

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 251[740 words]

Because of this, Tarquin hadn't shown Elysia a single smile all day.

And Elysia? She didn't bother with him either. It's not like he was ever Mr. Sunshine towards her!

After fixing dinner, Elysia was ready to head home.

These past few days, she'd spent her mornings here with Elijah, only to return home in the evenings to her three little rascals.

When it was time to leave with White, Elijah clearly seemed reluctant to part ways. Elysia could only comfort him, "I'll talk it over with Evan, see if we can bring White over again tomorrow to hang out with you."

As much as she wanted Elijah to be happy, White was Evan's pet; she couldn't just decide to give White to Elijah without consulting Evan. Neither could she just cheer up Elijah and ignore how Evan felt.

Elijah, silent, handed White back to her and turned his gaze towards the window.

With a doting tone, Elysia said, "I'll come by again tomorrow, see you then."

Elijah didn't respond, the epitome of aloofness.

It wasn't until he heard the door close behind her that he turned around, looking both aggrieved and unhappy. He didn't want her to go, but pride kept him from asking her to stay.

Just like his dad, too proud for his own good.

In the living room, Elysia was surprised to find Tarquin, dressed and ready, standing by the door.

"Are you driving me?"

"Yeah."

"What about Lowell?" It had been Lowell who was driving her around lately.

Tarquin, frowning, didn't explain but retorted, "Are you coming or not?"

"What about Elijah? You're leaving him alone at home?"

"There's someone to look after him. Don't worry about it."

Elysia pouted, reluctantly following him downstairs.

He was still driving that same old sedan, and the ride was silent between them.

It wasn't until they reached the gate of her complex that Elysia realized he'd locked the car doors.

Elysia, wary, asked, "Why'd you lock the doors?"

Tarquin killed the engine, lit a cigarette, and took a few puffs before speaking up,

"The Bradford family has a family reunion next month, and we need Elijah to attend. He's also expected to give a speech; think you could convince him?"

So, that was why he'd personally driven Elysia today. He knew he wouldn't be able to handle it himself, so Elysia was his best shot.

Elysia, already having plans in mind, frowned. "He has to give a speech?"

"Yeah."

"Can't he just attend without speaking?"

"Nope."

"Why does your family reunion have to be such a big deal?" Elysia grumbled.

Tarquin shot her a look. "I've already talked to Elijah about it, but he didn't agree. He might listen to you, though."

"Why would he listen to me?"

"He likes you."

A flicker of joy passed through Elysia's eyes. "He told you that?"

"I can tell."

Elysia, "I'll talk to him about it tomorrow then."

"Good. Elijah likes you, and if you treat him well, you won't miss out on your reward. For now, it's ten thousand a day, and if you do well, there might be a bonus at the end of the month."

The mention of money immediately perked Elysia up. "There's a bonus?"

Seeing her eagerness, Tarquin pressed his lips together in disdain. She was the typical type, eyes wide open at the sight of money-a true money-grubber!

"Do well, and the bonus starts in the five figures."

Elysia's eyes went wide, "For real?"

"Yeah."

"Once the bonus is in, the work's a breeze. I'll definitely shine, you can bet on it!"

Even though she wasn't taking care of Elijah for the money, getting paid would definitely put a smile on her face. She was really struggling financially right now, so any opportunity to earn some cash had to be seized. After all, she still had three sons relying on her.

Seeing her react like she just got a jolt of electricity, Tarquin added, "If you can convince Elijah to cooperate and attend the ancestral ritual, it's a 50 thousand bonus." He didn't want to scare her off with too many details.

50 thousand was like winning the lottery for Elysia, her eyes widening even more, "50 thousand dollars?"

"Yep."

"Not five thousand? Not five hundred?"

"Nope. It's 50 thousand."

"A gentleman's agreement is hard to break. You said fifty thousand, not a penny less. Going back on your word is a dog move!"

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 252[642 words]

Tarquin flicked his cigarette ash with a look of disdain. "First think about how you can convince Elijah. I'm not just asking him to attend; I want him to give a speech in front of everyone. If you screw this up, you won't get a dime."

Elysia was brimming with confidence, "A public speech? Piece of cake, no problem at all!"

Seeing her full of confidence, Tarquin squinted his eyes, "You have a plan?"

"Yep!"

