m begging you, don’t kill me! It was all Nola’s idea. She said she would help me get even. She told me if I could force Ms. Thorne to confess to Gage’s mess, I could take my anger out on Elysia. Nola promised that even if the sky fell, Mr. Bradford would have my back. I didn’t know Elysia was his woman, I swear...”

“Nola?” Keaton’s brow furrowed.

“Yes, yes, I’m telling the truth—you can check! Please believe me...”

Keaton’s eyes flickered with thought, then he turned to his bodyguard, “Looks like it’s time for the Suttons to vanish. Tarquin doesn’t want to see her again. Let her and the Sutton family disappear together.”

Oriana’s eyes widened in horror. “Mr. Huber, please, don’t kill me, I’m begging you...”

“Kill you? Why would I dirty my hands? Murder is for those without class,” Keaton said flatly, already turning to leave.

As Oriana watched him walk away, the phrase ‘worse than death’ echoed in her mind. She screamed after him, “Mr. Huber, please... Mr. Huber!” But her pleas were swallowed by the chill of the morning air.

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Keaton didn't even glance back as he climbed into his car, scratching his head while he dialed Benjamin.

"Did Tarquin swing by to see you?"

"Yeah, Lowell just called me, asked me to hustle over to the hospital. Said Ms. Thorne fainted from shock. I'm off duty today, so I'm not at the hospital, but I'm heading there now."

Keaton let out a sigh.

"Alright, you get there fast. I'm on my way too. And hey, make sure she's taken care of, alright? Keep Ms. Thorne safe, and I swear I'll bankroll a new top-notch hospital for you."

"What? What happened?"

"It's a long story, damn it, got screwed over by a woman! Gotta go, just get to the hospital and round up your best docs. Make sure she's okay!"

After hanging up, Keaton couldn't help but scratch his head again.

Damn, done in by a dame, capsized in the gutter!

This was the first time an ex had caused him such trouble, and boy, did it blow up in his face!

Driving towards the hospital, Keaton made another call.

"Dig up everything on Nola messing with Oriana to get at Elysia. I want the full scoop in thirty minutes!"

Once Elysia was taken to the hospital, she lay in bed, eyes closed, yet screaming, "Get away from me! Don't touch me! Go! Go! Go

away-

Tarquin stood by the bed, his face stormy.

“Is she awake or not?”

Benjamin said, “She’s not awake. This is a reaction to the trauma. She must be terrified.”

Tarquin just stood there, brooding.

“Please step out. I’ll do a full exam to see if she’s hurt anywhere.”

Tarquin glanced at Elysia, and then, as if possessed, he said, “Get a female doctor.”

Benjamin was puzzled.

Tarquin, looking like he knew exactly what he was talking about, said, “She was nearly humiliated today. Seeing a man might upset her more. Have a woman check her.”

With that, he turned and left.

Benjamin was frozen for a few seconds but decided to follow his advice and called in two female doctors to examine Elysia.

Stepping out into the hallway, Benjamin saw Tarquin at the end of the corridor, lighting up a cigarette, and asked Lowell, “What the hell happened? Keaton also called me, said to take care of Ms. Thorne no matter what.”

Lowell shrugged in resignation, “Mr. Huber was played by a woman.”

No matter who was behind it, or whether they had broken up or not, the fact that Oriana was his ex couldn’t be changed.

It was because of him that Oriana had picked a fight with Elysia. So, one way or another, Keaton was responsible.

Benjamin was still curious about what exactly had gone down when Keaton rushed in, anxious.

“How is she? How’s Ms. Thorne?”

“Nothing serious from the initial check, no obvious injuries. We’re still running a full exam.”

Keaton breathed a sigh of relief, “No serious harm, that’s good. Where’s Tarquin?”

“Over there, having a smoke.”

Keaton glanced toward the smoking area and once again scratched his head, “Wish me luck.”

With that, he braced himself and walked toward the smoking area.

Upon reaching Tarquin, Keaton immediately pulled out his phone, presenting all the gathered info.

“I can’t duck responsibility for what happened today. Rest assured, I’ve got people on it. I promise you by today the Sutton family will be history in Jindale City. They won’t be bothering you again. And look here, I’ve pieced together the whole mess. The mastermind is

11.02

Chapter 1DU

Nola

Turns out, when Gage was in trouble, someone really did threaten him to stay away from Elysia!

They said if he dared to hassle Elysia again, next time they’d go straight for his life!

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 160[531 words]

Nola was fuming, and she hatched a plan to teach Elysia a lesson through Oriana’s unwitting help!

She also intended to capture evidence of Elysia conspiring against Gage, and then confront Tarquin with it, demanding he take her

side.

After Tarquin read the message, he didn’t utter a word, just took a long drag on his cigarette.

Keaton, sensing Tarquin’s irritation, kept quiet too, sharing a silent smoke.

A little later, Benjamin came to call them, “Ms. Thome wasn’t hurt. She’s just shaken up. She’s awake now.”

.....

At that, Tarquin stubbed out his cigarette and hurried to the hospital room.

Elysia was propped up in her bed, staring out the window in a daze. Seeing Tarquin, she burst out, “Get out! Just get out!”

Tarquin scowled, “I didn’t even do anything to you!”

But Elysia, trembling with rage, tossed a vase at him, shouting, “Get out, I can’t stand the sight of you! Go away-”

She couldn’t contain her fury. Just the sight of him infuriated her!

It annoyed her!

It reminded her of that night’s madness and terror!

Benjamin quickly pulled Tarquin out of the room and said, “Ms. Thomne just woke up; she can’t be agitated. What did you do to her to make her react like this?”

Tarquin felt wronged,

“I didn’t do anything! No, wait, I saved her! That’s right, I saved her, for heaven’s sake!*

“Huh? If you saved her, why is she so hostile towards you?”

“How should I know?!” Tarquin roared.

Benjamin flinched and tried to calm him down, “Take a breath, man. Ms. Thome probably mistook you for one of those jerks that hurt her.”

“But she was awake when I saved her!”

“Really? That’s odd. She should be grateful to see you*

He didn’t need her to weep with gratitude; if she could just appreciate what he did and take good care of Elijah, that would be enough.

But instead...

“No good deed goes unpunished!” Tarquin bellowed, storming out of the hospital and leaving Elysia behind

Lowell, at a loss, contacted Blossom, knowing she was Elysia’s close friend.

Blossom rushed to the hospital as soon as she got the news. Seeing Elysia on the bed, she paled.

“Elysia! What happened to you? What’s going on?”

Elysia, seeing her friend, burst into tears and hugged her. “Blossom...*

“I’m here, I’m here. Don’t be scared, I’ve got you.”

Once Elysia calmed down, she recounted the ordeal to Blossom,

“I was angry at them, but I hadn’t lost my mind, not until I saw him. His face was just too much for me. I really thought he was that brute from years ago! When those guys were on top of me, I

flashed back to that night six years ago. And then he showed up... It was like reliving the past. I wanted to hurt him! But I couldn't fight him off; he had my hands pinned, and I couldn't even hit back. I was powerless...

These past days, she'd slowly gotten used to his face. She'd even started to approach him for Elijah's sake. But today, the nightmare resurfaced, and her emotions spiraled out of control.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 161[589 words]

30.09

After listening to the whole story, Blossom was both furious and heartbroken, her eyes reddening with emotion.

“Damn it, Oriana has the nerve to pull this crap? We’re suing her, let her rot in jail! And that guy, that... that jerk. Okay, so he helped you out this time, but it doesn’t erase what he did to you before! We’ll sue him too! They think they’re above the law? Well, they’re not! I’m calling my folks right now to get us a lawyer. We’re not letting them get away with this!”

Blossom started fumbling for her phone, tears choking her voice, but Elysia stopped her,

“Wait, let’s not be hasty.”

“What do you mean? You don’t want to sue them?”

Elysia sniffled, “I’ve already called the police. Oriana will get what’s coming to her. The law will handle it.”

“And what about... the jerk?”

“I don’t want anything to do with him anymore. I want a divorce with my husband, and I want out, fast!”

Just this morning, she was all excited, making breakfast for Elijah, braving the snowstorm to deliver it to Sunshine Community. She wasn’t in a hurry to leave anymore.

But now, she couldn’t stand to stay another second. She wanted out!

More than getting back at Oriana or dealing with the jerk, she wanted to leave now!

“But isn’t your husband refusing to divorce? He won’t even meet with you. How can you divorce him? Will you just leave without it?”

Elysia shook her head and said, “No, I need to be divorced before I go.”

“But... do you have any ideas?”

Elysia thought hard, frowning. “Keaton!”

“Huh? What’s the plan?”

Elysia explained, “Oriana is his ex, and even though they’re broken up, this mess started because of him. If Jessamine finds out, she’ll tear him a new one. I can use this to talk to him... Plus, isn’t he close with my husband? I’ll lay it out for him. If he can get my husband to divorce me, I’ll drop today’s incident.”

Blossom pondered for a moment and said, “It sounds like it might work, but who knows if it’ll be successful.”

“Success or not, we’ve got to try! I need this divorce, and fast!”

While Elysia was plotting her divorce, Tarquin had already arrived at the Slater family residence.

Donovan Slater was at the office when he heard Tarquin was coming, so he rushed home.

He greeted Tarquin with more warmth than he would his own father, “Tarquin, you should have told me you were coming; I would have waited for you at home instead of making you wait here.”

