

Hitched 351

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She kept shifting her gaze, marveling internally, "Holy moly, is this spectacle free of charge?" Then she'd sneak another glance, thinking, "Might as well look if it's all for free. It's like a bonus!" She even found herself thinking, "Go on, strip away. Then put it all back on just to strip again..."

He had a certain grace about him when undressing, making her think that watching him dress must be just as pleasing.

Her head was spinning like a carousel, one moment gazing out the window, the next fixated on Tarquin Bradford, her cheeks blazing red.

It wasn't until Tarquin unbuckled his belt, revealing navy boxer briefs, that she spun around and dashed outside.

Bursting into the bathroom, she stared at her blushing reflection, taking deep breaths!

What a night of tempting thoughts!

She slapped her cheeks gently, exhaling long breaths into the mirror, comforting herself with thoughts like,

"It's not weird; it's natural to appreciate beauty. It's not like I'm paying for it. He didn't notice, so no harm done."

Why stress about it if it's free?

Calm down, no need to panic!

"Just consider those extra glances as my tip for the night's efforts. He's not at a loss!"

Elysia Thorne managed to console herself. After all, for a frugal person, anything free felt like striking gold.

She washed her face and went on a hunt for something to sober up with, settling for making a cup of tea in lieu of finding any hangover cure. Unable to find an opened pack, she fetched a new one from the cupboard, brewing it fresh.

The aroma of the tea filled the air, tempting her.

She couldn't resist pouring herself a small cup to taste, immediately sighing, "This tea is divine!"

Inspecting the newly opened tea cake, she realized it was a well-aged Pu'erh, beautifully packaged but without a brand name, making it impossible to purchase.

With a hint of regret, Elysia sipped her small cup of tea before taking the rest back to Tarquin's bedroom, also grabbing a cup of yogurt from the fridge.

Alcohol can make one thirsty, and the tea would help, while the yogurt could cool down any heat.

Inside, the bedroom was dimly lit.

Tarquin had turned off the main lights, leaving only a bedside lamp on.

What surprised Elysia was that the clothes that should have been scattered on the floor were neatly hung on a rack!

There were suits, shirts, trousers, with ties and belts orderly placed in a box, and dirty socks tossed into a laundry basket.

Elysia was taken aback. Was this guy not drunk at all, or did he have a thing for cleanliness?

If you'd say he wasn't drunk, he could barely walk straight, stumbling around all evening!

But if you'd say he was drunk, how did he manage to tidy up his clothes?

Not just a neat freak, this guy must have OCD!

Even in drunkenness, he wouldn't allow his room to be messy!

That's actually a plus!

Elysia placed the tea on the nightstand, giving him a glance.

Tarquin lay on his back, a silk duvet covering up to his chest, arms exposed, hands crossed over.

He was sleeping so properly!

But his brows were furrowed, and his features tense, clearly still in discomfort.

Elysia thought about waking him for the yogurt, but before she could get close, he nearly knocked it out of her hands!

She stepped back, exclaiming, "What the heck, I brought you yogurt!"

"Get out!" His eyes remained closed, his voice harsh.

Get out?!

"Ungrateful much? Have it your way then! Suffer if you like!"

Elysia muttered, placing the yogurt on the nightstand, turning to leave him be.

"Cough, cough, ugh..." Tarquin suddenly coughed, looking like he might vomit.

Elysia quickly returned, placing a trash bin by the bed for him, instructing, "Here's the bin. If you need to throw up, use it. Mess the floor, and you'll have me to answer to!"

The last thing she needed was to clean up that mess!

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Tarquin, for once, was being obedient, hunched over the side of the bed, retching into the trash can. Elysia was there for him, one hand steadying him while the other gently patted his back through the blankets. But despite their efforts, Tarquin could only bring up a bit of bile. It seemed everything else had been emptied earlier in the bathroom, leaving him dry heaving, forcing out whatever was left, which was just stomach acid. Elysia frowned, concerned. To be vomiting bile, he must be feeling terrible. Her tone softened without her even realizing, "If nothing's coming up, don't force it. Here, rinse your mouth out." She reached for the glass of tea by the bedside to help him rinse his mouth. Tarquin, lacking the strength to hold the glass, sipped from it with her help before lying back down. Elysia grabbed a tissue, gently wiping the corners of his mouth. This time, he didn't swat her hand away...

