

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 261[595 words]

"Seriously? Of course, he is!"

Elysia was a mess of nerves, her words slicing through the air like a knife as she interrupted.

With a fierce protective instinct, she positioned Elliot behind her, eyes blazing with a clear message for Tarquin: 'Dare to mess with my kid, and you're messing with me!'

Tarquin furrowed his brows, his gaze a mix of annoyance and confusion as he looked at her.

Elliot didn't like the way Tarquin was glaring at his mom. He tugged quietly at Elysia's shirt, signaling her to keep her cool for a moment.

Stepping forward, Elliot faced Tarquin with a slight frown.

This was their second encounter, and Elliot was better at controlling his emotions now.

His eyes mirrored his dissatisfaction, but confusion was there too.

He had made sure to wreck the surveillance himself, so what could Tarquin have possibly seen?

Uncertain, Elliot didn't jump into conclusions but simply asked, "What's up?"

Tarquin shifted his focus back to Elliot.

"The security cams at home went kaput all of a sudden. Just checking, did you head downstairs on your own just now?"

After moving in, they had beefed up their security with cameras everywhere.

But when Tarquin checked the footage earlier, he found their system had been sabotaged, knocking out the surveillance throughout the area.

So, he couldn't track down the mysterious man or figure out when or why Elijah had gone downstairs.

Nor could he tell if Elijah had gone down on his own, been taken, or perhaps led down.

That's why he rushed over to ask Elijah.

Elysia, caught off guard by his question, relaxed a bit, then silently fumed.

Man, can't he speak nicely for once?

She had thought he knew Elliot wasn't Elijah because of the surveillance footage!

She had been scared to death!

Elliot, hearing this, unclenched his fists and replied coldly, "I don't remember how I got downstairs."

"You don't?" Tarquin was puzzled.

"No."

"How come?"

"Why should I know?"

"You were awake all this while, so you should remember how you got downstairs."

"Just because I was awake doesn't mean I keep tabs on everything. Like, you were awake too, right? How come you don't know when my mom left, or why she left?"

Elysia was shocked.

Tarquin frowned.

Nobody expected Elliot to burst out like that.

After a moment of silence, Elliot added coldly, "I don't remember. Maybe I was sleepwalking."

Tarquin stared at him for a few seconds. "You've never slept walked before."

"That was then. Past doesn't define the present."

"But why would you start sleepwalking all of a sudden?"

"Don't know. I said maybe, were you even listening?"

"I..."

"If you've got nothing else, just leave. I don't want to see you."

Tarquin's frustration was palpable, mixed with surprise and sadness, "Elijah, what's gotten into you tonight?"

"I'm fine."

"Fine?"

"What, you got a problem with me being fine?"

"No, it's just... Elijah..."

"Out!" Elliot's frown deepened, clearly annoyed.

Tarquin couldn't believe his eyes.

Elysia felt that Elliot was being a bit harsh and gently tugged at his shirt.

Elliot declared, "Some guts you've got, showing a cold shoulder to a woman, yet can't even figure out what you want to know. Pathetic." Tarquin was taken aback, his son's disdain hitting him hard. No father wants to be seen as anything less than a hero in their child's eyes.

Tarquin felt wounded to his core. He stared at Elliot for a few seconds before turning to leave. As the door closed behind him, he asked Lowell, "Did that man get to Elijah?"

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"Not sure. What's wrong with Elijah," Lowell asked, scratching his head.

"He's giving me the evil eye, and his tone's all off."

"Really?"

It seemed like Elijah was harboring some resentment towards Tarquin. His words were laced with sarcasm, and his glances were challenging.

This resentment was new, only cropping up tonight.

Elijah, though usually reserved and not much of a talker, clearly adored and respected him before. He could feel it.

But tonight...

Elijah was contradicting him at every turn, even going as far as to disrespect him with a disdainful look!

Something was off tonight, and when things are off, there's usually trouble brewing!

Tarquin couldn't for the life of him connect the dots that the person he was dealing with wasn't actually Elijah. He suspected Elijah's odd behavior had something to do with that mysterious stranger!

Could the guy have said something to Elijah?

Stirring up trouble, perhaps?

No, he had to find that guy and get to the bottom of this!

"Expand the search area! That man couldn't have just appeared out of thin air, there must be some clue! And check on that dead cat again!" "Right away!"

...

Inside Elijah's room.

Elliot was holding Elysia's hand, trying to comfort her, "Mom, don't be afraid of him. If he glares at you, just glare back. If he's mean, you be mean back. And if he dares to insult you, you give it right back!"

Elysia asked timidly, "Elliot, do you not like him?"

She could tell from Elliot's tone that he wasn't fond of Tarquin.

Elliot was always gentle, even to strangers he was nothing but polite. But his words to Tarquin earlier were harsh.

Considering it was their first meeting, and Elliot didn't really know him, his attitude seemed uncalled for.

"Not really a fan."

"Why not?"

"Because he glared at you. Of course, I won't like anyone who does that! Plus, he's not a good dad, nor a good husband, which makes him not a good man."

Elysia's heart raced.

"Why do you feel that way? How do you know he's not a good dad or husband?"

"If he was a good dad, Elijah wouldn't be acting this way, and Elijah's mom wouldn't have left him."

Elliot only knew Tarquin as his dad but was unaware of the exact relationship between himself and Elijah. He thought Elijah was his half-brother from another mother.

So, the 'Elijah's mom' he was referring to wasn't Elysia.

Elysia swallowed hard and cautiously asked, "Elliot, aren't you curious why you, Evan, and Elijah all look alike?"

Elliot looked at his mom with a complex expression, pondering his response. He knew Tarquin was his father, but was unsure if his mom wanted him to know.

"Why?" Elliot pretended to be clueless.

Elysia hurriedly explained, "There's no real reason. It's just a resemblance, like how Daniel looks like his dad. It doesn't mean anything."

Elliot didn't say anything. Whatever his mom says goes.

His own mom, his own queen!

"Yeah, I get it. Everyone has a nose and two eyes. Resemblances are normal."

Elysia let out a sigh of relief, "Exactly."

Ah, my silly mom. Elliot sighed internally, but then smiled.

"It's almost dawn. We should get going. Mom, you should get ready. You've got to trust me, I'm pretty awesome. Today, I won't give us away!"

"Okay!" Elliot had interacted with Tarquin a couple of times without a hitch, and Elysia was gradually becoming less anxious than before.

She smiled and affectionately pinched Elliot's cheek, "Elliot is the best! I'll go make something to eat. Elijah usually gets up at 6:30 to get ready, but today's a special case. Just wait for me to call you."

"Alright."

Elliot nodded obediently, but as soon as Elysia left, his expression changed!

He rushed to the window to peer outside.

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Before dawn could even hint at its arrival, the streetlights outside were a dim glow against the pervasive darkness.

Elliot scanned the area, but the enigmatic figure he was certain had crossed paths with him and Evan before was nowhere in sight.

He was convinced it was the same masked figure they had encountered before. Downstairs, hidden in the shadows, the figure had let out a chilling, sinister laugh directed at him. It was clear the man knew Elliot would come.

For days, Elliot had been on the hunt for clues about him but to no avail. Yet, today, the man had appeared near Elijah's home, of all places.

Elliot was here to prepare the speech for the ceremony.

Anticipating security in the area, Elliot had crafted a plan to avoid drawing attention from Tarquin's security team. His efforts seemed unnecessary, though, as the masked figure had inadvertently distracted the guards, almost as if aiding Elliot in his secretive endeavor.

What was the masked figure's game? Did he know about Elliot's plan to impersonate Elijah in tomorrow's ceremony? Why encourage him and Evan towards violence while simultaneously aiding his stealthy approach to Tarquin?