Tarquin was cool and composed as he said, “No need. I’m here for Nola, and to check in on Gage while I’m at it.”

Donovan, an old fox, could tell something was off with Tarquin and started to panic.

He forced a smile, “Nola... Did she upset you again?”

Tarquin didn’t bite.

Donovan’s eyelids twitched madly as he quickly said. “I’ve spoiled her rotten, to the point where she dares to upset you! She’s just taking advantage of being Elijah’s lifesaver, that’s why she’s acting so entitled around you. Just wait until she gets back; I’ll set her straight!” In criticizing Nola, Donovan was actually reminding Tarquin that Nola was Elijah’s lifesaver.

Tarquin could read between the lines. He didn’t respond and just waited with a stern face for Nola.

Donovan swallowed nervously and reached for his phone to call Nola.

Just then, Nola arrived, bursting through the door and starting to rant.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 162[581 words]

“Tarquin! What brings you by today? Got some time on your hands?” Nola chirped, her voice bubbling with surprise and delight. She was in the midst of a shopping spree with her friends while waiting for a message from Oriana.

The news that Oriana had successfully kidnapped Elysia had sent waves of glee through Nola’s heart.

With a grand gesture, she treated her group of girlfriends to high tea and a lavish lunch.

They were all buzzing with excitement when word got out that Tarquin had come to see her.

The girls couldn’t hide their envy as one sighed dramatically, “Ah, Nola’s got the golden ticket. We can’t even get a glimpse of Mr. Bradford, and there he goes knocking on Nola’s door!”

“Exactly! Nola, you gotta spill the beans. Did you and Mr. Bradford have a tiff after he announced you two weren’t an item?”

“Is that even a question? It’s all a lovers’ tiff. They have a spat, pretend to break up, and now here he is, making amends. Bet they’ll be announcing their engagement before we know it.”

“Oh Nola, you’re so lucky. Who else but you to fill Mrs. Bradford’s shoes?”

“Remember us when you’re rolling in it, Nola. Once you’re Mrs. Bradford, you better not forget your old pals.”

Nola basked in their flattery, feeling on top of the world.

was

” he‘

It was as if Tarquin’s visit was truly a peace offering, as if

about to become Mrs. Bradford herself.

Without giving Tarquin a chance to speak, Nola bubbled over, “Tarquin, I’m in such a great mood today. If you’re free, why don’t you join me for some shopping?”

Tarquin’s brow furrowed, and he gave her a cold, piercing look.

Nola, oblivious to Tarquin’s irritation, was still lost in her own joyous bubble.

“Tarquin, don’t be shy. Just say what’s on your mind.”

His voice was ice, “Did you contact Oriana?”

Nola’s heart skipped a beat, her expression shifting instantly. “Tarquin, what are you talking about?”

“I don’t like games or manipulations,” he said, his tone hardening. “I’m only here because of the time you helped Elijah.”

Nola panicked.

Tarquin pressed on, “Did you reach out to Oriana?”

“LL”

Donovan, clueless about the extent of the situation and seeing Tarquin’s serious demeanor, quickly chided his daughter, “Speak up! Tell the truth!”

Nola, feeling cornered, confessed, “I...I did reach out to Oriana.”

“What for?”

Facing Tarquin’s icy gaze, Nola stammered, “I heard that... that wretch Elysia caused Oriana and Mr. Huber to break up. We’re like sisters, so I went to console her.”

“And then?”

“And then... I told her not to be afraid of Elysia, that I’d help her.”

“So you suggested that she kidnap Elysia, force her to confess to setting up Gage, and then... what? Have people take advantage of her?” Tarquin’s voice was rising with accusation.

Realizing that Tarquin was here to call her out, Nola quickly tried to defend herself, “I didn’t tell Oriana to go that far. That was all her doing. I just wanted her help to find out if Elysia was behind my uncle’s troubles. My uncle said the assailant warned him to stay away from Elysia or else he’d be killed! That’s my uncle we’re talking about. I was furious. Elysia seduced my uncle first and then got him into such a mess!”

“Are you any better than her?” Tarquin suddenly cut her off, his voice sharp and unforgiving.

Nola was taken aback.

Even Donovan was startled.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 163[716 words]

Tarquin, despite his influential position, always acted like a true gentleman around them. He was invariably polite and never let a swear word slip from his lips.

So Nola thought she must have misheard him.

“Tarquin, what..... what did you just say?”

Tarquin’s brow furrowed as he articulated every word, “Do you think Elysia is cheap? If she’s cheap, what does that make you?”

Nola’s eyes instantly brimmed with tears, “Tarquin, you...”

If she’s cheap, you’re not even worth that!

“Tarquin! What are you saying? Waaah...” Nola burst into tears.

Donovan listened in stunned silence, not daring to interrupt.

Only Tarquin could have the audacity to come into his home and insult someone like this. Anyone else would have been beaten senseless by now!

Tarquin continued, “Do you think I don’t know what kind of man your uncle is? As if anyone would be interested in seducing him. Does he even have what it takes to be seduced? With his character, it’s a sign of strength for a woman not to feel disgusted at the sight of him, let alone go out of her way to seduce him. What woman would be so desperate?”

“...”

“And you, do you really think that just because you helped Elijah, you can act however you want around me? I’m grateful, but I’m not a fool, and I certainly won’t indulge you! Oriana is already in custody, and you can watch the news to see how that turns out for her. It’s only because she doesn’t have direct evidence against you that you haven’t been arrested by the police! If you were

taken away, don't expect me to bail you out! I can provide financial support to the Slater family, but I won't be an accessory to wrongdoing! You're an adult, and adults must face the consequences of their actions. This world is harsh, everyone's struggling to make their way, and nobody's going to coddle you out of the goodness of their heart! I'm laying it out for you today, Elysia is under my protection – dare to mess with her again, and you'll see!"

With those cold words, Tarquin got up and left.

Nola collapsed to the floor in a sobbing heap...

Seeing this, Donovan snapped out of his daze and hurried after Tarquin, "Tarquin, Tarquin, please cool down. Nola's just being foolish, she..."

"You know she's foolish, then keep her at home and teach her some sense until she's fit to be seen in public! It'd spare everyone else from her nonsense!"

Donovan's face turned beet red with embarrassment, "Tarquin..."

Tarquin continued, "A father's failure is not teaching his children. Mr. Slater, you failed as a father and are not qualified to collaborate with the Bradford Group. All dealings with the Slater Group are suspended, effective immediately! Mr. Slater, you'd best spend this time at home teaching your daughter."

Donovan gasped, his eyes wide with shock.

All their dealings suspended?

This could be the death of the Slater family!

–

Donovan rushed out after him, "Tarquin, listen to me, I'll discipline Nola, but we can't stop the collaboration if it stops, the Slater family

will..."

Tarquin had already gotten into his car, not even glancing back.

Lowell held Donovan back, his tone polite but his eyes distant, "Mr. Slater, don't bother chasing after him. Tarquin's not in the mood to talk. You might as well spend your energy having a heart-to-heart with your daughter. What Ms. Slater has been up to... well, it's a sad state of affairs."

With a sigh, Lowell got into the car.

Donovan watched Tarquin's car drive away, stamping his foot in frustration.

“Damn it all!”

Donovan stormed off, cursing as he went to find Nola.

Lowell, driving the car, glanced in the rear-view mirror to see Tarquin rubbing his temples and offered some advice, “Don’t let it get to you. At least Ms. Thorne is safe.”

10:10

“Am I upset over her? What does her being in trouble or not have to do with me?” Tarquin snapped back.

Lowell’s lips twitched, “Right, right, my mistake. You’re not upset because of Ms. Thome, you’re upset because of Ms. Slater. She’s truly a femme fatale.”

“Are you blind? Does she look like a femme fatale to you?”

Lowell cleared his throat awkwardly. “Ahem, no, she’s just trouble.”

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 164[708 words]

the doesn’t even deserve to be called trouble! She’s so vile and nasty, she’s a venomous viper!”

“Yeah! A venomous viper!”

“What do you mean, yeah? Do you just echo everything I say? Don’t you have a mind of your own?”

Lowell was speechless.

Lord have mercy, let me vanish right here and now.

Whatever I say is wrong!

Might as well be invisible!

Tarquin’s fuming because he went out on a limb for Elysia, and instead of gratitude, he got slapped, berated, and bickered with, right?

And he won’t even admit it!

Lowell thought blowing off some steam at the Slater family gathering would do the trick, but it's only getting worse.

At this rate, was Lowell gonna work himself into an

early

grave?

The vibe in the car was all kinds of awkward, and Lowell, with a lump in his throat, said,

"It's not that I don't have opinions; I'm just scared to voice them. I'm afraid I'll make you madder."

"So I'm such a tyrant that you can't even speak up?"

Lowell scrambles to clarify, "No, no, you've got the patience of a saint."

"If you can't talk right, then get lost, and don't give me that sarcastic tone."

Lowell was on the verge of tears as he thought, "Saying you're patient is no good, but suggesting you're not would probably get me booted out of the car!"

"Tarquin, cool it, will ya? Let me break it down for you. Take today for instance. It's definitely Ms. Thorne who's out of line. You saved her, you're her hero. Instead, she not only hits you but curses you out. That's just ungrateful."

It's like biting the hand that feeds you!"

"Exactly, that's what I'm saying."

Tarquin snorted coldly.