After replacing the trash bag in the bathroom bin, Elysia came back to find Tarquin still looking miserable, which made her frown again. She didn't want to care, but he bore such a striking resemblance to Elliot, Evan, and Elijah! It was as if her brain automatically slotted her kids into his place. Even though she knew it was Tarquin suffering from his drunken state, not her children, it pained her just as if it were her own kids feeling unwell! After some hesitation, Elysia grabbed the yogurt from the nightstand, "I'm not doing this for you, I'm doing this because you're like one of my kids right now, and I'm the mom!" She convinced herself out loud, scooping up a spoonful of yogurt and holding it to Tarquin's mouth, "Here, eat!" Tarquin looked like he wanted to protest, but Elysia was ready, deftly avoiding any resistance and again offered the spoonful, "Eat!" Tarquin turned his face away, refusing, but Elysia got stern, "Eat, or you'll regret it! Be good!"

Be good...

Suddenly, Tarquin's eyes snapped open, and he looked at Elysia... Memories of his childhood, being by Elizabeth's side, her voice and her laughter flooded his mind. "Tarquin, be good, you can't be picky. Picky eaters don't grow up strong. Try this, mommy made it just for you, come on, be good." "Tarquin, why the pout? Are you upset? Don't keep it to yourself, talk to mommy, be good." "Tarquin, you have to eat your carrots and greens, they help you grow tall and keep you healthy. You can't pick them out; you have to eat them all, be good, let mommy feed you." These childhood memories surged like a tide, leaving Tarquin choked up. He just stared at Elysia, feeling an unexplainable mix of emotions, unable to speak. And it was probably for the best that he couldn't make a sound! Imagine if he accidentally called her 'mom'? That would scare Elysia away for sure!

Elysia, lacking the ability to read minds, couldn't fathom his stare or why he seemed so strange all of a sudden, giving off a vibe of vulnerability, like a stubborn little one in need of comfort. But he was far from a little one; he was more like a big, scary dog! Was it her threat that had shaken him? That didn't seem right; he was tougher than anyone! Elysia concluded that he must have become sensitive and fragile from the alcohol. She'd never guess that in treating Tarquin like a child, he was momentarily seeing her as a motherly figure! Seeing the fierce man turn into a pitiable figure softened Elysia's voice a bit, "Come on, eat up. The yogurt might not sober you up, but it'll make your stomach feel better. You'll feel less miserable after." As she spoke, Tarquin looked at her, and she looked back at him. When he obediently opened his mouth to eat, Elysia was genuinely surprised.

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Elysia scooped another spoonful of the creamy yogurt and brought it to Tarquin's lips, which he accepted and ate. It was a small act, but it greatly encouraged her. With determination, she continued, spoon after spoon, until the whole cup of yogurt had vanished into Tarquin's stomach.

It reminded her of taking care of Elliot, Evan, and Emmett, as she gently wiped the corners of his mouth with a napkin.

"All done. Now, lie back and get some rest," she said, standing up to leave. However, Tarquin suddenly grabbed her wrist. His movement was swift, yet gentle, showing no intention to hurt.

Elysia wasn't afraid; after all, this wasn't the first time he had grabbed her. She was merely curious.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

Tarquin furrowed his brows, struggling for a moment before managing to say, "Don't go."

Don't go? Elysia's eyes widened in surprise. She couldn't stay with him indefinitely.

She needed her sleep!

Besides, there were boundaries between men and women!

Elysia declined, "You... you need to get some sleep. I'll just be in the bathroom."

With that excuse, she made her escape, her heartbeat accelerating slightly.