And then, there was the matter of the dead cat.

It was exactly as Evan had described - a cat brutally killed by having its neck twisted. This meant the local "psycho" Evan mentioned was none other than the masked figure, who seemed to know not only where they lived but also personal details about them. Who was he, and what were his intentions with them?

Lost in thought, Elliot closed the curtains and sat down at Elijah's desk, booting up the computer. He intended to use Elijah's computer for research but was met with a password prompt and additional security measures. Despite being 'Baby ET's Support One' - a hacker of considerable renown he couldn't crack Elijah's security.

This was telling.

Meanwhile, in the living room, Tarquin eagerly questioned Elysia as she emerged from Elijah's room.

"Did Elijah say anything?"

Elysia played dumb, "Nope."

"Nothing at all?"

"Uh-huh."

"Lowell said he saw a dead cat downstairs tonight. Didn't he mention it to you?"

"A dead cat? No, he didn't!"

Elliot really hadn't brought it up.

Tarquin furrowed his brow, "Did he tell you why he suddenly went downstairs?"

"You asked him, didn't you? He doesn't even know himself."

"Why would he suddenly go downstairs?"

"I have no idea!"

"Can't you just get into his head and figure it out?"

Elysia tied her apron and turned around, sounding irritated, "You want answers, ask Elijah yourself! Don't ask me, I don't know anything!" Then, she remembered Elliot was still in the room and quickly added, "And don't bother him either, he's resting! He's not in the mood to talk!" Tarquin immediately asked, "Why isn't he in the mood?"

"I don't know!"

"You didn't notice he was in a bad mood?"

"I did, but he's only in a bad mood when he sees you. When he sees me, he's fine. Who knows what you did to upset him. Instead of interrogating me here, why don't you reflect on your own behavior?"

Tarquin paused.

Just then, Lowell came back in, looking serious, "There's a call from Gideon. They said they've been trying to reach you, but you're not answering."

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He handed his phone to Tarquin.

Tarquin frowned, holding the phone as he walked to the study.

Gideon asked, "Is something up? You've been dodging calls."

"Nothing!"

"Alright then, just wanted to confirm the details about the memorial ceremony today. Elijah is all good, right?"

Tarquin's brow furrowed deeper, irritation bubbling inside him. He wasn't even sure if Elijah was okay! His mind wasn't on the memorial ceremony at all!

"If you don't say anything, I'll take it as a yes. The ceremony is important, and you and Elijah are the present and future heads of the family. Don't be late."

"Got it."

Tarquin's response was cold as he hung up the call. He tossed the phone to Lowell and lit up a cigarette.

Lowell pocketed the phone, cautiously trying to advise him, "Today's focus should be on Elijah and the memorial service. Let's put the mystery man on hold for now. I'll inform you immediately if there's any news about him. We've already escalated the surveillance issue."

Tarquin took a harsh drag on his cigarette, "Did you see that cat?"

"Yeah, someone twisted its neck, killed it. Must be a real piece of work."

Tarquin's expression darkened even more. A ruthless person showing up outside their house and fixating on Elijah's window with a creepy grin wasn't a good sign!

"Find him, no matter what it takes!"

"I know. Also, Ms. Thorne mentioned she wants to join us at the ceremony. If she goes, wouldn't she find out who you are?"

Tarquin's voice was cold, "She won't figure it out."

"Huh? Why?"

"Too dumb! Doesn't have the brains for it!"

True to Tarquin's words, Elysia indeed followed them to the Bradford family's private cemetery without piecing together Tarquin's identity.

All the way there, her heart was in her throat, worrying that Tarquin might discover Elliot.

But upon reaching the cemetery, her focus shifted.

At the entrance of the cemetery stood a tall stone monument inscribed with "The Bradford Family."

Elysia sat in the car, looking through the window at the monument, she couldn't help but remark, "Old money, huh? Hey, did your family have some famous ancestor or something?"

Tarquin pressed his lips together, not bothering to answer, annoyed by her lack of insight.

In the whole of Jindale City, besides the wealthy Bradford family, who else could afford such a grand private cemetery on this prime land?

And that big 'Bradford' inscription - in Jindale City, how many families with wealth and power like the Bradfords could there be?

Anyone with a bit of sense could figure it out, except for her, apparently.

How she managed to get by with that kind of intellect was a mystery!

Lowell, driving, couldn't help but grimace. Just as Tarquin said, Elysia hadn't suspected a thing about his identity!

Such an obvious clue... Her intellect was indeed worrisome.

Elliot glanced at his clueless mom, unsure how to continue the conversation.

The car continued up the mountain, passing rare and valuable trees.

Rare meant scarce, and scarce meant precious.

A single precious tree could cost anywhere from thousands to millions, and with the mountain full of such rare species, the total value was unimaginable.

Reaching the mid-mountain, a large parking area was constructed as the road ended there. Cars had to be parked here to proceed further on foot. And the Bradford family's cemetery was up the mountain.

The Bradford family had all arrived, filling the parking area with a fleet of luxury cars.

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Tarquin hadn't instructed Lowell to park the car just anywhere; instead, he had him navigate a narrow path, take a turn, and halt at a secluded cliff side.

Nestled on the edge of the cliff was an ancient-looking oak, beneath which sat a stone table flanked by several stone benches, the area awash with a vibrant array of flowers and greenery.

The view was breathtaking, capturing Elysia's attention instantly. As soon as the car stopped, she couldn't help but push open the door and step out. The mixed scent of flowers and earth hit her, refreshing and invigorating.

A waterfall cascaded down the cliff in the distance, with a lawn and pebbles underfoot, surrounded by blooms in full glory – a true beauty.

Winter's chill usually meant only the hardiest of flowers, like winter jasmine, could bloom.

So, the sight of these flowers swaying in the breeze was a delightful surprise to Elysia.

"How come these flowers are blooming in this season? Are they specially cultivated? Is someone taking care of them? What place is this?"

Lowell was about to respond, but a glance at Tarquin, who remained silent, made him hold back. Instead, he simply said, "This place has the perfect ambiance for a break, Ms. Thorne. You can wait for us here."

Prepared on the stone table was a grill, sizzling with treats like sweet potatoes, oranges, corn, peanuts, and chestnuts.

At the center was a small coffee pot, its aroma filling the air, while the stone benches were adorned with cushy blankets.

It was evident that everything had been prepared in advance, especially for her.

Elysia was touched, "Thank you, Lowell. This is so thoughtful."

Lowell, taken aback, quickly corrected her, "You're thanking the wrong person. He arranged all of this. I'm just a simpleton, not nearly as thoughtful as he is."

This revelation took Elysia by surprise, and she glanced at Tarquin.

Tarquin, however, just gave her a stern look.

Elysia was baffled. "Him, thoughtful?"

Even Elliot found it unexpected. He hadn't imagined Tarquin would go to the lengths of preparing a grill and snacks for his mom.

He softened his gaze towards Tarquin, the resistance fading a bit.

A gust of wind stirred, causing the wind chimes to tinkle melodiously.

Elliot's gaze shifted to Tarquin, suspicion narrowing his eyes.

"Elijah, let's go," called Tarquin.

Elysia, her attention now on them, asked, "Are you leaving?"

Tarquin remained silent, but Elliot nodded reassuringly at her, "I'll be back soon."

Elysia's brow furrowed with worry.

Elliot leaned in, whispering something that made her eyes sparkle.

"Really?"

He nodded earnestly, "Just wait for me here."

"Okay!"

Elysia nodded eagerly, like an obedient child.

Elliot flashed her a discreet smile before following Tarquin away. He wasn't worried about her safety; Tarquin had made sure to station guards all around.