Lowell went on, "But see, I get where she's coming from, too. She was bullied today, nearly got in a real mess. She must have been scared, desperate, and all worked up. When she saw you, her first thought wasn't how good you've been to her; it was your past behavior towards her..."

"I treated her badly in the past?"

"Well... not your finest hour."

Tarquin's face darkened as he said, "Even if it wasn't great, it's her own doing."

"Right, right, it's all her fault. You couldn't possibly be wrong."

Tarquin, mistaking Lowell's agreement for sarcasm, shot him a glare.

Lowell quickly switched gears, “What I’m trying to say is, regardless of who was at fault before, you definitely don’t have a stellar image in Ms. Thorne’s eyes. So after her ordeal today, she took out all her frustration and anger on you.”

Tarquin frowned. “So she thinks I’m a pushover?”

“No, it’s not like that. It’s one thing after another. I think she’s getting a bit spoiled.”

“Who’s spoiling her, huh?”

Lowell’s scalp tingled. “No one, I misspoke, my apologies.”

If you’re not spoiling her, would you be holding her?

If you’re not spoiling her, would she have you this riled up?

If you really weren’t spoiling her, Elysia wouldn’t dare to throw a tantrum in front of you, let alone slap you.

“I treat her differently, all because of Elijah. If it wasn’t for him, she’d have been gone a hundred times over!”

Lowell nodded. “Yeah, yeah.”

Whatever you say is right. But from what I know about you, even for Elijah’s sake, you wouldn’t let a woman get away with that. Last time at the bar, it was Elysia who made the move on you, you were caught off guard. But this time, you held her of your own accord, didn’t

10:10

you? You’re the one holding her, and you’re the one getting worked up about it! If it were someone else, say Nola, you’d probably steer clear!

The onlooker sees tho

of the game, you might think your special treatment of Elysia is all because of Elijah. But actually? Your body

know what I mean, Lowell thought clearly doesn’t reject Elysia. A kiss here, a slap there, and getting up close and personal – ahem, you silently.

Lowell can’t figure it out. Isn’t this what falling in love looks like?

Calling it love might be a stretch since someone is still in denial, but saying love is on the way? That sounds about right.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 165[687 words]

“Dig deep and find out who did this to Gage!” Tarquin blurted out suddenly.

Lowell snapped back to the present, his expression growing stern.

“Right, I’ll make a call.”

After visiting the Slater family, Tarquin had made a point of seeking out Gage to get the lowdown.

Gage had confessed that the attacker made it clear he was targeted because he had been bullying Elysia,

The attacker had threatened that if Gage messed with Elysia again, next time he would be signing his own

death warrant!

Gage had even tried to bribe his way out, offering the attacker ten times the payoff to let him off the hook, but the attacker just sneered and said, “Money isn’t my only motivator. I’m not some gun for hire that jumps at the highest bidder!”

So, it was all because of Elysia. Someone was avenging her.

It could be that the attacker knew Elysia personally, harbored deep feelings for her, and after learning of Gage’s repeated harassment, decided to take matters into his own hands.

Or it could be that the person who paid for the hit knew Elysia.

And that the attacker and the client had a close bond, leading the former to act in defense of Elysia.

But after all this time getting to know her, they were almost sure of one thing: Elysia was just an ordinary woman. She hadn’t been back to Jindale City for ages, with no clout to speak of there.

The most influential people she knew were Winona and Blossom.

But Blossom came from an esteemed academic family, and with her demeanor, she wasn't the type to orchestrate something as heinous as castrating Gage.

Winona, though a fierce lady, wasn't even in Jindale City and was probably oblivious to Elysia's return.

So, the mystery remained: who was taking up arms for her?

This person must have strong feelings for Elysia, considering Gage's sensitive status and his ties to Tarquin.

Without a deep affection for Elysia, no one would dare make a move.

Then there was the time someone breached the Bradford Group's security system, sent him an invitation, and hijacked his billion-dollar deal overnight...

Tarquin was now suspecting that Elysia had a guardian angel. And it was very likely someone she was unaware of!

Or perhaps she knew of this person, but was clueless about his actions.

In any case, Tarquin wanted to get to the bottom of it.

After Lowell hung up the phone and delegated the tasks, Tarquin said, "Focus on Zane."

"Huh? You still suspect Zane? But he doesn't have that kind of money. Not Zane, not even the entire Newsom family could cough up billions overnight."

09:56

Lowell thought Tarquin was still on about Zane stealing their business.

Tarquin replied city. The one who breached our security might not be him, but the one who hurt Gage could well be

Lowell was taken aback. "You think Zane was the attacker? But he knows full well Gage is connected to us. Would he dare touch Gage?"

re's nothing he wouldn't dare if Gage crossed a line. Forget about emasculating him; he'd kill him if pushed

You mean, Ms. Thome is Zane's breaking point?"

Tarquin's brow furrowed slightly, but he didn't respond.

Lowell ventured, "But Zane and Ms. Thome aren't that close, and she's not his wife."

"She doesn't have to be his wife. She could be his one that got away."

Really? But the rumor mill says Zane's head over heels for Ms. Newsom. High school sweethearts turned life partners, the picture of love. Ms. Newsom's his 'one that got away.'

"The one that got away' is the one you can't have. If he's already married her, how does she fit that bill?"

"You've got a point there, but how did you figure Zane has a thing for Ms. Thorne?"

"Just a hunch"

"Strange... I've seen them together as much as you have, and I didn't catch a whiff of that."

"You're blind and dense!"

Lowell was left speechless. Wasn't this just a friendly chat? How did it turn into a personal attack?

The sound of incoming messages interrupted their tense exchange.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 166[621 words]

Tarquin's phone rang, and it was Heath, the butler, on the other end of the line. Whenever Heath called, it usually meant there was something up with Elijah.

Tarquin picked up, "What's the matter?"

Heath was practically buzzing with joy, his voice quivering with emotion, "Mr. Bradford, Elijah asked for food on his own! He-he-he just came looking for me to ask when you'd be back. Said he wanted some pastry! It's the first time in years I've heard him ask for food himself! I'm so moved! He mentioned you made him pastry this morning, along with some side dishes, and he said he wanted more of the same. I've already got people gathering the ingredients as per Elijah's request. When will you be back to cook for him? What time can you make it home?"

Tarquin's lips twitched uncontrollably. His son suddenly showing interest in food should be a cause for celebration, pure joy!

But those pastry and side dishes were made by Elysia!

Considering Elysia's current attitude towards him, Tarquin felt a headache coming on. She can't stand the sight of me, how's she supposed to take care of my boy?

“Just say I’m still tied up and might be late getting back. Have him eat something else in the meantime.”

After hanging up, Tarquin dialed Keaton immediately, “Elijah wants the meal Elysia made. If you can’t get Elysia to cook for him, you’re in for it!”

Keaton’s eyes bulged, “What?”

Tarquin hung up, passing the buck Keaton’s way.

When Keaton tried to redial, Tarquin cut the call. Keaton tried again, but found himself blocked. With a head full of troubles, Keaton had no choice but to call Lowell.

“What’s the situation? What’s that supposed to mean?”

Lowell explained sheepishly, “Ms. Thorne made breakfast for Elijah this morning. Elijah took quite a liking to it. Heath just called to say Elijah’s asked for food himself, wanting more of what he had this morning.”

“What? Elijah’s asking for food? That’s progress, isn’t it? A sign his condition’s improving! Tarquin should be over the moon! Why’s he biting my head off?”

Lowell, realizing Keaton had missed the crux of the matter, repeated, “But the meal Elijah wants is the one Ms. Thorne made. And right now, Ms. Thorne can’t bear to be around Tarquin, so... it’s on you to make something happen.”

Keaton finally got it, his eyes wide. “What am I supposed to do?”

“I don’t know either.”

Lowell groaned, “Because your ex-girlfriend ticked off Ms. Thorne, Tarquin is catching the fallout. If it weren’t for today’s mess, Tarquin would’ve approached Ms. Thorne himself.”

Keaton sighed after hanging up, racking his brain to the point of near baldness from all the scratching.

Elysia couldn’t even stand Tarquin, let alone him.

If he approached Elysia, would she send him packing with a swift punch?

09:57

After all, Oriana wasn’t Tarquin’s ex, she was his!

“Jeez... Do I look like I’m cursed or what?” Keaton muttered to himself.

He needed to figure out how to apologize to Elysia. And he had to think of a way to persuade her to cook again for Elijah.

If he couldn't manage that, never mind Tarquin killing him, he wouldn't be able to face Elijah.

His godson finally showed some interest in eating, and because of him, he might go hungry.

Wasn't that just a sin?

How could he ever face Elijah and still be called 'godfather'?

If he couldn't handle this right, his conscience would eat him alive.

But how to handle it?

Keaton thought long and hard, his neurons firing on all cylinders, but couldn't come up with a solid plan.

So, with sheer grit, he decided to take a gift and go see Elysia.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 167[579 words]

The hospital room was now a solitary sanctuary for Elysia, the hum of the fluorescent lights above a steady companion.

Blossom went to pick up the boys, a routine as familiar as the back of her hand.

The police had come and gone, their questions and Elysia's answers now just echo in the sterile space.

When Keaton walked in, Elysia couldn't help but furrow her brow in instinctive disapproval.

Keaton, caught in an awkward moment, tried to break the ice with a sheepish grin. "Hey there."

Elysia eyed him warily, letting silence speak volumes.