"What's the plan?"

Elysia immediately shot him a wary look, "It's a secret! A top-secret!"

"You're not even gonna tell me?"

"Especially not you. You're not privy to this information!"

Tarquin was dumbfounded.

Watching her being both foolish and overly confident, yet so irritating, he felt a mix of annoyance and reassurance.

"As long as you can handle it, money is no object."

Elysia stood tall and proud, "I'll nail it, 100%. Just make sure you have the money ready!"

Elliot had already thought of a plan for her, so that 50 thousand dollars was as good as hers!

At this moment, Elysia was happy, and even Tarquin was in a good mood.

To him, any problem that money could solve wasn't a problem at all. Her love for money only made her easier for him to control.

Tarquin took another drag of his cigarette and then said, "There's one more thing."

"What's up?"

"I've warned you, don't get any ideas about me."

Elysia was taken aback. It took her a moment to realize he was referring to today's 'inappropriate advance'!!

She pouted and retorted with a flushed face, "I admit I looked at you a bit more today, but to say I'm interested in you just because of that is ridiculous! Do you think you're as beloved as a dollar bill, loved by everyone? I'll have you know, I don't like you one bit!"

"Good, I have someone in my heart."

"And I have people in mine too! Quite a few!"

So having someone in your heart is something special? As if everyone doesn't have a few names in theirs, like Elliot, Evan, Emmett, including Elijah, they're all in her heart.

Quite a few?

What a player!

Tarquin looked at her with contempt and flicked his cigarette ash again, "You into Zane?"

"Who?"

"Zane, the son-in-law of the Newsom Group."

Elysia had a three-second meltdown, furious, "Are you out of your mind? Spouting nonsense! Zane is my best friend's husband! He and I are just friends! Saying that is even worse than saying I like you! Are you picking a fight on purpose?"

Her attitude was hostile, and Tarquin frowned slightly, "Why are you angry? If you're innocent, you have nothing to worry about, unless there's something you're guilty of."

"You... You accuse me and now I can't get angry?"

"I didn't accuse you, I was just asking."

"You can't just ask!"

Elysia was seething, "From now on, unless it's about Elijah, don't talk to me! And for the last time, I don't like you! Narcissist!"

"You..."

"Buzz off!"

"Elysia!"

"Don't you dare call me!"

Tarquin's face turned stormy, utterly provoked, "You dare insult me?"

"I wish I could hit you! Narcissist! Lunatic! Open the door! I'm getting out!"

"You..."

"Stop talking nonsense! Hurry up and open it! If you don't, I'm calling the cops!"

Tarquin, with a grim face, pursed his lips, silently repeating Elijah's name a hundred times in his head to calm himself, and finally unlocked the door. "You're crazy!"

"Not as crazy as you!"

Elysia huffed off the car, slammed the door, and walked away!

Tarquin, infuriated, felt pain in his heart, liver, lungs... everything hurt.

He slammed the steering wheel hard and floored the gas pedal, driving away!

From a corner, a shadowy figure watched Tarquin's departure, then glanced at Elysia walking away, and chuckled slyly, "They're fighting. Hehe, they're fighting..."

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 253[592 words]

Elysia stormed into her house, swearing under her breath the whole way home.

If he suspected she had a crush on him, she might have been able to stomach it.

But accusing her of falling for Zane? Ridiculous! What a jerk! A downright sleazy jerk!

If it weren't for Elijah, she'd swear off seeing him for the rest of her life!

How much did she detest him at the moment? Just the thought of his face made her grind her teeth, wishing she could bite his head off!

It took her a moment to compose herself before opening the front door.

The last thing she wanted was to bring her foul mood home.

Blossom and the three little ones were all at home. The moment they saw her, the kids rushed over, "Mommy!"

Seeing her three sons lightened Elysia's mood immediately, hugging one, kissing the other two.

Evan asked, "Mommy, how did it go? Did White help Elijah?"

"Yeah, Elijah really took to it, didn't even want to part when it was time."

Elysia handed White back to Evan.

On seeing Evan, White seemed to transform, acting as if reuniting with its young master after ages, nuzzling Evan affectionately.

Its dark skin turned white, and the little black snake became white.

Evan beamed, "Good job, White! You made me proud!"

Elysia smiled, "Can White spend another day with Elijah tomorrow?"