Today, Tarquin had not only prepared a cozy setup for Elysia but also ensured her protection, which made Elliot regard him more favorably.

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As they trekked up the hill, Tarquin, in a bid to break the silence, initiated a conversation.

"What did you tell her?"

"It's a secret."

Tarquin pursed his lips, deciding not to pry further and switched topics, "Elijah, were you mad at Dad this morning?"

Elliot knew exactly what he was referring to and admitted openly, "You were rude to her, and I didn't like it."

"Elysia? Because I glared at her?"

"Yeah, I won't allow you to glare at her, to give her the cold shoulder! She's nice to me, so of course, I'll be nice to her too. She looks out for me, so I'll protect her. Besides, women are often at a disadvantage, and she's both innocent and kind. She deserves to be treated well."

Tarquin fell silent for a few seconds before asking, "What if she has feelings for Dad?"

"Huh? She has feelings for you?"

"She likes me."

Elliot laughed outright, finding the idea ridiculous.

Mom clearly doesn't like him. If it weren't for Elijah, she'd stay as far away from him as possible!

That's not liking. That's outright disdain.

"Where did you get the crazy idea that she likes you?"

Tarquin's face was a picture of mixed emotions, especially since Elliot's laughter was so apparent. He hadn't seen his son laugh in a long time, and even though it was at his expense, he couldn't help but ponder.

"I'm just saying 'what if.'"

"Then you'd be the luckiest man."

"Huh?"

"If she ever looked your way, that'd be your good fortune," Elliot repeated.

Tarquin's expression grew even more complex. Elijah's world revolved around his mom, showing resistance towards other women, fearing they might take her place. He had thought Elijah would be opposed to the idea of Elysia liking him, but...

"You like her that much?" Tarquin couldn't help but ask.

Elliot faced him, his expression earnest, "Very much!"

Tarquin was taken aback, "So much that you'd be okay if she took your mom's place, if I was with her?"

Elliot frowned slightly. Tarquin was Elysia's one and only, yet she wasn't his only woman.

Being with him would be a loss for her. But if Elysia truly liked him, wanted to be with him, Elliot wouldn't object. Nothing mattered more than her happiness.

"If she really wants to be with you, then treat her well. If you make her unhappy, I'll be the first to stand against you!"

Tarquin was utterly astonished!

In just a short span of half a month, Elijah had grown to like her this much?

Was he bewitched by Elysia?

Elliot seized the moment to drive his point home, "Bullying a woman is not what a gentleman does. Like her or not, the least you can do is show some respect. You're a father, and you should set an example for me."

With that, Elliot marched ahead, leaving Tarquin a step behind, staring at his retreating figure in a daze.

Dressed in a long coat, just as he always was, his posture as straight as ever.

But today's Elijah was different from before. He seemed less hostile, more mature and stable.

And he spoke more than usual, his words reflecting the demeanor of a young gentleman-courteous yet firm.

This was a side of Elijah Tarquin had never seen before! He didn't seem like a child troubled by dark thoughts or psychological issues but rather like a young heir raised in a prestigious family.

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Tarquin was still puzzled when both his and Elliot's phones rang simultaneously.

Elliot glanced at his smartwatch, his brows knitting together as his expression shifted rapidly through a series of emotions.

He composed himself and turned to Tarquin, saying, "I need to hit the restroom."

With that, he hurried off toward the public bathrooms ahead.

Tarquin, not thinking much of it, stayed behind to answer the call, "What's up?"

"Tarquin, we've got a lead on that mysterious guy!"

Tarquin's face darkened.

After a while, still on the call, Gideon and his entourage found their way over.

A tumultuous crowd approached, some crying, some causing a ruckus, each face more expressive than the last!

Allegra, in particular, was livid, shouting at Tarquin, "You have gone too far this time! If you don't give me an explanation here and now, in front of our ancestors, I swear I'll haunt you, making your nights a living hell!"

Gideon, face set in a grim line and supported by his confidant, was visibly seething with anger.

Tarquin frowned, ending the call to address them, "What's this about?"

"Don't play dumb with me! Like father, like son, huh? Your family's always been trouble!"

Tarquin's expression turned icy as he fixed his gaze on Allegra.

The intensity of his stare made everyone shudder, and Allegra, intimidated, started sobbing uncontrollably, "Oh, the injustice, it's simply unbearable..." Tarquin ignored their drama and signaled Lowell with a glance before turning to Gideon, "What happened?"

Gideon, propped up by his aide, was furious, "This is your son's doing! And where's Elijah?"

At the mention of Elijah, Tarquin's demeanor turned even colder, "What about Elijah?"

"As if you don't know! Tarquin, today of all days, on our family reunion, you dare... This is outrageous! See for yourself!"

Gideon's confidant shakily handed over a tablet.

He quickly retreated to Gideon's side as Tarquin took it, as if fearing retaliation.

As Tarquin played the video, his expression shifted dramatically...

There was 'Elijah,' dressed in a black tracksuit, kicking Allegra across the room in front of everyone!

Allegra cursed out loud, and 'Elijah,' balling his fists, charged at her, using a large leaf to scoop up some animal droppings and shove them into her mouth.

Not satisfied, he then proceeded to beat her up.

When Verity tried to intervene, 'Elijah' flung her aside, causing her to fall and break her two front teeth on a rock.

"Enough is enough! Elijah, you rogue, stop it this instant!" Gideon, leaning on his cane, shouted.

'Elijah' rushed over, snatched the cane Gideon had used for decades, and snapped it in two right before his eyes!

Gideon gasped for air, almost fainting from anger, "Teach this boy a lesson!"

Hearing this, the Bradfords, seeing an opportunity, charged at 'Elijah'.

But before they could reach him, Elijah declared boldly, "I came here for Allegra; this has nothing to do with you! Mess with me, and I'll dig up your ancestors' graves, and parade their remains around!"

Everyone was shocked and speechless until Verity suddenly cried out, "Call Tarquin! Get Tarquin here! Let him see the result of his parenting! His son's about to disgrace our ancestors!"

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'Elijah' stopped in his tracks when he heard the warning. He darted over to Allegra, throwing a few warnings her way before bolting down the hill like a little monkey, disappearing from sight in a matter of seconds.

Tarquin's expression was a mix of emotions after watching the video.

Just moments ago, Elijah was with him, dressed in a suit and a long, black trench coat. When did he have time to change?

Lowell rushed over, whispering urgently, "Tarquin, I got the scoop. Elijah caused a ruckus at the cemetery, threw punches, and even tried to dig up the Bradford family's ancestral grave. Even Gideon's cane didn't survive; Elijah snapped it in half! Our guys said Elijah was a sight to behold!"

Tarquin was speechless. He tossed the tablet to Lowell and strode towards the restroom.

He had seen Elijah enter the restroom with his own eyes but never saw him leave. How did he suddenly end up causing chaos at the cemetery? Meanwhile, Evan had just finished explaining the situation to Elliot.

Bitting his lip nervously, he looked up at Elliot, "Did I mess up? Did I ruin your and Mom's plan? I just... I just couldn't stand that old hag Allegra! The thought of her hiring someone to run mom over. I just lost it."

Evan was aware of Elliot taking Elijah's place in today's ancestral ritual.

Despite Elliot's clear instructions to stay out of it, Evan couldn't help himself. He was worried about Elliot and his mom being bullied by the Bradfords, especially since his mom wasn't a fighter and Elliot was only moderately skilled. He snuck out to protect them.

Before Elliot and his mom arrived, Evan had already made his way to the hills.

He never expected to lose control at the sight of Allegra. Hearing her mock Elijah and his mom was the last straw for him.