Clearing his throat to pierce the silence, Keaton set down an expensive-looking gift beside her bed and took a seat, resembling a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

“Look, about today... I apologize. I had no idea Oriana could be such a drama queen! I messed up, and I’m

sorry.”

Elysia’s expression softened slightly at his seemingly sincere contrition. After all, it wasn’t his face that needed slapping—it was Oriana’s, and she wasn’t even here.

Besides, Oriana was nothing more than Keaton’s ex—water under the bridge.

If Keaton thought he was off the hook, Elysia wasn’t one to argue, especially considering the legalities.

And there was something she needed from him. Her potential divorce from Tarquin might very well hinge

on his assistance.

So, with Keaton’s apology hanging in the air, Elysia offered her olive branch, “This mess isn’t your fault, it’s Oriana’s.”

Keaton seized the truce eagerly, “You’re younger than me, so I’ll just call you Elysia, alright? You are, without a doubt, the most understanding and level-headed woman I’ve ever met. Not to mention beautiful. I really dig that about you.”

Elysia shot back instantly, “Don’t go falling for me now.”

Keaton’s face dropped, baffled by her mix of suspicion and distaste. He knew all too well the number of girls who would kill for his attention, but Elysia was out of his league—firstly, his sister would never have it, and secondly, Elysia was Tarquin’s territory.

“I mean, I admire you, that’s all,” Keaton backpedaled, “With my sister breathing down my neck, I wouldn’t dare make a move on you.”

Elysia’s lips twitched slightly, “I’ve reported today’s incident to the police. They’ve already taken statement. I hope you won’t cover for Oriana.”

She was afraid Keaton might shield Oriana, allowing her to evade justice.

“You have my word, I won’t cover for her,” Keaton pledged earnestly.

my

Silence reclaimed the room as Elysia pondered how to broach the subject of Tarquin, while Keaton wondered how to tell her about Elijah’s sudden craving for pastry.

They both started to speak, then stopped, and Keaton, ever the gentleman, insisted, “You first, ladies first.”

09:57

Not one to decline, Elysia cut to the chase, “I hear you know Tarquin

Keaton looked puzzled. Of course, he knew Tarquin; she had seen them together. Why the sudden curiosity?

“I need to meet him. Could you possibly arrange that?” Elysia requested.

Now Keaton was utterly perplexed. Hadn’t she just been with Tarquin?

Seeing his confusion, Elysia hastened to clarify, “Don’t get me wrong, I’m not into him. It’s strictly business. His status makes him hard to reach, and I’ve heard you’re close. I need your help to arrange a meeting.”

Keaton’s interest was piqued as he asked, “Do you know who that good-looking guy was who brought you

here?”

“Elijah’s father?” Elysia replied, with a hint of intrigue, not fully grasping the depth of the man’s identity.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 168[663 words]

Elysia frowned

I didn’t know him before I’ve only met him recently: his name is Tarin. But I’m not looking for him—I need to find Tarquin,”

Keaton was silent for a moment

Tann, huh

Bold of him to claim, and of her to believe

Clearly. Tarquin was hiding his true identity, but Keaton didn't want to burst that bubble just yet. Instead, he asked, "What do you want with Tarquin?"

lose it

"It's personal, I'd mother not disclose it."

She had thought about coming clean to Keaton, maybe even enlisting his help to find Tarquin and get a divorce, but after giving it some serious thought, she decided it wasn't wise

A secret marriage and a confidentiality agreement forced her to keep quiet. She couldn't tell anyone.

If Keaton could just help her get a meeting with Tarquin, she was confident she could persuade him to sign those divorce papers

Keaton considered for a few seconds before responding. "Alright, I'll keep it in mind. I'll let you know as soon as I hear anything."

"Thanks in advance."

"Don't mention it. Actually, I've got a favor to ask you too. Elijah's been hankering for more of those pastry you made. Would it be too much trouble to whip up another batch?"

Elysia paused. "Elijah?"

Keaton rubbed his neck awkwardly, "It was supposed to be Tarin who asked you, but since you don't want to see him, I'm stepping in. Forget about Tarin for a second—think about Elijah. The kid might have a scumbag for a father, but he's a good kid. He's had it rough. with a mother who doesn't care about anything but herself. It's rare for him to ask for anything, so when he does, it means a lot. He's never asked for anything before, so could you possibly help out? I know it's tacky to talk money, but if you're still mad, go ahead and milk Tarin for all he's worth. Open your mouth wide and extort him—it'll serve as your revenge."

Elysia replied, "I'm not so greedy as to kick a man when he's down and out."

'Down and out?'

"Yeah, I know he's bankrupt now. I'm not doing this for the money; it's just for Elijah,"

After Elysia finished speaking, her phone rang. It was Blossom calling.

She glanced at Keaton and said, "Til make something for Elijah and get in touch once it's ready. You can pick it up then. If there's nothing else, you can go back now."

Keaton nodded.

“Sure, sure. Don’t worry, I’ll keep the Tarquin thing in mind”

“Thanks for your help.”

Keaton left with a squint and a smile. As soon as Keaton stepped out, he saw Tarquin sitting in a car, smoking.

Keaton slid into the passenger seat before Tarquin could argue and quickly said, “Mission accomplished. Elysia will make something for Elijah later”

Tarquin gave him an inscrutable look and took a drag of his cigarette. He then exhaled slowly, trying to hide his relief that Elysia hadn’t abandoned Elijah in her anger.

Keaton was in high spirits as he asked, “Heard you changed your name and went bust?”

Tarquin flicked ash from his cigarette. “Did you tell her who I am?”

“No, I didn’t. So, how about treating me to dinner?”

Tarquin pursed his lips and rolled his eyes, ignoring him.

Keaton chuckled, “I won’t make you buy me dinner, but I kept your secret and asked her to make food for Elijah. We’re even now.”

Tarquin kept his cool and didn’t reply

Keaton pressed on, “What’s your game plan here? Hiding your identity is one thing, but telling people you’re bankrupt? Hoping for sympathy or looking to be a kept man? But from what I hear, Elysia isn’t exactly living in the lap of luxury. Aside from her stunning looks and figure, she doesn’t have much else going for her. No connections, no influence, and three sons to raise. She doesn’t have the spare cash to take pity on you.”

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 169[883 words]

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Keaton chuckled, shaking her head with a playful smirk. “So, spill the beans, what’s your mal agenda here?”

Tarquin remained silent Keaton ventured a guess. Don’t tell me you’re worried about blowing your cover because someone might fall for you? Don’t flatter yourself, buddy. Elysia told me today that she’s just not that into you”

Tarquin’s expression dark ened “What’s she telling you about me for?

She asked me to et up a meeting with you

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me right. She specifically said Tarquin, not Tarin!”

“And why does she want to meet me?”

“Beats me. I asked, but she was all hush–hush about it. Just said it was something important.”

Tarquin took a drag of his cigarette, deep in thought. What on earth could Elysia possibly want with him?

“Did you guys have a past encounter or something?”

Without hesitation, Tarquin shook his head. Tve looked into it, nothing

That’s just weird then She doesn’t know you, so what’s this all about?”

Tarquin just shrugged in silence

“If you go to this meeting, you’re basically outing yourself, you know?”

Tarquin puffed on his cigarette in silence for a long moment before finally speaking up, “Set it up!”

“Huh? You’re actually going?”

“Yeah!”

“Are you sure? N

Not womed about exposing yourself?”

“Enough with the yapping!”

“Ha! You “Keaton’s teasing was cut short by a call from Jessamine.

His face went pale.

“This is it. This gotta be about Oriana and Elysia’s mess.”

Tarquin raised an eyebrow, a sarcastic glint in his eyes. “Looks like karma’s knocking.”

Keaton just stared at his phone in dread.

Soon enough, Elysia got the message that Tarquin agreed to meet her tomorrow at noon.

“Really? Elysia was ecstatic

“Yeah, totally. So, where’s it gonna be? Your call or his?”

Im fine with anything, I follow his lead.”

“Okay, I’ll check with him and send you the details as soon as we’ve got it pinned down.”

“Thanks, Mr. Huber“

Keaton was almost bashful. “No need to th

didn’t see the Oriana thing coming”

“Uh, sure.”

thank me, but hey... if my sister calls you, could you put in a good word for me? I honestly

After hanging up, Elysia was buzzing with excitement. She’d see Tarquin tomorrow at noon. If she could just get to him, she was confident she could persuade him to divorce!

With the divorce, she could finally register her kids, and put all this drama behind her.

Elysia, in high spirits, processed her hospital discharge. She wasn’t really hurt, it was just a shock to the system. Now that she had steadied her mind, she was ready to turn the page.

Standing at the hospital’s entrance, she hailed a cab, planning to hit the grocery store.

Since Elijah loved her cooking, she'd make a feast tonight, especially since she had scored the meeting with Tarquin – a cause for celebration

She called Blossom and shared the good news about her discharge, asking what she and the kids fancied for dinner so she could pick up the groceries.

11-21

“How come you're out already?” Blossom asked.

I was fine, honestly. You didn't tell the kids, did you?”

“As you wished, not a word. They're in the living room, and I'm in the bedroom.

“Good. Every cloud has a silver lining, right? I've nailed the situation with my husband!”

“That so? Keaton came through?”

“Yeah, all set for tomorrow noon.

“Keaton's quick on his feet. This calls for a little celebration, doesn't it? How about I bring the little trio and we meet up?”