The guy was quite handsome, and hearing him plead with her to stay was hard to resist!

Luckily, she wasn't Blossom Blythe, with her strong willpower!

After washing the yogurt cup in the kitchen and making a quick bathroom trip, Elysia returned to her study to sleep.

Tarquin lay awake, unable to see Elysia return before the effects of alcohol lulled him into a drowsy state, caught between dreams and memories...

In the midst of winter, surrounded by a blanket of snow.

Elizabeth, dressed in a white puffer jacket, squatted before him, affectionately pinching his cheek with a bright smile,

"Tarquin, be a good boy at preschool. Eat well, play nicely with your friends, and listen to your teacher, okay?"

Little him, dressed in a miniature suit, stood before Elizabeth, his expression and demeanor a spitting image of the current Elijah.

Unwilling to part, he wore an unhappy face,

"I don't want to go to preschool!"

"Oh? Why? Aren't you happy there?" she asked.

"It's childish!" he replied with a scowl, his tone haughty.

Elizabeth laughed, "You're at the age where preschool is a must. You can't just skip education."

He frowned deeper, insisting,

"You have to be the first to pick me up after school, not second."

"Alright, alright, I promise to be the first one there. Mommy always keeps her promises! Pinky promise!"

Elizabeth extended her pinky finger. He found the gesture childish but still complied, locking pinkies with her.

Only then did he reluctantly say goodbye to Elizabeth and followed the teacher to the classroom.

As he turned the corner, he heard Elizabeth call out from behind,

"Tarquin, mommy and daddy will always love you! Mwah!"

He turned back to see Elizabeth blowing him a kiss.

With the preschool entrance bustling with other teachers and parents, he felt exposed by the public declaration of love, his cheeks turning a bright red!

In his heart, he repeated 'I love you too' over and again, but was too shy to say it aloud.

Elizabeth, amused by his bashful reaction, laughed even more joyously.

She waved at him and then turned to walk towards the street.

Watching her disappearing figure, his eyes filled with adoration and favoritism.

To him, Elizabeth was like a Snow White, her long hair flowing as she moved through the crowd towards her Prince Charming!

Sensing his gaze, Elizabeth turned back, playfully squinting her eyes and blowing another kiss.

Suddenly, "Bang-"

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A massive truck appeared out of nowhere, launching Elizabeth into the air.

She was thrown over 30 feet away, landing hard on the ground.

Young Tarquin's face went through a rapid series of changes, "!!!"

"Elizabeth!" Kendrick yelled from the side of the road, panic-stricken as he ran towards her. By a cruel twist of fate, he was struck down by a sedan...

Tarquin, like a madman, broke free from his teacher's grasp, crying as he ran into the street.

Elizabeth lay in the cold snow, her white dress stained red with blood.

Young Tarquin knelt in the pool of blood, crying for the first time in his young life,

"Mommy, get up! Please, Mommy! Mom! Mom! Mom! Ah, ah, ah-"

Kendrick, barely hanging on, dragged his weakened body to Elizabeth's side.

He held her tightly in his arms,

"Elizabeth, don't be scared, I'm right here! I'm here! I'm here!"

Receiving no response from Elizabeth, Kendrick looked up to the sky and let out a heartbreaking scream, coughing up blood.

Young Tarquin was terrified, "Daddy! Daddy!"

Kendrick, still holding Elizabeth, didn't bother to wipe the blood from his lips. He reached out to touch Tarquin's face,

"Tarquin, Mommy and Daddy won't be able to watch you grow up. You must be strong, be good... You know our wish for you, to grow up happy and healthy. Don't worry about the feuds with the Bradfords... If they take you in, remember, never harbor ill will but always stay cautious. The Bradfords are like a den of lions, you must be careful... Don't worry about your mom, I'll always be with her, taking care of her. We... we all love you..."

With his last bit of strength, Kendrick gave his son these final words, dying in the snow alongside Elizabeth.

In one day, a family of three was reduced to one, leaving young Tarquin an orphan.