"Sure, as long as he doesn't try to steal White from me."

"No worries, Elijah is well-behaved. He knows not to covet what others cherish."

"Then I can lend White to him for a few more days."

Elysia nodded gently, "You are the most caring."

After spending some time with the kids and chatting with Blossom, she took Elliot aside.

"Elliot, I've made up my mind. We'll do as you suggested! I've already had Elijah's dad announce that Elijah is better. Now, we just need to create an opportunity to convince everyone. Coincidentally, Elijah's family is hosting a memorial service next month on the fifth, and Elijah and his family will all be there. That day is a good opportunity; we should plan carefully!"

"Next month on the fifth?"

"Yeah!"

Elliot slightly narrowed his eyes, looking all grown-up, "Mommy, leave it to me. I guarantee everything will go smoothly."

"Alright! Oh, and there's a speech that day, you okay with that?"

"No problem!"

Seeing Elliot brimming with confidence, Elysia felt relieved and her mood completely lifted.

After dinner, Elysia and Blossom took Evan and Emmett out for a walk.

Elliot, preoccupied with his plans, made an excuse not to go.

Upon returning, Evan immediately told Elliot, "There's a weirdo in the neighborhood."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, the janitor found a dead cat by the wall. A bunch of people went to look, and I went to see what the fuss was about. That cat must've been dead for days, all dirty, like it was buried and then washed out by the rain. But that's not the point. The point is, it was killed by someone who twisted its neck while it was still alive."

Elliot frowned, "Are you sure?"

"Of course, I'm Evan. I knew the cause of death the moment I saw it! Who in their right mind does that to a stray cat? Kittens are so cute, and most people would want to hold them, pet them. Only a psycho would twist its neck like that."

At the mention of a psycho, Elliot's mind immediately drifted to the masked figure. Ever since that encounter in the park, he hadn't seen him again.

Chapter 254

[584 words]

Elliot had been sleuthing around for days on end, trying to dig up anything he could on the mysterious figure haunting their mom, but to no avail.

He even went through the list of all the potential enemies Elysia might have, but came up empty-handed.

As for Tarquin's enemies, well, that was a list too long to even start with, leaving them with no suspects at all.

So, the masked figure remained just that - a mystery.

"Since we've got a creep on our hands, be extra careful when you and Mom go for your walks downstairs. Stay safe, okay?"

"Absolutely, don't worry. No one's touching us with me around. Huh? Did that jerk Tarquin send you a message?"

Evan was glued to Elliot's tablet screen.

It was flooded with messages from Tarquin, whom Elliot had saved under his name.

Elliot nodded. "He knows I got something from Gideon Bradford, and now he wants it."

"What does he want with it?"

"It's valuable; everyone's after it."

Evan was intrigued, "Is it really that powerful?"

"Yeah, don't let its looks deceive you. It packs a punch."

"Then why don't you just use it to make that jerk Tarquin divorce our mom?"

"Mom's been tied up with Elijah's stuff recently. She's not in a rush to divorce. Plus..."

Elliot had been rethinking the whole divorce idea because, despite everything, he realized Tarquin wasn't entirely useless.

If it hadn't been for Tarquin, Elysia might have been seriously hurt in that incident Allegra orchestrated.

Fair's fair, Tarquin did save their mom once.

"Plus what?" Evan was curious.

"Never mind."

Just as Elliot finished, the tablet pinged twice more - this time, it was Gideon reaching out.

Tarquin was after Baby ET's Support One, namely Mr. E.

Gideon was after Alpha Thorne.

Neither knew Mr. E and Alpha were the same person, let alone that it was Elliot.

"Elliot, didn't you and Gideon wrap up your deal? Why's he still reaching out?"

"He wants to team up with me against Tarquin."

Evan was confused. "But isn't Gideon Tarquin's grandfather? Aren't they family? Mom always says families should stick together and love each other. Why don't they love each other?"

Elliot sighed, "In a normal family, yes, but the Bradfords are anything but normal."

Evan pouted, "We should get Mom to divorce that jerk Tarquin sooner rather than later. She shouldn't have to deal with that dysfunctional family. They're not worthy of our mom."

"Yeah, I'll handle it. Now that we have something Tarquin wants, we can make them divorce anytime mom's ready."