“Sounds good, let's head to Happy Mart.”

“Need a lift?”

“No need. You bring the kids, and I'll cab it from the hospital.”

“Alrighty, kids, gear up! We're off to Happy Mart to meet your mommy.”

“Mommy's at Happy Mart? I thought you said Mommy might not come home tonight because of some errand?” The three little ones babbled excitedly, vying for answers.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 170[654 words]

Before knowing if Elysia could be discharged, Blossom had already given them a heads up.

She prepared them for the possibility that Elysia might not be home tonight.

Blossom's voice was bubbly over the phone. "Your mom has wrapped up her business, and she's in such a great mood that she's planning to hit Happy Mart for some treats. She's gonna whip up a feast tonight."

"Wow!"

The three little ones screamed with excitement.

Elysia, phone in hand, couldn't help but let a smile spread across her face as she listened to her children's laughter.

Their voices were the sweetest sound in the world.

Keaton and Tanquin caught sight of that smile.

After Elysia finished the discharge process, Tarquin followed her out.

Maybe it was because Elijah was eager for her home-cooked meals, he stuck close to her side.

"That smile of hers is as lovely as a blooming flower," Keaton remarked from the driver's seat, genuinely moved.

At that, Tarquin shot him a glare.

Keaton's brow arched in amusement, "What are you glaring at me for? You're not into her! If you're not, and she's not taken, so why can't I admire her?"

Tarquin rolled his eyes and took a drag of his cigarette.

Keaton prodded, mischievously, "Be a man and admit it, are you interested in her or not?"

"No." Tarquin replied without a second thought.

For real?"

"I'm bored."

Keaton chuckled, "You two would actually make a good match, at least where looks are concerned. Both single, both raising kids on your own. If you could make a family together, it'd be perfect."

Keaton was on the same page as Lowell.

Better to build something new with Elysia than to wait endlessly for a woman who was nowhere in sight.

Elysia was beautiful, had a great figure, and was Tarquin's match.

So what if

if she was a bit less well-off and ordinary? Tarquin didn't need a woman's status to bolster him. After all these years, it was only with Elysia that Tarquin's interactions had a hint of intrigue.

And Tarquin was different with her than with other women.

That's why both Keaton and Lowell were playing matchmaker.

But Tarquin's response was a dark scowl, "Buzz offi

Keaton pursed his lips, exasperated, "See, you're no fun. Can't even take a little talk What, Elysia isn't good enough for you? I think if Elysia got together with you, it'd be you who's reaching. Look at you, not getting any younger, a bachelor past his prime. Stop being choosy. And honestly, I think you're into Ms. Thome. You definitely like her..."

Tarquin interrupted, "Should I get in touch with Jessamine and let her know you're fanciful about Elysia?"

"Damn! That's spreading rumors, man!"

"If you can gossip, why can't I?"

Keaton paused for a moment before saying, "Using my sister to threaten me? That's low."

"I'm your boss."

Keaton grumbled and stepped out of the car He needed to keep his distance from Tarquin and from Elysia too, to avoid his sister's wrath.

In their phone conversation today, his sister had nearly chewed his head off. Lucky for him, they weren't face-to-face, or she would have

killed him!

After Keaton left, Tarquin lit another cigarette and watched Elysia in silence.

Lowell, sitting at the wheel, had heard every word of their exchange. He couldn't help but add. "Ms. Thome is quite a looker, and she's

11:20

hapter 170:

got a beautiful smile. Plus, she's got a good heart. Any other woman might have been scared or upset for ages after what happened today. But look at her, just a few hours later, and she's already bouncing back. Either she's seen some real storms in her life, and today's troubles are nothing to her, or she's just exceptionally positive and optimistic about life."

“Or she could just be an alrhead! Clueless and cheerfully oblivious.”

Lowell was left speechless, thinking, “Can’t we just say something nice about her?”

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 171[733 words]

Over here, Elysia had just hung up the phone with Blossom when Jessamine’s call came through.

Jessamine said she had just finished tome shopping and was on her way to the hospital when Keaton told her Elysia had been discharged.

Elysia replied with a chuckle. “Yeah, I just got discharged. Don’t bother coming over; I’m fine. It was just a bit of a scare, but I’m all good

now

“Ugh, I only just found out. And let me tell you about that Orlane – she’s got some nerve! Not only is she audacious, but she hasn’t shown a shred of remorse! The whole mall incident was brushed off by Keaton because she was his girlfriend at the time – he treated it like a breakup settlement. But she’s so ungratefull if I had known, I wouldn’t have let her off so easily that day! Thank goodness you’re okay. What if something serious had happened?”

“I’m alright, so let’s just put it behind us.”

“I gave Keaton an earful over the phone just now. Every day it’s a new drama with him and his girlfriends. And now look, he’s caused a scene! I haven’t seen him in person yet, but just you wait until I do I’m going to give him a piece of my mind”

“Well, Mr. Huber didn’t see it coming either, after all, Oriana is an ex of his, so I wouldn’t say he’s at fault.”

“Not at fault? He’s the one who stirred up this mess! If he hadn’t dated Oriana in the first place, there wouldn’t have been the mall incident, nor what happened today!”

You could hear the frustration in Jessamine’s voice.

Elysia tried to soothe her, “Mr. Huber already came to apologize today, and he actually did me a e a huge favor. I’m quite thankful to him.”

“He owes you an apology! And if you ever need anything, just ask him. If he dares not help, I’ll take care of him!”

Elysia giggled, “Sure.”

After chatting with Jessamine for a bit and making plans to catch up another day, Elysia hung up.

She felt a warm glow inside – Jessamine had been really good to her and was like her guardian angel.

If it weren’t for Jessamine, Keaton might not have agreed to her request so readily.

The fact that Keaton had gone to the hospital to apologize so humbly today. Elysia believed, was also because of Jessamine.

Keaton was probably afraid of getting an earful from Jessamine, which was why he hurried to apologize.

That was Elysia’s assumption, but in reality, Keaton’s visit was largely motivated by Tarquin

The way Tarquin had roared at the construction site had been terrifying!

If Keaton didn’t make things right with her, Tarquin would surely have his head.

Putting away her phone, Elysia looked around. It had been over twenty minutes, and she still couldn’t hail a cab.

It was rush hour, and the area around the hospital was busy not the best time to find a ride

Elysia checked her GPS and saw that the supermarket wasn’t too far, a bike ride would only take about twenty minutes.

Without hesitation, she walked a few steps forward and got a shared bicycle.

Pedaling off, she hit the road.

Lowell was dumbfounded as he asked, “Tarquin, are we still going to follow her?”

“Keep up,” Tarquin commanded.

Lowell sighed inwardly, “But how?”

If she were driving a sports car, he wouldn’t be worried about keeping up.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin)

The blaring ought Byens attention, and when the light turned red the glanced back, her gaze skimming over the vehicles.

Level gückly ducked his head and even Tarquin turned his face away, fearing that Elysis at the crosswalk might catch sight of them

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Lower spoke up again, Targain, this aint gonna by Ms. Thoma int churters thell definitely catch on if we keep this in Not only will she figure out you're not bankrupt with that fancy set of wheels, it also tick her off she gets mad just seeing you, and if she finds but you're talling her shell hit the roof What if she gets so steamed the refines to cook for Elijah? Either you listen to me and chase after her on a bike, or we drop this Tean have someone follow her instead

With a dark expression, Tarquin remained silent for a moment before pushing open the car door and stepping out

By then, traffic was backed up behind them like a parade

Targum, dressed in a pricey designer suit, donned sunglasses and a face mask, and amid the curious stares, he made his way to the sidewalk and got a bike

Onlookers watched as he with his long straight legs, pedaled away

The crowd was abuzz with confusion and excitement

“Holy cow is that some celebrity causing a scene? Are they filming a movie?”

don't see any cameras Doesn't look like a movie shoot”

“Maybe its some nich kid slumming it? I saw him get out of that luxury car!”

vibe a I nich kid, it's more big shot CEO Holy moly, did I just step into a novel? My boss CEO is hitting the streets! Those legs. that figure, that nom. I'm head over heels! No, no, I gotta follow my CEO and experience life, I'm hopping on one of those shared bikes

What are you riding for? Your house is just up the road”

“I don’t care. I wanna ride, I wanna follow the CEO and strut down the street”

“Me too me too

And just like that, a group of girls, giddy as can be, started scrambling for city bikes to chase after Tarquin

Lowell watched the procession behind Tarquin and facepalmed.

Didn’t say it wasn’t a good idea to follow? And even if we did, did he really have to do it personally? Doesn’t he hate being seen in

Yet there he was, not only making an appearance but also riding a city bike. Holy cow, what a sight to behold!

And what was the big deal today that he had to follow her?

Lowell was still clueless about Tarquin’s actual motive for tailing Elysia. He quietly pulled out his phone, snapped a photo, and discreetly sent it to the group chat

Then the chatterboxes and the silent ones in the group exploded into conversation.

Meanwhile, Elysia was blissfully unaware that her solo bike ride had sparked a cycling frenzy.

She arrived at the Happy Mart and parked her bike in the designated area

While heading towards the supermarket, she dialed Blossom’s number, Blossom, have you guys made it yet?”

“We’re still stuck in traffic. You there already?