When he learned about Allegra's plan to run his mom over, Evan was ready to confront her, but Elliot stopped him, insisting on handling it himself. Evan held back until he saw Allegra today, unable to restrain himself any longer.

Now, Evan knew he had done something wrong, "Elliot..."

Elliot, with a stern look, replied, "It was wrong to come here without letting us know first. But, I understand where you're coming from. Just remember, don't act on your own again."

"Yeah, but... what do we do now? About your and mom's plan..."

"It's okay, I have a Plan B."

"Plan B?"

"Yes, I never go into battle unprepared."

Elliot didn't elaborate on Plan B, simply instructing, "Take off your jacket. If you can't avoid Tarquin and the Bradford's bodyguards, just stay put in the restroom until it's safe to leave. If you think you can leave without being noticed, go ahead. Don't worry about Mom and me."

"Got it! Also, they had an ambush set up today, wanting to kill Elijah!"

Elliot's brow furrowed, "What do you mean?"

As Evan stripped off his jacket, he quickly relayed his findings to Elliot.

With a grim expression, Elliot said, "Such heartless villains. Lucky for us, Elijah didn't show. Here, lend me White; I have a plan." "Sure, White, listen to Elliot," Evan said.

White, his pet snake, flicked its tongue out at Evan in acknowledgment before slithering up Elliot's sleeve.

"Elijah." Tarquin suddenly appeared.

Elliot and Evan, shocked, turned to face him, eyes wide with surprise.

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Evan's quick reflexes saved the day once again. Before Tarquin could even catch a glimpse of who was there, Evan had already darted into the little cubicle.

Tarquin, puzzled, turned to Elliot, "Who were you talking to just now?"

Elliot, clutching his small hands, let his deep eyes roll around before calming down and countering, "Did you come here to read me the riot act, Dad?" He knew very well that Evan's antics would not have gone unnoticed by Tarquin.

Before Tarquin could reply, Elliot went on, "What's done is done. I'll stand by my actions and won't drag you into this. If the Bradfords have a bone to pick, they can come at me."

Tarquin looked at him with a complex expression, "I'm not here to reprimand you. Are you hurt?"

Elliot was skeptical. Evan had caused such a mess, and Tarquin wasn't angry?

It seemed he had a soft spot for Elijah.

Elliot answered, "I'm fine."

"That's good to hear. When did you sneak out of the bathroom? I was outside the whole time and didn't see you leave."

"I knew you wouldn't let me go, so I changed into different clothes and jumped out the window."

Tarquin glanced at the open window and then at the clothes on the floor, "Why the need to change clothes?"

Elliot replied smoothly, "I'm going to pay respects to Grandpa later. Didn't want to dirty these clothes. It wouldn't be respectful."

Tarquin pondered for a moment before asking, "When did you prepare the clothes?"

"Today."

"Where did you get it? You don't like that style. You never wear it."

Elliot coolly answered, "Elysia gave it to me. She thought my clothes were too mature and not lively enough. She wanted me to try a new style. I had this set under my coat, so you didn't notice."

"Weren't you wearing a suit under your coat?"

"I had the sportswear on over the suit."

Tarquin was momentarily speechless, feeling something was off but couldn't pinpoint what exactly. He decided to believe Elliot's explanation for now and asked, "Was the fight with Allegra over Elysia?"

"Yeah. Elysia almost got hit because of me. I had to stand up for her! Otherwise, the Bradfords might think Elysia's an easy target without anyone to back her up."

Tarquin was puzzled, "Who told you Allegra was behind the attempt on Elysia? Did Elysia complain to you?"

"No, she didn't say anything. I accidentally overheard you talking to Mr. Lowell about it."

Tarquin sighed, "I've already settled things with Allegra."

"You did what you had to; I have my own score to settle. Elysia was wronged and frightened because of me, and I needed to make it right." Tarquin fell silent again, studying Elliot. The boy seemed different from the reserved and aloof Elijah he knew.

Now, reflecting on it, he seemed distinct from the one who just made a scene at the cemetery - he was mature and composed, whereas the fighter was more impulsive and lively.

These differing personalities seemed like three separate individuals, yet Tarquin knew he only had one son, and there was no mistaking that they were the same person in appearance.

Confused, Tarquin softened his tone, "You don't need to worry about the Bradfords or bother with them. I'll handle this situation. Let's go pay respects to your grandpa."

Elliot couldn't help but give Tarquin another look.

Not a single word of criticism and such gentleness in his voice... it was just like a tender father.

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Hesitating for just a moment, Elliot placed his tiny hand in Tarquin's hand, and found himself being led out of the restroom. Before leaving, Elliot shot Evan a secretive glance, signaling for him to stay cool; everything was under control.

Outside the restroom.

The Bradfords immediately bristled at the sight of Elliot, their faces contorted with anger as they glared at him.

But Elliot was unfazed, quietly standing by Tarquin's side, his gaze filled with disdain.

Allegra bellowed, "Tarquin! You owe everyone an explanation today!"

Tarquin's expression grew icy. Just as he was about to speak, Elliot stepped forward to ask, "What explanation do you want?"

"You publicly assaulted your elders, humiliated them, and made a huge scene in front of our ancestors. This is disrespectful, irreverent, and outright rebellious! You're inviting retribution!"

Elliot replied coldly, "And what about all of you wishing me dead? What does that make you? You show no respect for your elders, so how should I respect, honor, or revere you? Regardless of

whether you love me or not, I am still a life. You all have murder in your hearts; who really deserves retribution?"

"You..."

Elliot's gaze turned icy as he stared down Allegra, "You should be thankful Elysia wasn't killed by you, or you'd truly be finished. Even the lives of your entire family wouldn't be enough to compensate!"

His intense look genuinely frightened Allegra and shocked everyone else.

Although Elliot's anger differed slightly from Tarquin's, his presence was equally formidable. Every look, every word from him was enough to send shivers down their spines!

Elliot then scanned the rest of the Bradfords, "Since you're all here, I might as well speak my mind so I don't have to tell each of you individually. Elysia is under my protection, my care. If any of you dare to harm her again, just try me!"

The crowd was left breathless, their breaths caught at his aura. How could a 5-year-old child be this imposing?

And wasn't he supposed to be sick? His eloquence didn't seem to indicate any illness!

After a tense silence, Gideon finally spoke up, "Elijah! Are you really going against your own family for an outsider?" "Outsider?" Elliot narrowed his eyes at Gideon, "I want to ask, what defines an outsider? And what defines family?" Gideon, fuming, replied, "Family is bonded by blood! Outsiders are those without blood ties!"

"Hah! That's your belief, not mine! In my eyes, those who treat me well are my family. And those who wish for my death... are my enemies!" The Bradfords were stunned into silence.

Gideon, brows furrowed, looked at Elliot in shock. "You consider us your enemies?"

"You should ask yourselves, what am I to you?"

"You're just a kid! How can you be so scheming? You're the sole heir to the Bradfords. Everyone in the family hopes for your well-being, nobody wishes for your death!"

"Really? Dad wouldn't wish for my death, I believe that. And you, I can believe you don't wish for it either. But ask them, who among them doesn't wish for me to die sooner rather than later?"

The room fell into an uneasy silence.

Gideon's expression softened slightly, relieved by Elliot's faith in him, but then Elliot added, "And your lack of ill will is not out of love for me. You're just using me. After all, if I were to die, the

Bradfords would be thrown into chaos. Everyone would want to be the heir, and you wouldn't be able to control anyone."

Gideon's face went pale as his deepest motives were laid bare for all to see.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 271[651 words]

Elliot tossed out a line with a weight that would sink any ship, "Other families hope for their descendants to thrive, but you? You're just hoping for your own good. Having you in the Bradford family is like hitting the jackpot in reverse. A triple dose of bad luck."