Elliot wasn't as concerned about the divorce now; his main worry was the masked man.

The less he found out, the more anxious he became.

He felt the masked man was like a ticking time bomb, ready to explode at any moment!

...

The next morning, it was Lowell who picked up Elysia.

When they arrived at Sunshine Community, Elysia didn't even see Tarquin.

Which was fine by her; she didn't ask where he went, focusing instead on spending time with Elijah.

She brought up the topic of paying respects to their ancestors with Elijah, who coldly replied, "I'm only going to pay respects to my grandpa, no one else!"

Elysia tried to broach another topic, but Elijah cut her off, "I don't want to talk about it."

Elysia felt helpless but didn't want to upset Elijah further, so she dropped it.

Time flew, and before they knew it, the eve of the family ceremony had arrived.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 255[736 words]

Blossom could see that Elysia was on edge about Elijah's upcoming family ceremony. She tried to reassure her, saying, "You know, Elliot might be young, but he's got a good head on his shoulders. You can trust him to handle things smoothly. Nothing's going to go wrong."

Elysia trusted Elliot, of course, but the thought of all the things that could potentially go wrong was still a nagging worry in her mind.

Blossom added, "Besides, you're not even sure if he's really Evan and Elliot's dad. Maybe it's just a resemblance, you know? Think about Daniel. Daniel looks so much like his dad! Everyone says he's the spitting image. But in reality, there's no biological connection there."

"Yeah, you're right," Elysia conceded.

"So, don't worry. First off, Elijah's dad might not be that wild man. And even if he is, Elliot is smart enough to keep things under wraps. Everything will be fine."

Elysia let out a sigh of relief, "To make sure everything goes smoothly tomorrow, I'm not going to come home tonight. I've already told the little ones, so they're all set. I'm counting on you to look after them. Thank you!"

Blossom waved off her thanks, "No need for formalities between us. I'm on standby too. My phone's glued to my hand, ready for your call. Just ring me if you need anything!"

"Will do." Elysia couldn't help but hug Blossom tightly. Having such a supportive friend was truly a blessing.

...

The day proceeded as usual, but the evening brought Tarquin home.

It was their first confrontation since their argument, and the tension was palpable. With Elijah already asleep, it left them alone in the living room - one sulking on the couch, the other pouting at the dining table. Neither wanted to break the silence or acknowledge the other.

But with the family ceremony looming the next day, they had to communicate.

After a long silence, Tarquin finally spoke up, "The ceremony is tomorrow."

"I don't need a reminder!" Elysia snapped back, her tone harsh.

Tarquin shot her a displeased look, trying to keep his cool, "Have you and Elijah got everything prepared?"

Glancing towards Elijah's bedroom, Elysia replied tersely, "Yes."

"And Elijah's got his speech down?" Tarquin continued.

"...Yes."

"If everything goes smoothly tomorrow, you'll get your money," he added.

At the mention of money, Elysia's mood seemed to improve slightly, reminding him, "50 thousand dollars!"

Using her own words against her, Tarquin retorted, "I don't need a reminder!"

Elysia glared at him, annoyed, "Tomorrow, while you guys are up there paying respects, I'll be waiting in the car."

"You don't have to come."

"I want to!" Elysia insisted, her voice tinged with urgency.

Seeing her worked up, Tarquin tried to reassure her, "If you've got everything sorted with Elijah, there shouldn't be any issues."

"But... but it's better to be safe than sorry," Elysia argued, her fears getting the better of her.

"Afraid of the Bradford family, are you?" Tarquin raised an eyebrow.

Of course, she was afraid. But there were things she feared more.

Elysia tried to deflect, "Your family isn't the high and mighty Bradfords. What's there to be scared of?"

Little did she know that the man before her was indeed her husband, Tarquin, the CEO of the Bradford Corporation, and one of the wealthiest men in Jindale City. She had always assumed their shared surname was just a coincidence.

Tarquin didn't pursue the topic further, simply reminding her, "We leave at 6 AM. You'll sleep in the study tonight."

With that, he retreated to his own room, leaving Elysia to pout in his direction. She didn't head straight to the study, though. Instead, she made her way to Elijah's room.

The little guy was fast asleep, bathed in the soft, warm glow of the nightlight. His peaceful expression and the gentle rise and fall of his chest were a stark contrast to his usual stern demeanor - so much like his father's.