“Yeah, I biked over”

“Told you, two wheels beat four during rush hour. Well need another fifteen minutes or so. It’s chilly out, go on inside, and I’ll call you when we get there”

“Okay” Hanging up, Elysia grabbed a shopping cart and entered the supermarket

Tarquin, having shaken off his trail of admirers, followed her inside

’ ’ ’ ’ ’ ’

He couldn’t go unnoticed, wherever he went, eyes followed.

Even the lady sweeping up at the supermarket entrance couldn’t help but give him a few extra looks, chuckling as she said. “This young man sure is handsome.”

11:20

Chapters

The incessant honking behind them was getting impossible to ignore.

This traffic was moving slower than the walking ones!

The blaring horns caught Elysia's attention, and when the light turned red, she glanced back, her gaze skimming over the vehicles. Lowell quickly ducked his head, and even Torquin turned his face away, fearing that Elysia at the crosswalk might catch sight of them.

Luckily, after a brief glance, she pedaled away as the light switched to green.

Lowell spoke up again. "Tarquin, this ain't gonna fly! Ms. Thome isn't clueless. She'll definitely catch on if we keep this up. Not only will she figure out you're not bankrupt with that fancy set of wheels, but it'll also tick her off. She gets mad just seeing you, and if she finds out you're talking her, she'll hit the roof! What if she gets so steamed she refuses to cook for Elijah? Either you listen to me and chase after her on a bike, or we drop this. I can have someone follow her instead."

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"That vibe ain't rich kid; it's more big shot CEO! Holy moly, did I just step into a novel? My boss CEO is hitting the streets! Those legs, that figure, that ours, I'm head over heels! No, no, I gotta follow my CEO and experience life. I'm hopping on one of those shared bikes

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Tarquin, having shaken off his trail of admirers, followed her inside.

He couldn't go unnoticed: wherever he went, eyes followed.

Even the lady sweeping up at the supermarket

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 173[640 words]

When others got compliments, they beamed with pride. But when Tarquin was praised, it was as if he'd been catcalled.

A scowl was plastered across his face!

Even the janitor was too intimidated to clean around him, clutching her mop and scurrying away to tidier pastures.

The onlookers who'd been ogling him also quickly averted their gaze and pretended to be engrossed in something else.

Tarquin stormed into the supermarket, his expression as dark as a thundercloud.

It had been ages since he'd set foot in a supermarket and the bustling chaos inside made him furrow his brow in disdain.

He cherished his peace and quiet and loathed the noisy crowds.

But for the sake of following Elysia, he endured,

Like Elysia, he grabbed a shopping cart, determined to buy whatever she bought.

She headed for the fruit section, picking up bananas and... what was that spiky monstrosity? Dunian!

He grimaced at the pungent aroma but, not wanting to draw attention, he reluctantly hoisted the largest one into his cart.

Next was the vegetable aisle. Elysia went for cabbage, Tarquin did the same. She chose broccoli; he added it to his cart.

Then came the spices and condiments, and he doggedly followed suit...

It wasn't long before Elysia sensed something was off, feeling eyes constantly on her. Yet every time she glanced back, there was no suspicious figure to be found.

Meanwhile, Tarquin caught the eye of everyone in the supermarket. His striking looks, impressive build, and extraordinary aura were impossible to ignore. Plus, his behavior was nothing short of bizarre. He shadowed the beautiful woman ahead, mimicking her every purchase without fail, a first for many of the store's patrons.

If he knew her, why didn't he speak to her? And if he didn't, why on earth was he copying her shopping list item for item?

His odd behavior reached its peak when he even followed her to the personal care section, grabbing a pack of sanitary pads...

The Saleswoman at the feminine hygiene products couldn't help but whisper to Elysia, "Miss, that gentleman must be your husband, right? Did you two have a spat?"

"Huh?"

"Don't be shy, darling Couples bicker—it's perfectly normal. Don't take it to heart. Especially since your man is such a catch! Have you seen the way those girls have been eyeing him since he walked in? You let him go today, and they'll pounce right away. And sure, you're gorgeous too, but a handsome guy like that is rare. Most men out there are as appealing as a bag of lemons. I've been around for a good thirty years, and he's one of a kind, I tell you. You're one lucky lady"

Elysia was utterly confused. Husband? What spat?

She looked around swiftly but saw no one.

"There's nobody following me, ma'am. You must be mistaken"

"Oh, no mistake. Everyone's noticed. He's been tailing you the whole time, copying your every move. He's just ducked behind that shelf over there, probably trying to muster up the courage to apologize."

With a frown, Elysia pushed her cart around to the other side of the shelves.

That's when Tarquin emerged.

Not seeing Elysia, he scrunched his brow in frustration

He approached the spot where Elysia had been standing and, without a second glance, grabbed a few packets of whatever she had been looking at and tossed them into his cart.

The saleswoman couldn't resist chipping in, "Handsome, getting those for your wife? Trying to make up after a tiff? I can tell you're one of the good ones. Let me help you out! Don't pick that brand. Go for this one—it's the top seller in our store. A bit pricier, but quality speaks for itself. Your wife is stunning, and only the best will do for her. Trust me on this and go for this brand"

The gas pedal was a delicate matter – too much pressure, and he'd speed past her; too light, and the car might not even move.

And even if he managed it, it would be too easy for her to spot them!

After mulling it over, Lowell turned to Tarquin and suggested, "Maybe you should get down and grab a bike too, Tarquin. Its the safest way. If you wear a mask, she won't repognize you. Just pedal slowly and follow her. Otherwise, if I keep driving this car... it's a sure bet well get noticed."

Tarquin's expression darkened as he said, "Cut the chatter and get moving."

With a silent groan, Lowell had no choice but to reluctantly start the car.

Elysia continued her leisurely bike ride in the bike lane, while Lowell followed in the luxury vehicle, crawling along the road at snail's

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 174[598 words]

The woman wanted to sell more products, but Tarquin was only interested in the same brand that Elysia favored.

She couldn't convince him otherwise, so she just loaded his cart with several more packs without further ado.

Tarquin didn't dive into his relationship with Elysia after grabbing the feminine products, he set off to find her.

And as luck would have it, he looked up to see her at the end of the aisle!

No need to search—she had made herself known! Her fierce demeanor gave Tarquin the unsettling feeling of a stalker caught in the act. He furrowed his brow and froze, unsure how to react.

Elysia was seething!

Even with his mask and sunglasses, she recognized him instantly!

Damn him!

How dare he follow her!

Charging with her shopping cart, Elysia advanced with a stormy presence.

Seeing her, Tarquin wanted to flee for some reason, but his p

pride rooted him to the spot.

As Elysia approached and saw her own shopping list mirrored in his cart, her anger flared. She slammed her cart against his with a thud

“What the heck?” she demanded.

Tarquin scowled. "What?"

"Why are you stalking me?"

"Im not stalking you!"

"Then how come everything you've got is exactly what I'm buying?"

"It's a free country! I can buy whatever I want. It's not like I'm complaining about you copying my shopping list," he retorted.

"You... Are you some kind of creep?"

"Watch your language!" Tarquin's face darkened.

"Watch my language? You want me to watch my language when you've been tailing me all morning? You gonna tell me you didn't follow my lead on these items?"

Tarquin, with a stony expression, played his hand of denial.

"Nope!"

"Not admitting it, huh? Well, explain this: Why y are you buying the same sanitary pads as me?"

"The manufacturer didn't make them exclusively for you, did they?"

"I mean, I use them for their intended purpose. What's your reason?"

"I use them too."

Elysia choked up, momentarily at a loss for words.

Tarquin thought he had the upper hand and continued, "So, only you can use them, and I can't? You sure are nosy"

He then grabbed a few more packs from the shelf and dumped them into his cart, adding. "I've always used this brand."

After his snide comment, he gave Elysia a mocking look.

Stunned, Elysia forgot her anger, staring at him incredulously. "You, a grown man, how can you possibly need these?"

"Who says they're only for women?"

"They're for women!"

Tarquin's face turned dark as he took another glance at the products. He had been too focused on following Elysia and hadn't paid attention to what he was actually grabbing, mistaking them for toilet paper...

"You're a freak, aren't you?" Elysia snapped again.

Tarquin clenched his teeth in frustration. He had lost this round and couldn't muster a comeback. Reluctantly, he returned the feminine hygiene products to a distant shelf and coolly said, "My mistake, I've always used this brand's tissues."

"You're lying! This brand only makes sanitary pads, no tissues! And you still claim you're not copying my shopping list? If you're a man, you'd admit it openly! Don't make me lose respect for you!"

11:20

Tarquin felt his face being metaphoneally ground into the dirt

Aware of the onlookers, he abandoned his cart and grabbed Elysia, pulling her behind another aisle

They found themselves in the bedding section, among comforters and quilts, with no one else around.

Elysia struggled, Let go of me Let go

Tarquin pulled her in, pinning her against the shelf to prevent her escape.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 175[640 words]

Their breathing was rapid, a sure sign of mounting fury

Get off me Elysia's cheeks flushed red as she shoved at him, trying to push him away.

Tarquin stood firm as a rock, Feeling like a kitten was playfully scratching of his chest.

Cut it out!

If you don't back off, I swear I scream! Get lost, you creep!"

The moment she tried to hit him, Tarquin caught her wrist and held it high above her head.

When she attempted to kick, Tarquin leaned in, pinning her in place.

Anonly embarrassed, Elysia nearly walled, “Help... mmmph...”

Tarquin quickly covered her mouth with his other hand, silencing her cries.