Tarquin hovered over the scene like a ghost, watching his deceased parents, watching his younger self wailing in despair... The pain, the tension, the breakdown!

He floated around them, unable to do anything!

This extreme sorrow and helplessness drove him mad!

He roared in anger, howling like a madman!

Next door, Elysia had already gone to bed, but the noise from Tarquin was too much, and she couldn't help but get up to check on him.

Tarquin lay in bed, his brow furrowed, hands gripping the sheets tightly, his body shaking violently!

Sweat beaded on his forehead, his lips trembling, as if he wanted to scream but couldn't make a sound.

The veins on his forehead were throbbing, clearly on the verge of exploding but unable to let it out.

Elysia thought he was having a nightmare!

She hurried over, frowning as she called out to him,

"Hey! Wake up! Wake up..."

After several calls with no response, she ran back to the bathroom to grab a wet towel to wipe his face, hoping to snap him out of it. His eyes suddenly snapped open!

Bloodshot, filled with red veins!

Elysia stepped back instinctively, startled.

Tarquin suddenly grabbed her and threw her onto the bed, pinning her down, his eyes blazing as he demanded, "Who did it?!"

Huh?!

Elysia was confused, "What do you mean, 'who did it'?"

Tarquin was furious, the veins on his forehead bulging, "Tell me! Who did it?! Who was it?!"

Elysia was terrified. Was he losing his mind?!

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She pushed him with all her might, trying to get him off her. "Get off, you jerk! I have no clue what you're babbling about. Snap out of it!" But it was as if Tarquin didn't hear a word she said, his voice on repeat, "Who did it? Who was it?"

Who had orchestrated his parents' demise? Who?!

Elysia looked at him, terrified. His emotions were too volatile, and if things kept going this way, something bad was bound to happen! She reached out to turn on the main light from the bedside table, hoping to bring him back to reality. Instead, she knocked over the lamp. With a 'click,' darkness suddenly enveloped the room.

Tarquin, on high alert, glanced around. The familiar darkness, the extreme tension, and the presence of that familiar woman beside him...

His mind suddenly drifted back to that day six years ago at the airport. It was his first day back in the country to take over the Bradford Group, and he was immediately targeted. Chased, ambushed, drugged...

He quickly pressed down on Elysia, covering her mouth, "Shh! Don't make a sound!"

Elysia, struggling to breathe, didn't care what he was saying. She resisted fiercely!

Tarquin pressed down harder, their bodies pressed tightly together. One hand secured her wrists above her head, while the other kept covering her mouth and nose. His legs pinned hers, immobilizing her!

"If you want to stay alive, keep quiet. Someone's out to get me, and they won't hesitate to take you down too."

Elysia's eyes widened in shock, her memories flashing back to six years ago. He had done the same thing, covered her mouth, and said the exact same words, without missing a beat!

Was he reliving that moment from six years ago?!

"You..."

"Stay still!"

Elysia was terrified, unable to keep still despite his command. She struggled, fought, trying to break free. Her resistance seemed to stoke a fire in Tarquin, his frustration evident. His lips involuntarily moved closer to her.

Elysia, reacting on instinct, turned her face away, and Tarquin's head found its way into the crook of her neck. He bit down on her, like a dog punishing its owner for disobedience.

"!" Elysia's breath hitched, her pupils dilated, "You... you..."

Tarquin, as if possessed, shifted from biting to sucking... his whole demeanor changed.

"Mmm..." Elysia couldn't help but make a sound.

Encouraged, Tarquin whispered sweet nothings into her ear, "Help me, and I swear I won't let you down! Trust me! I'll make you the happiest, most respected woman in the world!"

Elysia's eyes were filled with horror, as if history was repeating itself, "No, please, no..."

But her protests were drowned out by his kiss. He was as domineering as he had been back then! Prying open her lips to claim her thoroughly, ransacking her mouth and forcefully mingling his essence with hers.