Sitting by his bedside, Elysia couldn't resist caressing his cheek. She had longed for such a moment, and now, with Elijah asleep, she finally had her chance.

His skin was soft and smooth, melting Elysia's heart. She loved him dearly.

Even though they shared no blood relation, it did nothing to diminish her love for him.

Elijah was so adorable, so sensible, and yet so pitiful.

How could his mother have abandoned him?

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 256[691 words]

Did she never miss Elijah after all these years?

With a soft sigh, Elysia gently kissed the little one's forehead, tucked him in, turned off the bedside lamp, and tiptoed out of the room.

The bathroom light was on, the sound of running water filling the air.

Tarquin was taking a shower.

Elysia pursed her lips, letting out a cold huff before heading to the study.

The study was prepared with a long sofa, blankets, and pillows, all set up during the day.

Elysia closed the door behind her and locked it from the inside.

This was her second visit to the study. The first time was to negotiate with him, to ask him to announce that Elijah was doing better.

But she was so preoccupied with the negotiation that she hadn't really taken in the room.

Now, taking a proper look, she had to admit, the study didn't quite fit his usual style. Instead of reflecting his icy personality, it exuded a warm atmosphere.

The bookshelves were filled with classics, many of which seemed to cater to female readers.

Elysia couldn't help but wonder, was this study previously owned by Elijah's mother?

She randomly picked a book from the shelf and, sure enough, found a woman's handwriting inside.

The script was elegant and neat, clearly that of a learned woman.

Flipping through a few more books, she noticed the handwriting belonged to the same person.

This further confirmed her guess that the study once belonged to a woman.

"I wish to be acquainted with you, for life without end. Mountains may lack edges, rivers dry up. Thunder in winter, snow in summer. Only when heaven and earth unite, dare I part from you."

Elysia couldn't help but read aloud the poem she found on a bookmark, signed by a woman named Elizabeth.

Elizabeth? Was Elijah's mother named Elizabeth?

"Elizabeth... Why does that name sound so familiar? I swear I've heard it before," Elysia murmured to herself.

She felt she had heard the name before but couldn't recall where.

The sound of running water in the bathroom suddenly stopped, followed by the rustling sounds of drying off and getting dressed.

Elysia snapped back to reality, quickly putting the book down and slipping under the covers.

The sound insulation in the old apartment was poor; she could hear the bathroom door open and Tarquin returning to his room, just next door to the study.

Once he was back in his room, she could hear everything even clearer.

The sounds of him pulling back the covers, getting into bed, and even flipping through a book.

Surprisingly, he liked to read too.

Was it because of this woman named Elizabeth that he took up the habit?

Half an hour later, Elysia heard him close the book, turn off the lamp, and settle down for the night.

But Elysia found herself wide awake, her mind racing.

Elijah was about the same age as Evan and Elliot, meaning Elijah's mother and she would have been pregnant around the same time.

Did Elijah's mother leave him because she found out about his 'one-night stand'? She must have thought he had cheated, leading her to leave him. The room, filled with books and notes, and the elegant handwriting, all pointed to Elizabeth being a woman of talent and depth. A woman of her intellect and depth of feeling would surely not tolerate infidelity.

If Elizabeth had left because of what happened at the airport, did that make her the 'other woman'?

And all the suffering Elijah had endured over the years, was it all because of her?

The more Elysia thought about it, the more restless she became.

Feeling wronged, angry, and even a bit guilty, she couldn't stand not knowing the truth.

Was this man the same one from that night all those years ago? If he wasn't, she wouldn't have to worry about the family ceremony the next day or torment herself with these thoughts anymore.

How could she find out for sure?

Tonight might just be her chance.

With determination, Elysia bit her lip and carefully sat up, ready to confront the situation head on.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 257[600 words]

She slipped from under the covers and tiptoed out of the study, making her way to Tarquin's bedroom door.

Elysia was never the brightest bulb in the box, not given to overthinking. Her approach was straightforward and blunt.

To prove if he was the wild man from years ago? Easy!

Just sneak a peek at his shoulder.

Back when he had bullied her, she had bitten his shoulder fiercely. If he was indeed that wild man, there would be a significant bite mark!

Luckily, Tarquin hadn't locked his door.