“Shut it! I admit I followed you here today, but it wasn’t for you—it was for Elijah! He loves the meals you cook, and I just wanted to see what ingredients and seasoning packets you’re using.”

The reason he had been following Elysia all day was just that.

Elysia shook her head violently, trying to escape his grip.

Tarquin issued a warning, “I can let you go, but if you dare scream, I’ll just have to silence you again.”

He released her, and Elysia didn’t scream. She just faced him, fuming, “Are you insane? If you wanted to know what ingredients and seasoning packets I use, you could have just asked! Don’t you have a mouth? Or you could’ve messaged me!”

Tarquin was even angrier than she was. “Do you think you would’ve told me if I asked? The moment you sow me today, you told me to get lost!”

“And why do you think I told you to get lost? Don’t you have any clue?”

“What clue? All I did was save you!”

“You’re accusing me of ingratitude? What right do you have to say that? If I hadn’t thought about Elijah being orphaned if you died, I would have ended you right there in that abandoned building today!”

“You wanted to end me? How is that not ingratitude? Why the hell would I have gone to that derelict site if not to save you?”

“I didn’t need your rescue!”

Tarquin was so angry he was practically gasping for air.

I’ve dealt with unreasonable women before, but never someone as ungrateful as you. If I’d known, I would’ve left you to their mercy!”

“You. It’s you who’s ruined me! I’ve already died once because of you, what more do you want?”

“You say I’ve ruined you? Clarify that right now!”

1. Elysia’s eyes reddened with anger.

If it wasn't for the kid, she would drag all their past drama into the light of day. To face him head-on, to have it out once and for all!

"Don't play dead! You won't leave until you make yourself clear today!"

Tarquin glared at her like a parent disciplining a wayward child. He believed he hadn't done anything unforgivable to Elysia.

At first, he did suspect her motives for approaching him, but it was nowhere near as severe as she claimed.

Ruined? If someone else heard that, they'd think he'd done something terrible to her!

Elysia bit her lip, glaring furiously at him. She wanted to speak but didn't dare, only puffing up in silent rage.

As she struggled with what to do, her phone suddenly rang. She knew it had to be Blossom arriving with the boys.

Thinking of the boys, Elysia's heart raced, her pulse throbbing in her throat.

Seeing her reaction, Tarquin narrowed his eyes as he said, "Answer the phone:

Elysia shook her head frantically.

The more she resisted, the more Tarquin suspected there was something amiss with the call.

He reached straight into her pocket.

Elysia exploded, "You jerk, what are you doing? Don't touch me!"

Through the thin fabric, Tarquin felt the heat of her skin, a flicker of something crossing his face, but he didn't linger and quickly

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 176[589 words]

Tarquin stealthily slipped her phone out of her pocket. The screen was alight with a bold notification.

Squinting. Tarquin read aloud, "Love No. 1.

“Back off, jerk! Who said you could just grab my phone without asking? No manners, no class! Give it back! Give me my phone!”

He chuckled dryly, “All this panic, they say your sins will find you out. If you’re bold enough to have a lover, why fear getting caught? Love No. 1 got a sidepiece, do we?”

“It’s none of your business! Just give me back my phone!”

“Shameless, aren’t you?”

“Whether I’m shameless or not is none of your concern, your dog! Dare to answer my phone and see what happens. I’ll go to war with you!”

A video call was incoming!

If he swiped to answer. Elliot’s face, identical to his own, would appear on the screen.

And then, they’d both be caught...

She couldn’t bear to think about it, the mere thought of what might happen next was too horrifying to entertain.

Luckily, just as Elysia’s anxiety was reaching a peak, the phone call disconnected automatically.

Elysia’s body slumped, her breath coming in heavy gasps.

But then-

The phone rang again!

This time, the screen displayed “Love No. 2.”

The mockery in Tarquin’s eyes was so evident, even a blind man could see it!

This time, however, before Elysia could speak up, he released her and tossed the phone back to her.

“You’re right. Your morals, or lack thereof, are none of my business. My request is simple, just look after Elijah. Keep your vices away from him, and I won’t interfere. Take good care of him, and there will be benefits for you. Fail, and don’t expect me to be nice!”

His final words were a knot of brows and a gaze filled with threats and warnings.

But Elysia was too preoccupied to notice, clutching the phone to her chest as if it were her lifeline, fearing Tarquin might snatch it away

again.

Love No. 2 was Evan, and she couldn't answer this video call just yet.

With his warning delivered. Tarquin turned to leave.

Only then did Elysia's heart rate begin to normalize

But, as luck would have it, her eyes caught a glimpse of Evan at the end of the aisle!

Clearly, the kid had seen her too. His eyes lit up, and he started toddling her way.

Elysia's heart nearly stopped. She grabbed Tarquin, who was about to turn away, not caring as the phone slipped from her grasp and clattered to the floor

She smacked Tarquin's face with her hands.

This time it was Tarquin's turn to get mad, "What the-?"

Elysia glanced sidelong at the approaching Evan, tongue-tied, "Go... go that way."

"What way? There's a wall and shelves, it's a dead end!"

"You..... just... just..."

Elysia was at a loss, her whole body trembling.

Tarquin sensed something was off and felt the presence of someone small racing towards them.

He turned his head to look, but Elysia, in a panic, grabbed his face, preventing him from seeing.

The more she resisted, the more he wanted to look.

He pried her hands away, about to turn his head, when Elysia suddenly lunged at him!

On tiptoes, she aimed a kiss at him. She didn't know any other way to distract him..

11.201

dejapter

Horquin was stunned, "What the lis

In the chaos, Tarquin stumbled backward into a shelf, sending it crashing down.

Caught by inertia, Elysia tumbled after him....

"Mummy Evan cried out, terified, and raced over.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 177[601 words]

She caught sight of Elysia's frantic gestures and realized something was up. Grabbing Evan by the hand, she made a beeline for the

exit.

Evan resisted, "Blossom! Mommy fell down!"

"It's okay, honey... we'll check on her in a bit. Look, she fell into those shelves of quilts and pillows. They're soft. She's fine"

"But, but I saw Mommy with a man, and they were... they were... kissing."

Blossom's eyes lit up. "Really? Tell me more!"

"Yeah! And Mommy was the one who kissed him first."

Blossom Internally groaned. Oh, what juicy gossip! How she yeomed to dig into it!

No, no, she must prioritize. Kids come before gossip.

If Elysia didn't want Evan to go over there, there must be a reason. She couldn't let her friend down!

Blossom reined in her gossip-hungry heart, and said, "Evan, put on your face mask, and let's go find Elliot and Emmett"

"But..."

"No buts. Your mommy's going to be okay, trust me!"

With that, Blossom scooped up Evan and left without looking back, denying the little guy any chance to protest

Meanwhile, Elysia felt a wave of relief seeing Blossom take Evan away. She slumped into Tarquin's embrace.

Tarquin stiffened.

Lying on his back, he was cushioned by the soft quilts, with a warm, heavy person collapsed on top of him!

He wasn't hurt, but he was definitely irritated!

What was this woman doing? Taking advantage of him again?

He thought to himself—she really was—

“How romantic, like a scene straight out of a movie.”

“The good-looking ones are different. Knocking over shelves looks like a scene from a soap opera, such a treat for the eyes.” “Ha, aren't they

they the couple that was arguing earlier? Looks like they've made up.”

“Couples don't hold grudges overnight, a little kiss and cuddle and everything's mended.”

The bystanders chuckled and commented as they looked on.

Tarquin, already disliking attention, now found himself the center of a spectacle.

Not only was he the subject of public scrutiny, but here was a scandal brewing.

And, Elysia had kissed him again!

Even though it was through a mask, Tarquin was fuming.

He lay on the quilts, staring blankly at Elysia, his face a shade of thunder

His anger was palpable, veins throbbing at his neck!

He was so aggrieved that he couldn't even speak, just clenching his sculpted lips tightly, glaring at Elysia with a chest that heaved with every breath.

Elysia, realizing the situation only when she heard the crowd's remarks, hastily got up from atop him, her cheeks blazing as she said, “I'm... I'm so sorry.”

Tarquin didn't utter a word. After glaring at her, he stood up and stormed off.

Elysia sighed in relief seeing him go, though her ears still burned at the thought of her bold move. Even through a mask, it was quite the... well, quite something.

But she had no other way to divert his attention. If there had been another option, she certainly wouldn't have resorted to such

measures.

A young saleswoman approached, not immediately concerned with tidying the shelves but rather asking. “Miss, is that your boyfriend or husband? He must be a movie star right?”

Elysia’s mouth twitched uncontrollably and said, “No, he’s not.”

09:58

“Awe don’t be shy. You two are such a good match. It’s a pity he had sunglasses and a mask on. I couldn’t see his face clearly, but with his demeanor, he must be Incredibly handsome!”

Elysia didn’t know what to say. After apologizing to the saleswoman and helping to straighten the shelves, she quickly went to find Blossom and the boys.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 178[583 words]

The moment they met, Emmett blurted out. “Mommy, why’s your face all red? Your ears, too?”

Elysia flushed with embarrassment and said, “Oh, I was just helping the clerk restock some items, and it got a bit warm

Emmett bought the story. “So you were just hot

Elysia chuckled, gearing up to change the subject when Evan, the little straight-shooter, suddenly asked, “Mommy, who was that man you just kissed?”

“What?” Elysia was dumbstruck.