"You... you... you... Insolent child! Scoundrel! Cough cough cough..."

Gideon was so worked up that he started coughing violently, and then he collapsed.

Thankfully, his confidant was quick on his feet and caught him before he hit the ground.

He then immediately performed CPR and managed to shove several aspirin down Gideon's throat, which somehow brought him back from the brink. Gideon, weak and wheezing, glared at Elijah, gasping for air.

Allegra took this chance to stir the pot, "Dad! Now do you see? So much for 'the only heir'! He's nothing! He doesn't deserve to be the Bradford family's heir! Scratch his name from the will! The Bradford family would rather end with us than have someone like him as an heir!"

"Shut your mouth!" Gideon roared.

Even though Elijah was disrespectful and had exposed his old secrets, making him furious, he was speaking the truth.

Without Elijah, the Bradford family would instantly dive into a civil war for power, with every branch of the family pushing their own candidate for the throne!

At that point, Gideon would have no chance of coming out on top!

No one would listen to him! His standing and influence within the Bradford family would plummet even further!

Right now, they were all playing nice with him because they were wary of Tarquin and wanted him to take the lead in the fight against Tarquin, so they were all ears.

But if Elijah were gone, it would be total chaos!

"Bad as he may be, he's the only bloodline the Bradford family has! It's been a tradition for generations that only one son can be the heir. Everyone else, don't even think about it!"

"Dad, you're not thinking clearly!"

"Indeed, he has really gotten old. Can't he see the times have changed? Why hang onto this nonsense? Our kids also carry the Bradford blood." The Bradfords were all talking over each other, making a racket, while Elliot stood off to the side, his eyes narrowing slightly.

A tradition of passing down with only one son through generations?

Then what were he and Evan?

Was Tarquin not their real father?

Elliot looked puzzled, turning to Tarquin.

Tarquin, observing the commotion with a cold gaze, felt Elliot's eyes on him and turned to meet his son's gaze.

They looked at each other, their expressions and thoughts worlds apart.

Elliot was questioning whether Tarquin was his biological father.

Tarquin, on the other hand, wondered if his son, Elijah, was having an identity crisis?

Elijah's words and behavior today were totally out of character for him!

Even if Elysia had convinced him to participate in the family's memorial ceremony, the most he would do is go through the motions. He certainly wouldn't be verbally sparring with the Bradford family. He would just be angry and throw a tantrum!

But Elijah's words today? Not even a well-adjusted child could have pulled that off!

After a moment of contemplation, Tarquin sighed, "Let's go pay our respects to your grandpa first."

"Okay."

Elliot didn't argue and followed Tarquin to the family gravestone to light a candle in honor of Killian Bradford.

Just as they finished, something stirred in Elliot's sleeve. He quickly glanced down to find White coiling tightly around his arm, its head peeking out and its forked tongue tasting the air, eyes locked on a distant hilltop.

Following its gaze, Elliot spotted a lone wolf.

And then another, and another...

Soon, a whole pack of wolves appeared in his sight.

The alpha wolf locked eyes with Elliot, spotting its target, and led the charge.

Elliot's brow furrowed. It was on.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 272[554 words]

He quickly whispered something to White, who instantly left his side and disappeared within moments.

White, being small and nimble, went unnoticed as everyone's attention was fixated on the wolves, a rare sight for the Bradfords.

Panic ensued among the Bradfords,

"Where did all these wolves come from?!"

"Isn't the forest supposed to be monitored? How did wild wolves get here?"

"Run, run! These wolves look mad; they're going to attack!"

Lowell quickly chimed in, "Tarquin, get Elijah to safety! These wolves mean trouble!"

Tarquin's brow furrowed as he scooped up Elliot, saying, "Get Elysia back to the car, alert everyone, and don't let the wolves get to Elysia!"

"Right away!" Lowell hurriedly called the bodyguards.

Elliot gave Tarquin a meaningful look. Despite his cold demeanor towards his mom, the fact that he thought of her safety in danger earned him a point in Elliot's book.

"What's with these wolves? They seem to be targeting us specifically!" Lowell noticed after making the call.

The rest of the Bradfords also caught on, then halted their escape to speculate,

"Look, they're heading straight for Elijah and Tarquin!"

"Oh my, what's going on? Are those wolves trying to tear and eat them?"

Allegra screamed as if out of her mind, "Karma, it's all karma! They've done so much wrong, and now the heaven has sent these wolves to rip them apart! Here comes the karma, ha ha!"

Silence followed Allegra's manic laughter and shouting.

Her voice was loud enough for Elliot and Tarquin to hear.

Elliot pressed his lips together in frustration. These were trained animals specifically targeting Elijah, obviously sent by someone with a vendetta. He'd seen on TV how animals could be used to harm or kill. People trained them with pictures of their targets. But he'd never heard of such a thing happening in real life until Evan mentioned it today, leaving him both shocked and angry.

Elijah was just a 5-year-old boy. What had he done to deserve such cruelty?

Angered, Elliot had borrowed Evan's White, intending to teach those responsible a lesson.

White was no ordinary snake. It could take on a pack of wolves, or even lions, without breaking a sweat.

Suddenly, the leading wolf fell on the ground. The rest of the pack skidded to a halt, eyeing their fallen leader warily.

Elliot's eyes narrowed, knowing White had struck.

Moments later, the leaderless wolves changed direction, charging at the Bradfords.

Lowell was baffled, "What's happening now?! They've changed direction!"

Tarquin, with furrowed brows, glanced over before quickly carrying Elliot towards Elysia.

The Bradfords panicked, scattering in all directions,

"Weren't they after Elijah and Tarquin? Why are they coming for us now?!"

"They're here, they're coming, oh my... Ah... Oh..."

Soon, cries of terror and the sounds of struggle emanated among the Bradfords.

Elliot, held by Tarquin, watched ominously.

His mom always said, "Do good deeds daily, and you'll be rewarded manifold. Build virtue, and happiness will follow."

She also said, "Evil deeds will lead to one's downfall. Those who sow injustice will reap calamity."

And she said more, "Good people will find peace for eternity, while evildoers will eventually face divine retribution."

No matter the reason, the Bradfords were utterly evil to harm a child with such cruelty. They deserved to be punished, to suffer the consequences of their actions.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 273[609 words]

Elysia had barely settled into the car when she noticed the eerie silence, punctuated by distant howls that seemed almost ghostly. She couldn't quite make out the sounds from where she was sitting, given the car's excellent soundproofing and the distance from the source.

Her worry was just beginning to spike when Tarquin came sprinting back to the car, Elliot clutched in his arms, both of their faces painted with panic. "What's going on? Did something happen? Is the family reunion over?" Elysia asked, her voice laced with concern.

Tarquin, too out of breath to explain, and Lowell, in too much of a rush, didn't offer any explanations as they piled into the car and sped off.

Elliot, not wanting to worry his mom further, chimed in, "Some wolves showed up out of nowhere in the woods. It was really scary, so we ran back." Elysia was perplexed. "But isn't this property private? How could there be wolves?"

Elliot, with a hint of mischief, nudged Tarquin, "I'm not sure. Maybe someone let them in on purpose. You should've seen them; those wolves were on a mission. They were likely trained or something."

Tarquin's face darkened at the suggestion. Lowell's brow furrowed in concern.

Elysia, missing the subtext, clung to her fear, "On a mission? Did they attack anyone?"

"The bad guys."

Elysia let out a sigh of relief, "As long as they didn't hurt you guys."

The implication was clear; they were not the intended targets.