Elysia sneaked into the room, crouching and tiptoeing to the bed.

Tarquin was lying on his back, hands crossed over his chest, in a neat sleeping position. His eyes were tightly closed, breathing even, deep in sleep.

Seeing his face, Elysia paused... He was incredibly handsome in his sleep!

It wasn't an exaggeration; he was the most handsome man she had ever seen!

Cool and detached when awake, strikingly handsome in sleep.

Phrases like 'broad-shouldered and bright-eyed' or 'chiseled features' didn't do him justice.

He was like a favored creation, not shaped by hand but meticulously painted by some divine artist.

Elliot, Evan, and Elijah, although resembling him, were just toddlers over five, still cherubic.

None had his masculinity or his rugged charm!

With his looks, he could have blown up the acting scene!

Too bad his personality was... less than pleasant. A terrible temper paired with a venomous tongue!

Such a waste!

Elysia bit her lip in regret over his wasted good looks while waving her hand in front of his face to see if he was truly asleep. Confirming he was, she tried to check for the bite mark on his shoulder, but he was wearing a shirt, a crew-neck pajama top. No choice, she reached out to tug at his neckline, trying to pull the shirt down to reveal his shoulder.

But before she could see the bite mark, her wrist was caught in a tight grip!

Startled, she lost her balance, tumbling right into his shoulder!

"Oof—" Her forehead hit his collarbone, a sharp pain shooting through her.

Just as Elysia tried to get up, Tarquin pulled her onto the bed, quickly flipping her beneath him.

Without giving her a chance to resist, he swiftly captured her hands above her head and pinned her legs, trapping her beneath him.

"Click "

He turned on the bedside lamp.

The light flooded the room, blinding Elysia for a moment.

As her eyes snapped open, meeting Tarquin's gaze, her heart began to race.

Tarquin was glaring down at her, his expression dark and grim. His grip was strong, devoid of any tenderness, as if he was dealing with an adversary. His tone was chillingly cold,

"What are you trying to do?"

Elysia, intimidated by his menacing look, feared for her life.

"I... I... I can explain!"

Tarquin stared down at her, waiting for an explanation.

But Elysia was at a loss for words. How could she explain this?

Telling the truth was out of the question.

He hadn't even noticed Elliot and Evan yet. Confessing now would be foolish, wouldn't it?

What should she say?

Losing patience, Tarquin demanded, "Trying to seduce me?"

"Huh?" Elysia quickly shook her head, "No, not at all!"

"Trying to kill me?"

Elysia's eyes widened in shock!

Such a grave accusation could scare her to death!

"Don't be ridiculous, I can't even kill a chicken, let alone you. I didn't want to kill you."

"Then why sneak into my room in the dead of night, staring at me for ages and tugging at my shirt?"

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 258[643 words]

"Huh? You've been up this whole time?"

Tarquin's brows furrowed deeply. "Tell me the truth!"

Elysia's heart pounded wildly. When she had entered and seen him with his eyes closed, breathing steadily, she thought he was deep in sleep. Little did she know, he was faking it!

He's so cunning!

"I wasn't trying to seduce you! And I definitely wasn't planning to kill you. I was... oh, right, I was sleepwalking! Yeah, that's it, sleepwalking."

The grip on her wrist tightened suddenly, clearly showing he didn't believe a word she said.

"Ouch—" Elysia felt like her wrist was about to snap. She was a mix of pain, fear, and a touch of feeling wronged, her nostrils flared, and she was on the verge of tears.

"I really wasn't trying to... could you, maybe, lighten up? It hurts."

Seeing her eyes well up, Tarquin's expression softened slightly, and the grip loosened but didn't let go entirely, his voice cold as he warned, "Then give me a reasonable explanation, or don't blame me for being ruthless. Killing you would be no different to me than stepping on an ant." Elysia's breathing hitched, fear evident in her eyes. She looked at Tarquin, and he stared back.

In his gaze, she truly saw a willingness to kill!

Elysia started to breathe heavily, "I... I just wanted to see your..."

"See what?"

The words 'shoulders' danced on her tongue, but she dared not speak them. In the end, she gritted her teeth, "I thought you were well-built, so I wanted to strip off your shirt to have a look!"

Such a scandalous admission!