No matter how much Elysia struggled, he kept a tight grip on her, kissing her passionately, unleashing his pent-up desires. Like a starving wolf in the dead of winter finally finding its prey, clamping down and refusing to let go.

That kiss nearly took Elysia's life! Due to her inability to breathe properly during the kiss, her brain started to lack oxygen, and her consciousness began to fade. Even though she hadn't drunk a drop, she couldn't tell if this was reality or a dream!

Because for the past six years, she had dreamt of him more than once. Every dream was like this moment, desperately entwined!

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He pinned her beneath him, forcing her legs apart with a determined strength.

A firm and heated presence pressed against her, jolting Elysia awake, instinctively tightening her legs.

His waist, lodged between her thighs!

Clamping down on his waist, her grip tightened, eliciting a muffled groan from Tarquin, seemingly in pleasure.

Releasing her lips, he began a trail of kisses and nibbles down her skin...

He lavished attention on her earlobe, her jawline, lingering on the pale elegance of her neck.

His hands were busy too, one pinning her wrist, the other fervently kneading her behind with a forceful grip!

Beneath him, she was as soft as melted butter, her breaths coming out in light pants and whimpers, like a cat in secret delight.

The harder his grip, the higher the pitch of her breaths climbed.

Tarquin reveled in these sounds, biting down on her neck, his hand venturing beneath her to lift her closer, pressing down to amplify her vocal response!

And amplify it did, as the heat at her core sparked a sharp cry from Elysia,

"Mmm..."

That sound nearly did Tarquin in!

He breathed heavily, losing all control, once again going for her clothes like a man possessed...

Elysia trembled uncontrollably, the tremors fierce!

Once again, she was engulfed in fear, anger, helplessness, and shame!

Back then, she was too weak to resist!

But now...

With a "click," the taste of blood burst between them.

Elysia bit down hard on his tongue, using all her strength!

Tarquin, pained, released her lips, staring at her in shock.

Elysia glared back, gasping for air!

They stared at each other in the dark room, the air filled with a mix of passion and an eerie tension.

Seconds later, Tarquin reached out to touch a tear on her cheek, his hand trembling, "You don't want this?"

"I don't!"

"Then we'll stop."

Abruptly, he got off her, sitting up and turning on the light.

The sudden brightness forced Elysia to close her eyes, then slowly open them... coming back to reality.

It wasn't a dream but harsh reality!

He, drunk and lost in the past, mistook her for someone from a night six years ago, and she, kissed into a stupor, thought it was all a dream!

Six years ago, she suffered under him, and now, nearly again...

Had she known, she wouldn't have left the study to check on him!

Biting her lip, Elysia quickly adjusted her clothes, about to leave when he suddenly lunged at her again!

Pinning her down, his emotions running wild,

"This isn't right! This isn't the airport; this is my mother's house! I'm not being chased or drugged, but why are you here?" Elysia froze.

Tarquin asked, "Am I dreaming?"

Elysia remained silent.

With a slap to his own face, he exclaimed in shock, "Ouch! I'm not dreaming!"

Elysia panicked, her breathing hastened.

Was he sobering up?

Was he going to recognize her?!

Suddenly-

He pressed down again, his lips sealing hers shut.

Caught off guard, Elysia whimpered, "Mmm, mmm..."

She struggled fiercely, beating against his back!

Tarquin, relentless, kissed her deeply, as domineeringly as before, sweeping through the sweetness within her mouth!

This kiss lasted for an intense ten minutes.

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Until Tarquin released her, leaving Elysia gasping for air, his excitement was palpable.

"It's you! It really is you! You're back! You finally came back! Oh! Ha! You came back, you finally decided to come back!!!"

His voice choked up with emotion, and his eyes reddened with unshed tears. That kiss was just to confirm his own feelings!

Elysia's heart pounded in her chest, a mix of nervousness and fear engulfing her. Had he truly recognized her? Did he realize she was the same person he had wronged at the airport six years ago? Would he make the connection to the child being his? Would he try to take the child from her?!