Catching her drift, Tarquin glanced at her before lowering his head to send a message to Axel to investigate the mysterious wolves at the cemetery. Once home, Elysia hurried Elliot to Elijah's room, locking the door behind them to check on Elijah's wellbeing.

Meanwhile, in the study, Tarquin was on the phone with Axel, "Turns out, those wolves were kept by a guy who exhibited illegal animal battles. We found loads of Elijah's pictures at his training ground, some even torn up. He was training those wolves to target Elijah."

Taking a drag from his cigarette, Tarquin's frustration was palpable, "What about the guy?"

"Still missing. Could be dead or alive."

"How did the wolves get into the cemetery?"

"They must've followed the scent. They appeared out of nowhere, and the security tried to chase them off and informed us. But the wolves were faster than the message. We had no warning before they were upon us."

"Keep searching. Dig up the earth if you have to, but find that trainer. And check his associations too!"

"Got it."

After hanging up, Tarquin stubbed out his cigarette and lit another, his frustration not abated.

Lowell, standing beside him, broke the silence, "This was a premeditated act. Someone knew Elijah would be at the family reunion and trained the wolves to attack him. If they had succeeded, it would've been written off as an accident of wild wolf attacking on a child. No one would suspect murder, and the culprit would walk free. Damn, what a scheme!"

Even the usually calm and courteous Lowell couldn't help but curse. "It's a good thing those wolves suddenly turned on the Bradfords instead. Can you imagine the outcome otherwise?"

Even if they could save Elijah's life at all costs, he might still get hurt. The thought of Elijah getting hurt or worse was too grim to consider.

"But it doesn't add up. They trained those wolves to target Elijah, so why did the wolves change their target? At first, they were indeed coming for Elijah, but after the leading wolf was dead, they shifted their focus. Why is that?"

Both Lowell and Tarquin were stumped, the mystery deepening.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 274[562 words]

The moment it happened, none of them paid any attention to Elliot's expressions or subtle movements.

Even if they had noticed, they couldn't imagine that it was White who had secretly turned the tide. After all, they all believed that White was just a somewhat rare little snake, nothing more out of the ordinary.

The room fell silent for a moment before Tarquin flicked his cigarette ash and said, "We need to look into this! Bring me the information on that mysterious person from last night."

Lowell immediately shifted his focus, pulling out his smartphone to find a photo and handed it over to Tarquin,

"This is the only photo we have, but he's wearing a mask so we can't see his face."

The photo was a blurry capture from a surveillance camera.

"Are you sure it's him?"

"Yeah! This was taken by the surveillance when he attacked Allegra."

Tarquin didn't respond.

"Tarquin, you've always suspected Ms. Thorne had someone backing her up, right? Do you think it could be him?"

Maybe he attacked Allegra just to revenge for Ms. Thorne. He was smirking at Elijah's window last night, so maybe he wasn't there for Elijah but Ms. Thorne?"

Tarquin's brows furrowed tighter, and he stayed silent for a while, then stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray and stood up from his study. He walked over to Elijah's door and knocked, "Elijah."

Elysia had just helped Elliot move Elijah from the box under the bed to the bed.

She whirled around towards the door, her heart pounding.

"What's up?"

"Open the door."

Elysia, panic-stricken, watched as Elliot tugged at her clothes, pointing first to the box and then under the bed, signaling he'd hide there first.

Nodding, Elysia quickly pushed the box under the bed after Elliot jumped in.

After straightening the bedspread and steadying her nerves, she went to open the door.

Tarquin saw her sweating and looking guilty as if she had just done something wrong, and frowned,

"What's going on?"

"What?"

"Up to no good again?"

Elysia, taken aback, retorted, "You're the one who's up to no good!"

Tarquin ignored her and stepped into the room. He saw Elijah with his eyes closed, looking like he'd been asleep for ages, and asked Elysia, "What's with Elijah?"

Elysia stuttered, "What do you mean, 'what's with him'? Are you blind? Can't you see he's sleeping?"

Tarquin frowned and glanced at her, "Why did he suddenly fall asleep?"

"Been out too long and got tired."

Tarquin touched his son's cheek, found his breathing even, and didn't think much of it. He then said to Elysia,

"Come out here, I need to ask you something."

After Tarquin left, Elysia watched his departing figure, gasping for air, and thumped her chest in relief.

Elliot was still under the bed. If Tarquin found out, it would be game over!

As if sensing something, Tarquin suddenly stopped, turned around, saw Elysia thumping her chest, and got puzzled.

"What are you panicking for?!"

Elysia shivered, her eyes widening, "Huh?"

Tarquin turned back, "Are you hiding something from me?!"

"I'm not!"

"Not?"

"Not!"

Elysia nodded vehemently, but her expression clearly gave her away.

Tarquin had reached the door but suddenly turned back.

Elysia, poor at lying, was terrified at his return and instinctively blocked the bed.

Tarquin, frowning, glanced under the bed, "Is there something under there?"

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 275[392 words]

Elysia's heart leapt to her throat, but she denied vigorously,

"Nothing! Absolutely nothing!"

But it was obvious there was!

Tarquin, with a look of disdain, pursed his lips, "Move aside."

He wasn't usually nosy about her business, but today, he was determined to see what she was up to.

Elysia was petrified, her chest heaving with heavy breaths. She pushed him away with all her might, "You...move!"

Tarquin staggered slightly, annoyed, "What the hell?!"

"Get out!"

"Hiding someone?!" It slipped out of Tarquin's mouth instinctively.

Given Elysia's current state, she resembled a wife sneaking someone into the house behind her husband's back. It was a casual question, but for Elysia, it hit too close to home and nearly made her faint!

Indeed, she had hidden Elliot under the bed!

The more nervous she got, the more curious Tarquin became. Ignoring her protests, he tried to move her aside to see what was really under the bed! But the moment his hand touched Elysia, she snapped like a cornered little puppy, tilting her head and biting down on his arm.

And she bit hard!

"Ouch! Elysia!"

Elysia gritted her teeth, "Don't touch me!"

"I don't mean to touch you! You—"

"What's going on here?" Elijah suddenly woke up, his brows furrowed as he looked at them.

Their attention shifted instantly.

Elysia turned around, "Oh, Elijah, you're awake. How are you feeling?"

But Elijah, still with a furrowed brow, asked her, "I just took a nap; why are you freaking out?"

Elysia was taken aback, "I...I'm not freaking out."

Elijah gave her a skeptical look, "I'm fine."

Then he turned his questioning gaze to Tarquin, as if to say: What did you do to her to scare her like this?

With a hint of sarcasm, Tarquin said, "You should ask her what she's been up to in your room, sneaking around for no good reason."

Hearing this, Elysia glared at Tarquin, stumbling over her words in an attempt to explain, "I...I was just dealing with some personal stuff in the room, stuff I didn't want him to know about, stuff I didn't want to talk about, but he kept asking."

Both Tarquin and Elijah went speechless.

The room went silent for a moment before Elijah coldly said, "If she doesn't want to talk about it, she doesn't have to. Everyone's entitled to their secrets."

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 276[646 words]

Elysia was absolutely touched. That little guy really had his head on straight!

Watching the little one throw off the quilts and climb down from bed, she quickly asked, "Elijah, where are you off to?"

"Going to the bathroom."

"Oh, alright then, you go ahead. I'll head to the kitchen and whip something up for you."

As she finished speaking, she remembered Elliot and turned to Tarquin, "You should head out too! Don't be nosy; it's really rude!" Tarquin rolled his eyes at her, convinced she wasn't capable of anything significant, so he didn't give it much thought and left.

His arrogance and underestimation cost him a golden opportunity to discover his own son!

Once everyone had left, Elysia took several deep breaths to calm down. That was a close call.