Tarquin stared at her for a long moment before finally speaking, "...That's not seduction, that's harassment!"

"I..." Elysia wanted to argue but gave up after making eye contact.

Letting him think she wanted to harass him was still better than him thinking she wanted him dead, right?

Tarquin released her and got out of bed. He lit a cigarette, leaning against the window, his gaze lingering on her.

Elysia, drenched in cold sweat, quickly jumped out of bed, eyeing him cautiously.

Tarquin took a few drags of his cigarette, eyeing her coldly, his tone calm, "I've had my fair share of women trying to get a peek. What they think is their business, but those who act on it don't end up well."

Elysia wanted to explain but didn't know how without making things worse.

She couldn't reveal her true intentions, so any attempt at explanation would only add to the confusion.

Tarquin took another drag, his handsome face showing indifference.

"Because of Elijah, I can tolerate and even indulge you. If you're honest with me, I'll respect you. I made it clear before. I have someone in my heart, and you shouldn't set your sights on me. Apart from Elijah's mother, there's no one else for me. You're pretty and have a nice figure. Although not the brightest, that's not a flaw. If you want a man, there are plenty out there who would be interested in you. If you're looking for a quality man, I can introduce you to someone. But if you're aiming for me, you're barking up the wrong tree."

Elysia turned red with embarrassment, "I'm not looking for a man! And I definitely wasn't looking for you!"

"Not looking for me? So sneaking into my room tonight was just for a bit of fun?"

"I didn't! I..."

"I don't care what you want. But people need to maintain their dignity. Even if you don't care about your own reputation, think about the children's future. If you don't want them to be the talk of the town, you need to learn to respect yourself and understand the concept of shame."

His tone wasn't harsh, but every word struck deep!

Wasn't he basically saying she had no self-respect, no sense of shame?

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 259[664 words]

Before Elysia could even utter a word, he went on, "I don't know if it's because of that kiss last time that got you mixed up, so let's clear the air tonight. You know the reason behind that sudden kiss as much as I do. We're adults, and it's normal to have certain... urges. Sometimes things get out of hand, but that doesn't mean I have feelings for you.

Let me say this one last time tonight - my heart belongs to Elijah's mom and no one else. Alive or not, she's the only one I'll ever want. I'll wait for her, till Elijah's all grown up, till my dying day. No one else comes close, including you! No matter what you do, it's never going to happen between us. So whatever motive you had approaching me, drop it tonight. I'm not a saint, and I hate repeating myself. It's best you don't mess with me."

Elysia was livid, every word he said felt like a slap in the face.

If she had harbored any such intentions, she might have accepted the blame.

But she didn't!

All she wanted was to see if he was that wild man from years ago!

Swallowing her pride like a bitter pill, Elysia's eyes reddened as she retorted, "Rest assured, I don't fancy you that much! My interest in you is purely because of Elijah! Hope you keep your word and never spare me another glance!"

With those words, she turned and left.

Back in the study, she buried herself under the covers, tears streaming down her face.

Furious at his harsh words, and at herself for being foolish!

She had marched into his room, all guns blazing, only to leave with her tail between her legs.

His accusations of her being shameless and disrespectful hurt more than if he had physically slapped her.

Sobbing intermittently, her cries seeped through the walls to Tarquin.

Frowning and in a foul mood, he was frustrated. He had wanted to maintain a cordial relationship with her for Elijah's sake, but she had to go and make it difficult!

Elysia eventually cried herself to sleep, while Tarquin spent the night smoking, restless and sleepless.

...

The next day, before dawn, there was noise in the living room.

Lowell had returned with Elijah!

Tarquin, having been informed, stood in the living room, a mix of surprise and concern on his face as he looked at Elijah, "When did you go out?" Elliot instinctively clenched his fists, a complex expression crossing his face at the sight of Tarquin.

This was his dad!

The dad he and Evan shared!

Every time his dad was mentioned before, it was with regret and indifference.

But learning that Tarquin was his dad and still alive, he felt a mix of anticipation and anger.

Anticipation because no child doesn't yearn for their father's presence, no matter how tough they act. Anger because of the pain he caused Elysia, and for not providing a warm home for them.

Before coming, he thought he would keep his cool upon seeing Tarquin. He was Elliot, not Evan, always composed. He planned to observe Tarquin with a cold detachment.