All the fears she had imagined over and over resurfaced, driving Elysia to the brink of madness! At that moment, she had no desire to accuse or condemn him, only a deep-seated worry filled her thoughts. She was terrified he would find out about the kids!

Lost on how to face him, she tried to push him away and run, but he wrapped his arms around her from behind, holding her tight.

"Please don't go, I'm begging you. Don't disappear again, don't hide from me. I was wrong, I truly realize my mistake now. If you're angry, take it out on me, just please don't avoid me, okay? You have no idea how hard I've searched for you these past six years, how worried I've been, how much I've missed you! Six years, and my longing for you nearly drove me insane!

I know you're angry. You can hit me, yell at me, even kill me if you want, just don't disappear from my life again! I truly realize my mistake! Please don't vanish..."

He buried his head in the crook of her neck like a child seeking comfort, his voice breaking. Warm tears trickled down Elysia's neck to her collarbone, and she touched them in shock. Was he crying? This man, tough as steel, could actually cry? Tears were present even in him...

"I'm the one at fault, you can punish me, but our children are innocent. Don't let your resentment towards me affect them. They don't deserve to grow up in a broken home; they need a complete family... The mistake is mine alone to bear. Punish me however you see fit, just please, don't leave. Stay, give me a chance to make amends, will you?"

Children, children, children! Every mention of the children tightened Elysia's nerves, sending her into a panic! All she could think about was running, getting away as fast as she could, not spending another second in Jindale City!

Suppressing her anxiety, Elysia struggled to turn around in his embrace to face him, lifting her hand towards his pressure point. With a forceful strike, Tarquin passed out instantly!

Elysia pushed him away, attempting to escape, but then the unexpected happened... Her nerves had been on edge all evening, and the physical exertion from her earlier encounter with Tarquin had drained her strength, leading to her collapse as her brain shut down.

The night suddenly fell silent again.

The next morning.

"Ring, ring, ring..."

The persistent ring of the cellphone jolted Elysia awake. The first thing she saw was a wall of flesh, a healthy, tanned chest that was irresistibly masculine. Elysia's eyes widened in shock!

Fearfully, she slowly looked up... A strong jawline, thin lips, a prominent nose, and thick, well-shaped eyebrows framed a face she recognized all too well!

Elysia's heart leaped into her throat as she stared at him, nearly screaming aloud! She had ended up sharing a bed with him, wrapped in his arms, sleeping side by side the entire night!

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Elysia's consciousness slowly trickled back, the events of the previous night replaying in her mind like a broken record. Her breathing quickened with panic...

He found out!

He mentioned the kids!

No, no, no, run, just run!

Just like last night, when she realized he had recognized her, her first instinct was to flee!

If you can't beat them, run. That had been her plan all along!

But now, she was wrapped tightly in Tarquin's arms, and any slight movement from her caused his eyebrows to twitch in response.

Elysia feared waking him would spell the end of her escape, so she first silenced her phone, then held her breath, lying quietly in his embrace for a while.

Once she was sure he had fallen back into a deep sleep, she carefully moved his arm from around her waist.

She tiptoed out of bed, and like a thief in the night, she escaped the bedroom, darting into the study.

Only when she had locked the door behind her did she dare to breathe heavily!

Slumping against the door, her body felt limp and powerless...

"Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding..."

Her phone rang again, this time it was Blossom calling.

Elysia knew Blossom must have woken up and panicked not finding her at home. She steadied her heart and answered, "Hello?"

Blossom sounded frantic,

"Elysia, where did you run off to? I woke up and couldn't find you anywhere."

"I... had a bit of an emergency last night, I'm at Elijah's place now."

"Oh? You went to Elijah's? Is something wrong with him?"

"He's fine. It's just... Blossom, could you take a day off today? Don't take the triplets to school. I need you to start packing, I'll be home soon." Blossom was confused, "Packing? Are you moving?"

"Yeah, get Elliot, Evan, and Emmett up and have them start packing too."

Blossom sounded worried, "Elysia, what happened?"