She didn't dare let Elliot come out just yet, especially since Elijah had woken up and could return at any moment.

She could only gently tap on the bed frame, signaling Elliot to hold on and stay hidden a little longer.

Elysia then left the room too, making sure to close the door behind her, fearing Tarquin might sneak back in. She put him to work, "Please help me to peel these garlicks; we need a lot. I'm making garlic shrimp for Elijah."

Tarquin was lounging on the couch, barely lifting an eyelid before glaring at her, "Me? Peel?"

"What's wrong with you peeling? Don't tell me you don't know how! And after that, please clean these green onions too."

Tarquin just stared.

Elysia, with a stern tone, said, "Do it yourself if you want to eat. If you don't want to work, you can skip lunch. And remember, you're not doing it for me; you're doing it for your son."

Tarquin frowned deeply but tossed his phone on the coffee table and started peeling the garlic.

Elysia, satisfied, tied on her apron to start preparing lunch.

After a while, Tarquin approached her with his phone, "Do you recognize this person?"

Elysia, busy washing vegetables, glanced over, "Nope."

"Look closely."

"How can I see clearly if he's wearing a mask? Is he cosplaying or something?"

"You've never seen him?"

"Never!"

"He was the one who attacked Allegra that day, and he was lurking around our building last night. I think he was looking for you."

Elysia paused, set the vegetables on the counter, wiped her hands on her apron, and took his phone to look closely at the photo.

After a moment, she shook her head, "I'm certain. I don't know him."

Tarquin observed her for a few seconds, seeming to believe she wasn't lying, and put away his phone, casually stating, "Bring your eldest son over this afternoon."

Elysia was startled, "Who?"

"Your eldest son."

"Why... why do you need my son?!"

"Just to ask him a few questions."

"About what?"

Tarquin continued peeling garlic, not looking up, "It was your eldest who found her and called the police that day. I want to know if he saw this man." Elysia's heart raced, "My son said he found Allegra by accident that day! He definitely has nothing to do with this man!"

"I didn't say they were connected. I just want to gather some information." "There's nothing to gather! I'm warning you, stay away from my son!" Tarquin looked up at her, "I'm just asking, why are you so defensive?"

"I'm not being defensive. I just don't want you messing with my son!"

"I'm not going to hurt him or something."

Elysia's lips quivered, "My son is timid. I don't want him to get scared by you!"

Tarquin countered, "Timid? Going to the park at night alone?"

"He wasn't alone; he was with his brother!"

"So they're both brave. You didn't mention it, but now you remind me, please bring your younger son too. I'd like to meet them both." Elysia was taken aback.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 277[618 words]

When she didn't turn him down, he wanted to see Elliot. But after she did, he even wanted to meet Evan! Elysia glared at him for a good while and ground her teeth,

"There's no way I'm letting you meet my kids!"

Tarquin couldn't fathom why, "Why not? Is there something wrong with your kids, or is it me?"

"It's you! There's something wrong with your whole family... Well, no, Elijah's fine. It's just you!"

Tarquin's face darkened, "Fine, if you won't bring them to me, I'll find them myself."

"You dare! I'll fight you tooth and nail!"

Tarquin just stared at her.

After a few seconds of locking eyes, Elysia softened, "You... give me the photo, and I'll take it back for them to see. I'll ask if they've seen this person for you!"

Although puzzled, Tarquin didn't insist further. After all, his goal wasn't really to meet her sons but to investigate this masked man.

"I'll send it to you later."

Elysia took a deep breath in relief.

Just as she calmed down, Elijah emerged from the bathroom. Instead of heading straight to his room, he wandered into the kitchen. He was hungry.

Elysia knew it, so she quickly wiped her hands and brought out the oatmeal she had prepared in advance,

"Elijah, have some oatmeal to tide you over. You shouldn't eat too much right after waking up. After the oatmeal, we'll have lunch." Elijah responded with a cool 'hmm' and sat down to eat.

Tarquin glanced at his son and, grabbing a clove of garlic, sat opposite him, "Scared?"

Elijah looked up, puzzled.

"Those wolves today were unexpected. I've had Lowell look into it. Don't worry."

He didn't want his son to know the truth and get upset.

After hearing this, Elijah was even more confused, "What wolves?"

'Clang!'

In the kitchen, the knife Elysia was holding dropped to the floor.

Both Tarquin and Elijah turned to look.

Tarquin stood up, "Did you hurt yourself?"

"No, I'm fine."

Elysia quickly picked up the knife and turned on the tap to wash it, visibly flustered.

Tarquin couldn't understand, "What's got you so jumpy?"

"I'm not jumpy! When have I ever been jumpy?!"

Elysia was irritable. Her mood had been like a roller coaster all day, all because of him!

She and Elliot were in the room when he suddenly barged in; after that, he asked if she was hiding someone under the bed, which startled her. Then he suddenly mentioned wanting to see Elliot and Evan, which startled her again.

Just when she thought she could relax, he started talking to Elijah about today's family ceremony!

Although Elijah had his issues, they didn't affect normal communication when he was well. But Elijah hadn't gone to the ceremony.

Wouldn't Tarquin realize the truth if he mentioned it?!

If he found out, wouldn't that lead him straight to Elliot?!

Elysia was both panicked and headachy.

Indeed, lying only leads to more lies. She hadn't thought through what would happen after the ceremony!

How could she avoid being found out?

How could she ensure Elijah didn't give anything away, making Tarquin believe Elijah was the one at the reunion? "Elysia, you've been acting strange today! 'Where there's smoke, there's fire'." Tarquin bluntly shared his thoughts.

Elysia snapped back to reality, realizing she might have overreacted, and muttered, "He's eating. Don't bring up those unhappy things; it'll ruin his appetite. And the smell of raw garlic is strong; keep that away from him. Also, don't mention today's reunion in front of Elijah."

"Why not?"

"It's not a happy topic. Constantly bringing it up will only affect his mood negatively. You'd better talk about something cheerful to lift his spirits."

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 278[568 words]

"Is there anything that could make him happy?"

Elysia choked on her words, recognizing the challenge in the question.

Lately, there hadn't been much to boost Elijah's spirits. Despite her long tenure as his caretaker, she hadn't once seen him crack a smile.

In an effort to divert Tarquin's attention, Elysia racked her brain and then said, "You could talk to him about White; he's quite taken with our Evan's White."

Tarquin didn't object, instead asking, "Where did White come from?"

"What?"

"I'd like to get one for Elijah."

"White wasn't bought!"

"Then where did it come from?"

Elysia, with eyes wide, bluffed, "...Found it by chance in the village."

Tarquin didn't suspect a thing, "Convince your son to sell White to Elijah. Name your price."

Elysia shot him a cold look, "Do you think everything has a price tag?! Money isn't everything, you..."

"Five hundred thousand."

Elysia blinked, "How much?"

"Five hundred thousand. Plus, I'll forgive the debt of the 5 million that you owe me, as long as your son gives White to Elijah."

A son's happiness is priceless, and he could see that Elijah genuinely liked White. It was rare for Elijah to take a liking to anything, and he was keen on making the purchase happen.

Elysia's eyes widened - that was 5 million plus five hundred thousand!

With such an offer, she found it hard to refuse!

But White was Evan's beloved. She couldn't possibly trade his happiness for money, could she? That would make her the worst kind of mother!

If only there was a way to find another snake just like White.

Elysia thought for a moment, "White is not for sale! However, I'll try my best to see if I can find a similar one."

"Fine, if you manage that, you'll get the deal."

After all, he had people search all major pet stores without any luck.

If Elysia could find one to make Elijah happy, he was willing to agree to her terms.