But now, faced with his concerned gaze, Elliot felt an unexpected sting in his nose. It felt like the weight of the world was on his shoulders.

Tarquin had already crouched down, placing his hands on Elliot's shoulders, "Elijah, tell me what happened. Why did you run off alone at night?" Clearly, Tarquin mistook him for Elijah.

Elliot furrowed his brows, turning his gaze away, "I don't want to talk to you!"

"Elijah....."

Just as Tarquin began to speak, Elysia, hearing the commotion, rushed out. She locked eyes with Elliot for just a second and immediately knew something was off.

This was Elliot, not Elijah!

Elliot's affection for her was loud and tender, unlike Elijah's.

Elysia's heart skipped a beat, and she rushed over, scooping Elliot into her arms and darting into Elijah's room!

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 260[674 words]

"Click "

The door locked behind them.

Tarquin furrowed his brow and took a glance but didn't pursue, turning to Lowell instead, "What's going on?"

His expression was all business. "Something really odd happened today! Just a while ago, our guys found this weird dude in the backyard. He was standing outside, grinning like a madman at Elijah's window and was about to hurl a dead cat through it. Our guys rushed to check it out, but this fellow, slippery as an eel, vanished before anyone could blink. And before we could catch him, Elijah suddenly showed up downstairs. Worried sick, I immediately brought him up here. Elijah said he didn't want to talk to you, probably spooked by that dead cat ordeal. When that man bolted, he left the cat behind, and when we found Elijah, he was just staring at that dead cat with a scowl."

Tarquin's brows knitted tighter as Lowell finished explaining. He strode into the study and powered up his computer.

...

Inside Elijah's room.

Elysia was nearly scared to death by Elliot.

"Why didn't you call me before coming? And you didn't even say you'd be here now!"

Elliot calmed himself first, whispering reassurances to Elysia, "I thought it'd be trickier by daylight, so I came earlier. Don't worry, Mom, he didn't even notice anything. We didn't give ourselves away."

Elysia was still unnerved.

What had been bothering her these past few days was Elliot taking Elijah's place!

Elliot's plan was to appear as Elijah in front of everyone. Being a healthy kid, once he showed up, everyone would naturally believe Elijah was truly well.

After all, he and Elijah looked identical; no one could tell them apart.

But Elysia feared Tarquin would see through Elliot's scheme!

She was always on edge, hiding this big secret, fearing he would discover Elliot and Evan. And before he could, she had inadvertently brought Elliot right before him.

So, as good as the plan was, it was too risky for her liking!

If it hadn't been for Elijah, she wouldn't have dared to do it!

"Mom, you need to stay calm. The more nervous you are, the easier it'll be for him to spot something's off," Elliot reminded her.

"Right, you're correct! I can't afford to be nervous!" Elysia took several deep breaths to steady her nerves.

"Is this Elijah?"

Elijah was still asleep.

Elysia nodded, "Yeah, I gave him some medicine, so he'll sleep well today."

"He really does look just like me and Evan."

"Indeed."

Elliot gazed at Elijah for a few more seconds. "There won't be any mishaps today; we just have to put Elijah through this for one day."

"A little hardship now is for a better future. Elijah would understand," Elysia said, her eyes full of sympathy as she glanced at Elijah, then steeling herself to move him under the bed.

Elliot and Elijah couldn't be seen together, so to avoid Tarquin getting suspicious, they had no choice but to hide Elijah.

The hiding spot under the bed in a cab was pre-selected by Elysia.

It was lined with blankets and had air holes to ensure Elijah could comfortably sleep there all day without issue.

After stowing Elijah away and straightening the bed sheet, which perfectly concealed the cab, it was as if nothing was out of place. They had considered moving Elijah out, but after much thought, decided it was safer and more convenient to keep him hidden in the room. Just as they finished tidying up, Tarquin pushed the door open and entered.

He didn't speak but just stared intently at Elliot, his expression unreadable, leaving one to wonder what was on his mind.

Elliot slightly narrowed his eyes in response, mirroring the complexity in his expression.

Only Elysia felt her heart leap to her throat! She held her breath, her fingernails digging into the palm of her hand, forcing herself to remain composed, not to lose it!

But then, Tarquin's next words nearly made her crumble.

"I just checked the security cameras, you're..."