“I saw everything. Mommy You jumped right into his arms and even stood on your tiptoes to kiss him. When the guy fell back, he wrapped his arms around your waist, just like couples do on TV. You were all huggy and kissy”

Elysia was speechless. She wished the ground would swallow her up, hearing that from her little boy!

Now, not only were her face and ears red, but her neck was flushed too!

“Are you in love, Mommy?” Evan probed further

Elysia’s eyelashes fluttered madly, at a loss for words

If not so why kiss the guy?

If yes? She didn't want to weave that web of lies.

Just when she didn't know what to do. Elliot came to her rescue, "Evan, Mommy's a lady, and asking her directly like that will make her shy

"Huh? How should I ask, then?" Evan's face was the picture of innocence.

Elliot glanced at Mommy as he said, "Don't ask at all. It's Mommy's little secret."

With that, he took Evan and Emmett by the hand and headed for the toy department, distracting them with the promise of choosing new toys

"Elliot is such a sweetheart Blossom remarked, giving Elliot a nod of approval before elbowing Elysia with a mischievous grin, "So, spill the beans, what's the deal?"

Elysia exhaled. "It's complicated,"

"Complicated? Who did you kiss? Any guy you'd take the initiative with has to be someone special. Come on, dish the dirt, I want the scoop."

"Special, my foot Elysia was fuming. "It was Elijah's dad! He's been tailing me, copying everything I buy. I confronted him and we had a row. I didn't expect Evan to show up. If he'd seen Evan, we would've been in a world of trouble. So, thinking on my feet, I just...um, grabbed his face to distract him. And besides, he was wearing a mask.

Blossom gasped. "It was him?"

*Who else?"

"Holy smokes, lucky I grabbed Evan and got out of the

"Yep! Nicely done, you've earned an extra drumstick tonight

Blossom was still shaken,

"But why is he stalking you and buying the same things?"

"He says it's because Elijah likes the meals I make and wanted to check out my ingredients and seasonings."

"Why not just ask you? Oh wait, you stated clearly that you want nothing to do with her now, so that excuse kinda holds water."

Elysia pressed her lips together. Regardless of the reason, having Evan see her kiss a man was not a good thing. She felt like she hadn't set a good example for her kids!

"We better be more careful from now on, especially since we're in the same city. Running into each other is just too likely," Blossom

advised.

Elysia nodded firmly. "Yeah!"

They had to be careful, Jindale City wasn't that big, and the chances of bumping into each other were high. She should really get moving on the divorce with Tarquin! And take the kids and get out of here!

Tomorrow, she'd confront Tarquin and force him to finalize the divorce!

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 179[682 words]

In the evening Elysia had whipped up an array of scrumptious dishes.

She even packed a separate portion just for Elijah and texted Keaton to swing by the entrance of the complex to pick it up

Keaton was genuinely touched. "I can't thank you enough, Elysin. You're a saint."

Elysia wasn't too keen on Keaton calling her by her first name as if they were old chums.

But she didn't correct him, keen to keep the chit-chat to a minimum.

Keaton extended a sleek, designer tote bag adorned with the iconic Hermès logo—unmistakably high-end.

"This is just a little something from me to you, a token of appreciation for all the great food you've been making for Elijah."

Elysia didn't take it. Instead, she said, "No need for that Just make sure Tarquin shows up for our meeting tomorrow, and we're even,

"You can count on that. Hell be there on time. We've got it all arranged," Keaton assured her.

Elysia felt a wave of relief and said, “Just take your gift back. I don’t need it. Oh, and do me another favor, would you? Tell Elijah’s dad to give me a call if it’s about the boy from now on. No more following me!”

Keaton raised an eyebrow and asked, “He’s been following you?”

Elysia didn’t elaborate. “Just get that food to Elijah before it gets cold, will ya? Bye! With that, Elysia wrapped her coat tighter and disappeared into the complex.

Keaton, carrying the food, climbed into his limited edition Maybach parked curbside.

Tarquin was already inside, smoking

As soon as Keaton got in, he teased, “So, been playing the secret admirer, have we?”

Tarquin’s brow furrowed. “What did she say?”

“She reckons you’re trying to hit on her!”

Tarquin’s expression turned icy cold

The next second, he abruptly pushed the car door open as if he was about to storm out and set things straight with Elysia.

Keaton quickly held him back, “Come on, man, can’t you take a joke? Sit down. She didn’t say that. But she did say you can call her about anything to do with Elijah. No more following her around, okay?”

Seeing Tarquin retract his long legs and close the car door, Keaton couldn’t help but rib him, “Starting to tail her now, huh? Sounds like someone’s got it bad.”

“Shut

Back at Sunshine Community, Keaton and Tarquin made their way upstairs.

Elijah was still perched by the window, with Heath keeping him company.

Noticing Tarquin’s return, Heath stood up promptly to greet,

“Yeah, you can head out,” Tarquin replied.

Bradford, Mr. Huber

Once Heath left, Keaton approached Elijah cheerily, “Hey there, little Elijah, I’m here to see you!”

Elijah didn’t so much as glance his way, treating him like he was invisible.

Keaton attempted to ruffle Elijah's hair, but the boy sharply dodged and shot him a glare

Keaton was taken aback but also heartbroken.

Tarquin called out, "Got your favorite pastries here. Why don't you come and have some?"

Only then did Elijah get up, went to wash his hands in the bathroom, and sat down at the dining table.

Tarquin laid out the meal: besides the morning's pastries and egg crepes, there were four side dishes, and a bowl of soup.

It was a modest spread, each dish small but varied.

Keaton couldn't help but comment, "Looks good, but where's yours?"

Clearly, Elysia had only prepared Elijah's portion and left Tarquin out of the equation,

Tarquin shot Keaton a look that said 'zip it'

Under the watchful eyes of the two men, Elijah picked up a pastry and bit into it. After finishing it, he moved on to the side dishes.

09:58

Both men were silently pleased.

Elijah seemed to particularly enjoy the dish, continually reaching for it.

Keaton asked, "Do you like that, Elijah?"

Elijah didn't respond at first, but after a while, he finally nodded.

Keaton's eyes widened in surprise!

It was a casual question, and he hadn't expected any answer, but Elijah had actually responded. It was probably the first time in two years that Elijah had acknowledged him.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 180[621 words]

Back in the day, no matter how much Keaton jumped around in front of Elijah, Elijah just turned a blind eye and a deaf ear, treating him

like he was thin air!

Before Keaton left, he and Tarquin stood downstairs, taking a smoke break.

“You know, you can't knock it—Elysia's got some chops. I've hired a string of fancy chefs to cook, but none could win over Elijah's stomach the way she did

“Why don't you just have her come over to take care of Elijah?”

Tarquin frowned, flicking ash from his cigarette.

“She came over once, but Elijah didn't take to her, sent her packing.”

“Huh? Likes her cooking but not her company?”

“Vep.”

“The kid's probably feeling threatened because Elysia's such a looker. Thinks you and she might become an item.”

Tarquin took a drag on his cigarette, mulling it

it over. That was probably it.

Elijah never liked it when he was around other women.

He was playing his Mommy's little sentinel!

Keaton said, “Try to get them to spend more time together. Elysia's an opportunity. If Elijah likes her cooking, maybe he'll warm up to her too. Once he does, things can only get better from there.”

Yeah.”

“By the way, she asked again about meeting up tomorrow. You planning on seeing her? Decided to come clean about who you are?”

Tarquin flicked more ash, lost in thought

Keaton said, “Don't leave things up in the

Where does that leave my reputation?”

the air, man. I've already vouched for you. If you bail tomorrow, how am I supposed to explain it?

Tarquin scrunched his eyebrows and said, "Ill see her tomorrow"

"Good!"

After Keaton left, Tarquin went upstairs.

Elijah had polished off everything on the dinner table..

Tarquin was stunned. "You finished?"

"Yep."

"Feeling stuffed?"

Elijah shook his head and retreated to his room tem

Tarquin stared at the plates that looked licked clean by a dog for a long while.

Then he made a call to the nutritionist, asking how much a kid Elijah's sile should be eating.

Elijah used to pick at his food like a kitten, now he was devouring it like a little tiger!

He could polish off so much!

When he learned that it was fine for Elijah to eat that much, Tarquin sank into a deep self-reproach.

It wasn't that Elijah had eaten a lot today, it was that he had been eating too little before.

Elijah's previous appetite was like that of a three-year-old, but he was already five

Tarquin condemned himself for not being a better father, not even knowing how much his child should be eating, and at the same time, he felt a pang of heartache.

But looking at the empty plates on the table, he felt a bit of relief.

No matter what, it was good that Elijah was eating well now,

Tarquin rolled up his sleeves, gathered the plates and cutlery to wash in the kitchen, and decided to whip up someone for himself.

He thought Elysia might have left a portion for him as well, but.

He was expecting too much.

09:58

Just after he finished his meal, his phone rang. It was Benjamin.

*Tarquin, that bald guy's turned into a vegetable

"Who?"

"The bald dude who collapsed in the abandoned building on Ms. Thome today. Cops took him to the general hospital. My little bro works there, just told me about it."

"Any idea what caused it?"

"No clue, they haven't figured it out yet. Weird thing is, he was in good shape before, no idea what happened today. Suddenly collapsed and never woke up. But here's the kicker, his goons are saying he got taken down by Ms. Thome."

Tarquin was taken aback. "Elysia?"