Elysia had always been a bit of a money-grubber, especially after life's setbacks. For her, financial security was the most important thing in the world.

People needed money for everything: food, shelter, kids. Life could go on without love, but not without money!

While cooking dinner, Elysia mulled over asking Evan to communicate with White, to see if White could somehow lead them to another of its kind.

Meanwhile, White had already returned. Following Elliot's scent, it squeezed through a window crack and scurried under the bed.

Elliot wasn't surprised to see it; he knew White's capabilities. Initially, when Mommy had tried to put White back into the wild several times, it always found its way back to Evan.

White was intelligent and highly perceptive.

Elliot gently patted its head, praising it for a job well done today.

White, ever the aloof one, didn't change its demeanor at Elliot's touch, showing affection only for Evan.

With a flick of its red tongue, White coolly slid into Elliot's sleeve.

Elliot smiled softly, texting Evan to ensure he had made it home safely.

Suddenly, a commotion burst outside, "Tarquin, he's shown up again!"

It was followed by Tarquin's voice, who was instructing Elysia and Elijah to stay at home, and then the sound of doors shutting.

"Ring" Elliot's smartwatch beeped with a new message: [Head home, I've led them away. Ha ha.]

Elliot frowned, puzzled, "The masked man?"

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 279[635 words]

Elliot was on high alert. He traced the location of the masked man and found out the distance between them was minimal, just a few dozen meters. This realization hit him like a cold shower.

He was in this building!

With a furrowed brow, Elliot paused for a moment to think, then quickly texted Elysia: [Mom, take Elijah to another room. I'm going to make a run for it now.]

Elysia's reply came instantaneously: [Are you sure? Isn't it too risky?]

[It's fine.] Elliot reassured her. [Elijah's dad's out; this is the perfect chance for me to slip away.]

Truth be told, Elliot could have left without the masked man's assistance. His urgency was driven by a desire to confront this enigmatic stranger. "Okay." Elysia agreed.

Soon, Elysia had coaxed Elijah into the study, allowing Elliot to stealthily emerge from under the bed, mask in place, and quietly leave the house. Clutching his sleeve where his trusty companion, White, was hidden, he whispered, "White, I'm off to meet someone shrouded in mystery. You're my guardian today. I'll treat you to something delicious when we get back."

White, a true foodie at heart, adored seafood like crab legs, shrimp, and salmon, and Elliot's promise seemed to excite it.

With a slight wriggle, White seemed to acknowledge Elliot's plan, which earned a gentle stroke from him.

Though not particularly skilled in combat, Elliot felt emboldened by White's presence. With its companion by his side, he dared to seek out the masked man.

Following the directions on his tracker, Elliot stopped in front of Room 201 on the second floor. The red dot on his screen overlapped with his location, indicating the masked man was right inside!

As Elliot was about to knock, the door creaked open, and a large hand pulled him inside before he could react!

White, sensing danger, sprang from Elliot's sleeve in an instant.

The masked man was quick, too. He stepped back instantly to avoid White's attack, stood there, and tilted his head with curiosity to observe the little defender.

The room, thick with dust and long abandoned, now housed the three of them.

The masked man, draped in a clean, wrinkle-free black robe and wearing a sinister mask, looked at White for a few moments before breaking into a creepy, chilling laugh.

White bared its teeth in defiance, ready to protect Elliot at all costs.

Despite the masked man's eerie appearance, the quality of his robe and the meticulous care of his hands suggested he was someone who valued his image, far removed from the unkempt figure Elliot had imagined.

That night in the park, Elliot didn't see him clearly because the surrounding was too dark. With his weird voice from the voice-changing device, Elliot actually thought he must be a kind of slatternly man.

Gathering his courage, Elliot demanded, "Who are you? What do you want with us?"

"Friends, maybe?" the masked man replied with a sinister giggle.

"Friends should meet face to face. If you want to be friends, take off the mask. Show us your real face." Elliot countered, eager to see the true identity of the mysterious figure.

The masked man proposed a chilling bargain, "Kill Tarquin, and I'll reveal my face. How about that?"

Elliot, trying to gauge the masked man's motives, asked, "Do you have a grudge against Tarquin?"

He wanted to pry into the man's real target. Was it them, or Tarquin?

Instead of answering, the masked man made a bizarre offer, "Or, how about you help me to be with your mom? I could be a new dad for you. Call me 'dad,' and I'll take care of Tarquin for you. How's that sound? Ha ha!"

Elliot was speechless. Was this person insane?

Talking about murder as casually as one might discuss the weather!

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The moment Elysia was mentioned, Elliot's face turned icy cold.

"I never planned on killing Tarquin, nor did I ever want you to play daddy. Of course, if there's something between you and Tarquin, that's none of my business. But, if you dare target my mom, I won't let you off the hook!"

"Little devil, huh? Little devil," he chuckled, a hint of irony in his voice.

Right after his words hung in the air, he seemed to sense something and suddenly leaped out of the window.

Elliot rushed to the window only to find no trace of the masked man. The man vanished without a trace, like a ghost.

The next moment, Lowell's voice came from out of the door, "This place looks deserted. Should we check it out? He might be hiding inside."

"Break in!"

Elliot's brow furrowed tighter as he quickly climbed out the window, too. He slid down the drainpipe to the ground floor and swiftly left Sunshine Community.

Leaving the place, Elliot was deeply troubled. He was wary of this masked man. Today's encounter had been fruitless, gleaned no information. It wasn't even clear if the man was targeting Tarquin or them.

If it was Tarquin he was after, it wasn't their problem to solve. But if they were the target, then they needed to figure out who he was and what he wanted!

And that man had mentioned his mom, too!

Glancing back in the direction of Sunshine Community, Elliot's expression was thoughtful. His hand reached into his pocket and found a crumpled piece of tissue.

He unfolded it and saw a strand of hair he had sneakily plucked from Tarquin's head earlier that day at the cemetery as they were making a quick escape.

Rumor had it that the Bradford family had a long lineage of direct descendants, which made Elliot question his and Tarquin's relationship. Planning to shed some light on this, he decided to get a paternity test.

Elliot plucked one of his own hairs, placed it alongside Tarquin's, and made a call to arrange for the test.

That evening, when Elysia returned, she held out a photo to Elliot and Evan, asking if they recognized the person in it.

It was the masked man!

Both lied, claiming ignorance.

Elysia immediately called Tarquin, "I've asked, and my sons haven't seen this man! Don't think about bothering my boys anymore, or you'll have me to deal with!"

With that, she hung up.

Tarquin was displeased. Like Elliot, he was deeply concerned about this masked man, a potential threat they both aimed to uncover.

But the man had slipped away again, and the community's recently repaired security cameras had been destroyed, leaving them with nothing after a whole afternoon of effort.

He was about to light a cigarette when Elijah suddenly approached him, "Did you touch my computer?"

"No, what's up?"

Elijah, puzzled, said nothing.

"It might have been Elysia, ask her."

Elijah didn't respond but turned back to his room, locking the door behind him.

Elysia, with her simple tech skills, couldn't possibly have cracked his password.

It was clear someone tech-savvy had been at it, even if they didn't succeed. And knowing Elysia, if she needed his computer, she would have asked; she wouldn't just tamper with his things.

So, if it wasn't Elysia, and not their dad...

A third person had been in his room!

Who?!

Elijah's expression darkened as he scanned his room, noticing nothing out of place until his eyes landed on the calendar.

On the fifth day of the month, a day traditionally reserved for honoring ancestors, his dad didn't call him to join.

Why?

He missed the ancestral honor day, and an unknown visitor had been in his room... Something was off!

With a furrowed brow, Elijah returned to the study and asked Tarquin coldly, "Why didn't we honor our ancestors today?"