"It's a long story, I'll explain when I get back. I'm okay, don't worry. Just do as I say."

"

"

After hanging up, Elysia took another deep breath.

Thinking back to last night, she shivered with fear and didn't dare to waste any more time. She stood up, intending to change her clothes. "Mommy." Elijah's voice suddenly came from outside the door.

Elysia froze for a moment, then quickly tidied up her clothes and hair before opening the door,

"Elijah, why are you up so early?"

Elijah didn't answer her question, instead looking at her suspiciously, "...Mommy, what happened to you?"

"Hmm?"

"Here, and here, and there... Did we get mosquitoes in the house?"

Elysia touched herself here and there, realizing what he was referring to. Her eyes widened, and she hurried into the bathroom.

Seeing her reflection in the mirror, covered in love bites as if she'd been attacked by a wild animal, Elysia almost lost it!

Her face turned beet red!

She was fair-skinned, and now her neck was covered in obvious marks!

Elysia was furious, cursing him in her mind. He was like a rabid dog!

Elijah, still too young to understand what those marks were, looked worriedly at her from the bathroom doorway,

"Mommy, do you want me to call a doctor?"

"No!" Elysia quickly refused.

Elijah hurriedly asked, "Should I wake up daddy to get you some medicine?"

Call him?

"No, no, no, I'm... I'm fine."

Elysia responded in a flurry to Elijah, quickly wrapping a scarf around her neck to temporarily hide the marks.

She opened the bathroom door and told Elijah,

"No need to wake up your daddy; he had a bit too much to drink last night. Let him sleep in. Don't worry about me, I just got a bit of an allergic reaction from some bug bites, it's nothing."

Elijah still looked worried, "An allergic reaction? Are you sure you don't need a doctor?"

"No, I know what to do."

"Does it hurt?" Elijah asked.

Elysia shook her head, "No, it doesn't hurt."

"Does it itch?"

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"It doesn't itch."

"You're not uncomfortable?"

"No, not uncomfortable."

Hearing this, the little one finally let out a sigh of relief.

Elysia looked at Elijah, suddenly feeling a wave of sadness wash over her. Today was the day she had to leave, and she might never see Elijah again. Though not her biological son, the bond between them was undeniably real!

Elijah, sensing her sadness, grew anxious again, "What's wrong, Mom? Are you feeling okay? Should I call the doctor?"

Elysia's throat tightened with emotion, and she shook her head, lifting Elijah into her arms and heading toward his bedroom, "Mom needs to talk to you for a minute."

She was in a rush to leave, but she couldn't bear to say goodbye to Elijah so abruptly. Elijah loved her, and she loved him just as much! Every time he called her "Mom," she truly saw him as her son... If it were possible, she'd take Elijah with her in a heartbeat. After all, what's one more kid to look after?

But deep down, she knew it wasn't an option. That wild man would never allow it!

Once back in Elijah's room, Elysia set him down on his bed, asking him to lie down. She checked his pulse to ensure everything was normal, then said to Elijah, "Do you remember what Mom told you before? If you really miss me, you need to be good, eat well, sleep well, and grow up strong. Because if you're okay, then I'll be okay too."

Elijah, lying there, nodded obediently at her words.

Elysia continued, "Everyone is an individual, and with meeting comes parting. But just because we're apart, doesn't mean the love disappears. Do you understand?"

Elijah seemed to grasp something but wasn't sure. Furrowing his brow slightly, he looked at Elysia and shook his head nervously.

It broke Elysia's heart to see him like this, feeling a sourness in her nose. Holding back her emotions, she explained, "It's like you and me. I know you like me, and I like you too. But we are individuals. You have your life, and I have mine. So, we can't always be together."

Elijah suddenly sat up, emotionally stirred, "Does that mean you're leaving me?"

Elysia didn't want to admit it, but she nodded, "Mom has to go away for a while. I have some very important things to take care of."

Elijah's breathing quickened, "What things?"

"Personal matters. I'd rather not say."

"How long will you be gone?"

"I... I don't know yet."

"Are Elliot, Evan, and Emmett going too?"

"Yes."

Elijah's eyes filled with tears, "Then... will you come back?"

"I..."

Understanding dawned on Elijah, and he burst into tears, "Do you not want me anymore? Are you going to abandon me? Did I do something wrong? I can change, can't I?"

Tears streamed down his face, "Just tell me what I did wrong, and I'll fix it! If you want me to talk more, I will. If you want me to smile more, I'll smile all the time. You said eating more would make me grow tall, so... so... I'll eat three bowls at every meal, okay?"

Elysia's heart shattered. She embraced Elijah tightly, tears streaming down her face, "No! Elijah, you've done nothing wrong! You're perfect in every way. You're the most wonderful and talented child in the world! You're Mom's pride and joy! I love you so much, Elijah! I'll always love you, always!"

Elijah clung to Elysia's waist, sobbing uncontrollably, "Then... can't you just stay?"

Chapter 360

Elysia was heartbroken!

But he had already noticed her, and it wouldn't be long before he started suspecting Elliot, Evan, and Emmett's true identities.

If she didn't leave, it would inevitably lead to a bitter custody battle over the kids!

The kids loved her, and even if it went to court, they would surely tell the judge they wanted to stay with Mommy.

But did she even stand a chance of making it to court against him?

What was she compared to his power? Despite being bankrupt, he still had loyal followers at his beck and call, capable of ending her life with a mere flick of his wrist!

She couldn't take that risk!

The kids were her everything. If he took them away, her world would collapse, and she'd go insane!

But leaving Elijah wouldn't bring her world crashing down, because despite being a deadbeat, he was a good father!

"Elijah... they say there's a special bond between mother and child. I believe you're missing your mother, and she must be out there missing you too. Someday, you'll meet again, I..."

Elysia tried to distract Elijah by mentioning his mother.

But what she didn't know was that she was the very mother Elijah had been longing for!

After yearning for so long, how could Elijah accept the reality of her impending departure?

Elijah shook his head, tears streaming down his face, looking utterly vulnerable and pitiful. He didn't want Mommy to leave...

He had waited countless days and nights for his Mommy's return. He couldn't bear the thought of being separated from her...

Elijah was so worked up that his whole body was convulsing, on the verge of a breakdown.

Elysia quickly hypnotized him, forcing him to calm down.

Entering Elijah's mental world, she could still hear his pleas, begging "Mommy, please don't go."

It was torture for Elysia, each plea cutting into her like a knife.

She didn't want to leave Elijah either, but she felt utterly powerless...

If only Elijah wasn't the son of that man.

If only she didn't have the three little ones to worry about him fighting over.

She would've stayed, watched Elijah grow up, and seen him recover!

But that was just wishful thinking; reality was cruel.

However, she took some solace in noticing that Elijah's mental world had started to show some color.

The last time she visited, it was a barren wasteland, with Elijah lying injured and barely alive in the desert.

Now, it was different. There were sprouts of grass and sources of water, with a clear blue sky overhead.

Though not as vibrant as a normal child's, the grass had taken root and was slowly growing, promising to soon cover the ground in green. Surprisingly, she found no trace of Elijah's biological mother in his mental world.

Had the child stopped thinking about his real mother?

A drawing fluttering to the ground caught her eye. Elysia bent down to pick it up - it depicted a family of six, holding hands together, labeled Daddy, Mommy, Elliot, Evan, Emmett, and Me.

Elysia was shocked. Elijah truly saw her as his own mother?

He fantasized about her being together with his father, living as a happy family of six!

Elysia was moved yet anxious.

This was proof of Elijah's deep love for her!

But it was also a troubling sign. Elijah's excessive dependence and longing for her to stay could lead to immense pain if they were separated. Stepping out of Elijah's mental world, Elysia looked at him with deep concern, her brow furrowed in worry.

Elijah's wish was something she couldn't fulfill.